

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE • FOR FACULTY USE

The Five Workforces

Lecture notes and discussion questions for teaching how organizations absorb AI agents — from ungoverned use to autonomous work.

A teaching companion from Joey Price — HR practitioner, HR-technology analyst, and author of *The Power of HR* (Kogan Page).

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About this framework

The Five Workforces maps how organizations blend human employees and AI agents, from lightest to deepest integration. It gives students a structured, non-hype vocabulary for the future-of-work debate.

Where it fits in a syllabus: future of work, workforce planning, organizational behavior, HR technology, or an AI-and-work module. One 60–75 minute session; pairs naturally with the B.R.I.D.G.E. framework.

Learning objectives. After this session students can: (1) distinguish five levels of human–AI integration; (2) analyze how job design, skills, and accountability change across stages; (3) locate a real organization on the spectrum with evidence.

The five stages — lecture notes

1 The Free-for-All — ungoverned, experimental AI use

Teach: Employees adopt AI tools on their own with no policy, oversight, or shared standards. Teach students to see both the upside (grassroots learning, speed) and the risk (data leakage, inconsistent quality, shadow IT).

Example to use: Staff pasting sensitive data into consumer chatbots because no sanctioned option or guidance exists.

Common student misconception: That 'no policy' means 'no AI.' In reality AI use is already happening — it's just invisible and unmanaged.

2 The Augmented — people plus AI assistants

Teach: AI is a sanctioned assistant that helps people do their existing jobs faster or better; humans still own the work. Teach the automation-vs-augmentation distinction here.

Example to use: A recruiter using an approved tool to draft outreach and summarize notes, then editing and owning the output.

Common student misconception: That augmentation eliminates roles. At this stage it changes how work is done, not who does it.

3 The Delegators — handing tasks to agents

Teach: Whole tasks are assigned to AI agents, with humans reviewing the output. The design question becomes where the human-in-the-loop checkpoint sits.

Example to use: An agent that screens and schedules candidates end-to-end, with a person approving before an offer stage.

Common student misconception: That delegation is 'set and forget.' Review, escalation, and accountability design are what make it safe.

4 The Orchestrated — humans directing agent teams

Teach: People coordinate multiple agents across a governed workflow — closer to managing a team of digital workers than using a tool. Emphasize governance, roles, and quality control.

Example to use: A benefits process where several agents handle intake, verification, and drafting while a human orchestrates and sets guardrails.

Common student misconception: That this is fully automated. Humans move up to orchestration and oversight rather than out of the process.

5 The Autonomous — agents running end-to-end work

Teach: Agents run entire processes with humans providing oversight and judgment rather than doing the steps. Use this stage to discuss accountability, auditability, and the limits of autonomy.

Example to use: A largely self-running compliance-monitoring process with human review of exceptions and periodic audits.

Common student misconception: That autonomy removes the need for people. Oversight, judgment, and accountability remain human responsibilities.

Suggested 60-minute class flow

1. **0-10 min** — Poll the room: how are you personally using AI for work/study? Surface the invisible 'Free-for-All.'
2. **10-35 min** — Walk the five stages; after each, ask for a real example and the human's role.
3. **35-55 min** — Groups place an assigned organization on the spectrum and defend it.
4. **55-75 min** — Debrief with discussion questions 3 and 5 on human-in-the-loop and accountability.

Five discussion questions

1. Place an organization you know on the Five Workforces spectrum and justify the placement with evidence. What would move it one stage further, and should it move?
2. Compare 'The Augmented' and 'The Delegators.' What changes about job design, skills, and accountability as work shifts from assisting people to delegating tasks to agents?
3. Where should the human-in-the-loop sit at each stage, and why? Design a checkpoint for a delegated hiring task.
4. The 'Free-for-All' has real risks but also real learning. How should an organization move from ungoverned use to governed adoption without killing experimentation?

5. At 'The Autonomous' stage, who is accountable when an agent-run process makes a harmful decision? What oversight structures keep autonomy legitimate?

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