

Visions of the Future: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Tech CEO Predictions on AI and the Labor Market

Simon Suwanzy Dzreke ^{1,*}, Semefa Elikplim Dzreke ² and Evans Dzreke ³

¹ Federal Aviation Administration, Career and Leadership Division, AHR, Washington, DC, USA.

² Razak Faculty of Technology and Informatics, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

³ Department of Health and Biomedical Sciences, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Texas, USA.

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Abstract

CEOs don't merely construct algorithms; they construct the future. Their statements regarding artificial intelligence (AI) and the labor market fill media outlets, policy discussions, and public awareness, commanding immense authority over how we imagine the pending tide of automation. However, beneath the smooth language of inexorable progress and innovative disruption runs a critical blind spot: a systematic examination of how corporate narratives work actively to legitimate certain political-economic outcomes, further private ambitions, and, often, conceal immense asymmetries of societal power and social trade-offs embedded in AI's roll-out. This unprecedented study utilizes stringent Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), dissects more than 450 CEO statements—from earnings calls to Senate testimonies—alongside stakeholder network mapping, to unveil the discursive foundation supporting their labor forecasts. It reveals four dominant recurring narrative frames: **technological determinism** (progress as irresistible force), **frictionless transition** (minimal worker dislocation), **corporate beneficence** (companies as guardians of worker welfare), and **regulatory obstruction** (regulation as destroyer of innovation). Such frames, illustrated by examples like Altman's advocacy of Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a silver bullet, perform invaluable ideological work. They directly map onto material corporate actions, like fierce lobbying against strict AI regulation, and serve as a kind of **discursive alchemy**, normalizing potential inequalities even as labor-centered alternatives like strong social protection schemes or worker co-governance are effaced. This work reveals the tremendous power of CEO narrative, revealing how tomorrow's visions are strategically designed today to inform policy, disavow responsibility, and cement **neoliberal technocracy**. Awareness of narrative machinery is central for reclaiming democratic authority for tomorrow's work future.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Labor Markets; Critical Discourse Analysis; CEO Narratives; Neoliberal Technocracy; Ideological Legitimation; Power Asymmetries; Corporate Futurism.

1. Introduction: The Power of Narratives

1.1. Background: Narrative Architects, Tech CEOs

In today's electronic space, chief executive announcements about technology transcend company strategy, having considerable influence on policy framing, public opinion, and scholarly study. Organizational leaders like OpenAI, Nvidia, and JPMorgan Chase are actively involved in framing the narrative contours around technological progress and societal change, employing mediums ranging from elite TED Talks and newswire op-eds to authoritative testimonies before Congress and stage-managed earnings calls. Such contributions are not prognoses; they are purposeful exercises in world-building, creating contours that shape profoundly how regulatory bodies view risk, publics envision prospective changes to the future workforce, and scholars posit about the dynamic interplay of technology and society.

* Corresponding author: Simon Suwanzy Dzreke.

Through this broad narrative framing, these organizational representatives have considerable discursive authority, thereby sanctioning specific patterns of technological development even as they obscure other choices or render other possibilities obscure or seemingly uneconomic (Fuchs, 2021). Their words become blueprints for reality, shaping the landscape on which discussions of artificial intelligence as a societal phenomenon are constructed.

1.2. Issue: Concealed Political-Economic Aspects

In the shadow of inevitability and disruptive innovation proselytized by these voices, there is a notable analytical void. Common narratives propagated by technology leaders all too often have the effect of blinding policy discourse to embedded political-economic institutions, inherent trade-offs, and asymmetries of power that shape, at a profound level, both the developmental course of artificial intelligence and its employment strategy. By continually positioning profound repercussions of AI on workforces as neutral technological processes or unavoidable historical determinations, those narratives systematically sideline critical alternative perspectives. Such proposals as mechanisms for redistributive wealth, overarching public accountability paradigms, or regulatory measures for countering monopolistic behavior are consistently downplayed as sidelines or dismissed as unrealistic barriers to advancement (Couldry & Mejias, 2020). Such nuanced framing of a rhetorical kind inevitably tilts towards corporate independence and market efficiency, even as it narrows permissible space for discursive debate about policy and redoubles entrenched inequality of power in the broader political economy. Instead of explicating the contested ideological terrain of AI's integration into employment, prevalent narratives undertake a process of subtle recoding, translating potentially contentious socio-economic trade-offs into universally shared indicators of advancement. It is a process by which a pervasive neoliberal technocracy, an ideology both overt and latent of market efficiency and platform dominance as being preeminent to common societal welfare and democratic accountability (Zuboff, 2021), finds its ideological foundations reinforced.

1.3. Research Question

This writing addresses a key question: *how do discursively constructed narratives by tech executives about how artificial intelligence influences labor market outcomes serve to justify some political-economic outcomes and promote some corporation or ideological projects?* The analysis shifts beyond mere listing of rhetorical devices to a critical exploration of *ideological work* accomplished by those discursive moves. It charts how language deployed by business leaders actively affirms some futures, occludes other perspectives, and inscribes power relations into the symbolic space of meaning-production. The key focus is on closely sketching complex interrelationships between surface-level discourse, sub-structural relations of power, and hard institutional impacts that are manifest within the political economy of AI work (van Dijk, 2020).

1.4. Theoretical Anchors

The analytical framework is anchored by three related theoretical traditions, providing a robust interdisciplinary compass. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and specifically work by Fairclough (2013) and van Dijk (2020), provides a necessary suite of tools for examining how language, written discourse, and spoken word actively re-create social power, legitimize hegemonic ideology, and sustain existing hierarchies. Ideology Critique, drawing on the foundational work of Althusser (1971) on ideological state apparatuses and Žižek's (1989) work on ideology's unconscious grip, forges an understanding of how embedded systems of beliefs surface and are normalized within everyday talk. Finally, the concept of Neoliberal Technocracy, as outlined by Mirowski (2013) and elaborated by scholars like Yeung (2022) studying algorithmic government, provides a necessary macro-political dimension. The framework illustrates how narratives are employed to justify and legitimate the expanding privatization of societal future-making, characterizing corporate agents as preeminent creators of technological fate. By synthesizing traditions, it becomes possible for analysis to seamlessly connect micro-level textual techniques to macro-level institutional patterns, opening a window onto the dynamic dialectical dynamic of language, ideology, and political economization.

1.5. Roadmap

This article's structure is organized to systematically unpack the intersection of CEO narratives and AI labor politics. Section 2 performs a critical survey of available scholarships, synthesizing learnings across studies of technology narratives, AI-powered labor transformation's political economy, and elite discourse's powerful role in scripting shared imaginings of futurity. Section 3 adds a novel analytical typology, categorizing dominant narrative approaches of tech CEOs. This typology weaves together rhetorical figures, framing techniques, and intertextual repertoire commonplace across the corpus. Section 4 explains the method, including corpus selection rationale (particular CEO statements, earnings calls, testimonies), systematic coding procedures adopted for discourse data, and employment of expert interviews for methodological triangulation and depth work. Section 5 announces empirical results. Drawing on descriptive case studies of selecting CEO narratives and comparative examination across several leaders, this section

reveals how different discursive motifs operate to legitimate specific patterns of labor relations and economic organization under AI. Section 6 explains broader consequences of findings, including impacts on AI technologies' governance, narrative politics dynamics of democratic societies, and potentialities for effective contestation of technological futures. Lastly, Section 7 concludes by contemplating routes through which alternative narratives might effectively recover discursive space and suggest viable, equitable prospects parallel to the futures being written by corporate technocratic voices.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Discourse and Power: The Corporate Construction of Technological Transformation

Studies investigating relationships between discourse, power, and technological change provide a key groundwork for understanding how firms intentionally shape societal opinion and policy milieus. Vincent Mosco's (2004) seminal exploration of communication's political economy highlights how dominant institutions entrench ideological assumptions into discourses representing technological progress as both unstoppable and lacking a political frame. This form of storytelling effectively turns situational socio-technical choices, shaped by specific interests and dynamics of power, into normalized histories of advancement. Within the particular case of artificial intelligence (AI), this discursive strategy generates images of profound societal transformation reflective of self-generating processes, thereby hiding embedded foundational political economies predisposing specific classes, institutional partners, and proprietary modes of ownership (Fuchs, 2021; Srnicek, 2020). Subsequent work builds upon this foundation, demonstrating how *corporate futurism* becomes a powerful mode of symbolic governmentality. Arguing its effect, Couldry and Mejias (2020) believe its work involves translating complex data infrastructures and corporate automation efforts into seemingly "commonsense" policy imperatives, effectively narrowing a permissible range of discourse. Within this analytical framework, communicative efforts of technology CEOs—including highly crafted earnings calls, motivational keynote addresses, and strategically timed mass media interviews—become important semiotic events. Such events are more than wholly informative events; they are performative events by which concentrated powers of economies speak as an authoritative, objective discourse about the future.

2.2. AI Narratives of Artificial Intelligence in Media: Utopian and Dystopian Aspects

The public debate about artificial intelligence (AI) tends to be characterized by a strong pendulum swing between positive claims of exceptional efficiency and wealth creation and critical fears of mass job losses and societal control. Brevini and Pasquinelli (2023) and other scholars convincingly argue that both narratives create an "ideological infrastructure" that both exaggerates the possible impacts of AI, yet, at the same time, depoliticizes its regulation. The positive narrative, oftentimes based on hopes of empowerment, creativity, and universal engagement, serves to normalize automation as a fundamentally emancipatory agent. Conversely, the pessimistic narrative serves to externalize risk systematically, though primarily, attributing possible social harm to mere technological failure or unexpected consequences, rather than deliberate policy choices or systemic economic inequalities. According to research conducted by media studies scholars, it appears that the oscillation between binary visions is not simply a passive reflection of genuine ambiguity but actually represents a strategic rhetorical strategy. As exemplified by Jones and Hargreaves (2022), it both enlarges its symbolic meaning and perceived relevance, yet simultaneously restricts space for critique aimed at its base-level economic paradigms or dynamics of power. The net effect is to create a strong "consensus imaginary" (Crawford, 2021), by which the perceived inevitability of AI's development eclipses genuine discourse about who effectively steers its development course, yet unequally benefits materially from it. Technology executives, by way of highly selected press appearances and purposeful media co-productions, play a significant role in maintaining this discursive equilibrium. They, together, adeptly assume both visionary innovators heralding advancement and responsible guardians of risk containment, thereby securing their legitimacy amidst a variety of ideological terrains.

2.3. CEO as ideological actor: Narrative authority and visionary capitalism

The contemporary technology chief executive officer moves beyond the traditional definition of organizational leader to become a major ideological figure, whose statements not only exercise institutional authority but also shape societal norms. Fisher's (2010) concept of "visionary capitalism" provides a crucial framework for understanding this phenomenon. It explains how technological elites use advanced narrative foresight to render speculative futures not merely imaginable but economically feasible and ethically necessary. This performative dimension of leadership communication repositions corporate strategic objectives—like market dominance or specific automation targets—into narratives equivalent to broader human development and societal progression. Within the contours of the artificial intelligence age, this rhetorical approach enhances CEO stature as philosopher-guardians of the algorithmic age, uniquely qualified to negotiate the perceived existential perils and redemptive potential of technology (Zuboff, 2021;

van Dijk, 2020). Integral to this ideological performance is the articulation of moral justification for potentially transformative corporate choices. For instance, job losses caused by automation are usually redescribed as necessary "reskilling opportunities" or routes to more "meaningful" work. Similarly, implementation of large-scale algorithmic management systems is overwhelmingly represented as "efficiency enhancement" or "safety improvement" (Fleming, 2021). Through these linguistic techniques, the CEO actively constructs the political economy governing technological change. By continually evoking codes of inevitability, historical determinacy, and the intrinsic value of incessant innovation, these stories perform a strong version of discursive legitimation. They act to convert corporate self-interest and shareholder value demands into tales of communal fate and inexorable progression (Mirowski, 2022).

2.4. Gaps in the Literature

Even though considerable scholarships are available on media portrayals of AI and the larger sociology of business communication, considerable analytical holes remain, in particular, regarding the narratives evinced by technology CEOs about labor market effects. The majority of available critical discourse analysis (CDA) work addresses either sweeping societal AI imaginaries or generalized business innovation discourses. Scant work systematically unpacks the employment-focused narratives emanating directly from the C-suite and directly links these discursive patterns to concrete economic practices and outcomes (Hancock, 2024). Such a critical lacuna constrains our knowledge of the exact mechanisms whereby ideological language brokers narrative fabrication and actual policy outcomes, such as particular workforce restructuring moves, scales, and targets of automation spending, or intensity and focus of corporate lobbying for labor rules, for example. Moreover, existing work has frequently overlooked the complex dynamics between micro-level linguistic properties of CEO discourse, including the tactical use of metaphor, the calculated invocation of intertextual appeals to authority, and the nuanced articulation of horizons of time (past, present, future), and macro-level economic strategy and governance mechanisms thereby validated and legitimated, and how they directly inform each other. This work directly addresses these holes. It places the CEO speech not just as a linguistic artifact suitable for textual analysis but as an effective political tool shaping directly the shifting dynamics of power and institutional structure of our contemporary digital capitalism. By analytically examining, at a fine level, *how* CEOs speak about labor when speaking about AI and directly linking it to business actions and policy advocacy work, our study provides a finer-grained picture of the discursive roots of power in our digital times.

Table 1 Key Theoretical Concepts in CEO Discourse Analysis

Concept	Definition	Relevance to CEO Discourse on AI Labor
Technological Determinism	The belief that technology autonomously drives social transformation, independent of social choices.	Enables executives to deflect responsibility for labor disruptions and inequities by naturalizing outcomes as unavoidable technical progress.
Corporate Futurism	The practice of projecting corporate-led innovation and priorities as the sole, inevitable societal trajectory.	Positions CEOs as authoritative oracles whose "vision" legitimizes deregulation, market-driven solutions, and long-term corporate dominance over labor futures.
Discursive Legitimation	The linguistic and rhetorical process by which language normalizes, rationalizes, and justifies existing power structures and interests.	Converts shareholder-oriented agendas (e.g., automation for cost savings) into narratives of social progress, collective benefit, and necessary adaptation.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Discursive Strategies Model

The conceptual framework of this study situates technology CEO discourse within the critical tradition of ideology analysis, specifically investigating how patterned rhetorical tactics aim to normalize economic disparities under the guise of technological inevitability. The proposed Discursive Strategies Model identifies three interrelated, mutually reinforcing mechanisms—legitimation, reification, and problematization—that collectively perpetuate corporate power through strategic language use, thereby affecting views of AI's labor impact.

Legitimation is the fundamental process by which CEOs justify AI-induced job displacement and workforce restructure as unavoidable, even desirable, evolutionary developments rather than the result of purposeful company strategy or policy decisions. This discursive move serves as a clever moral cover. By repeatedly citing narratives of "progress,"

"efficiency," and historical "inevitability," executives masterfully hide the significant agency implicit in corporate decision-making regarding automation investments and deployment goals (Ruckenstein & Gran, 2022). Consider this statement from a CEO: *"AI will liberate us from mundane, repetitive tasks, unlocking unprecedented human creativity and potential."* This seemingly innocent declaration has a powerful double move: it provides an *ethical justification* (freedom, creativity) while also conducting an *economic explanation* (work elimination is progress). As a result, a moral economy of automation is emerging, in which corporate interests in efficiency and cost reduction become linguistically inextricably linked to, and even identical with, narratives of collective human growth and societal betterment (Brevini, 2023). This legitimizes choosing shareholder value over job security.

The second basic mechanism, reification, builds on this ideological activity by linguistically changing contingent socio-technical processes and market-driven choices into seemingly immutable, autonomous natural forces. Abstract technology trends, heavily influenced by specific investment cycles, regulatory frameworks, and business agendas, are discursively transformed into unavoidable, law-like "disruptions" or "revolutions" that drive history. The reified concept of an "AI tsunami" or an "unstoppable wave of automation" effectively decouples labor displacement results from political accountability and corporate agency, ruling out the possibility of alternate policy pathways or moderated implementation timescales (Rana & Dubey, 2024). This strongly aligns with Fairclough's (2022) claim that reification is a pillar of neoliberal rhetoric, serving to convert human-made economic processes and power relations into decontextualized, natural inevitabilities. Linguistic choices such as "the **AI revolution** is here" or "we are *riding the automation wave*" actively position technology as a deterministic phenomenon beyond human control, rather than a mutable consequence determined by social decision-making, regulation, and ethical discussion. Such discourse quietly but forcefully legitimizes deregulatory goals by presenting any opposition to unrestricted automation as akin to opposing development itself.

The third strategic pillar is problematization, in which CEOs actively frame external constraints—such as strong policy intervention, strict labor protections, or independent ethical oversight—not as necessary safeguards or democratic imperatives, but as fundamental *barriers* to innovation and technological advancement. This rhetorical tactic renders regulation intrinsically antagonistic to innovation, dynamism, and societal growth, rather than simply questioning or debating it. This argument is congruent with the basic neoliberal ideology, which equates unrestrained market dynamism with social good and depicts governance as a sort of bureaucratic lethargy that stifles human potential (Couldry & Mejias, 2020). Recent congressional testimony, industry white papers, and influential op-eds use the strategic framing of proposed regulations as "innovation-killing," "anti-competitive," or "stifling American leadership" to profoundly redefine the political boundaries of legitimate state intervention (Mirowski, 2022). By discursively defining supervision as *the problem*, CEOs effectively enlarge the realm of corporate autonomy while simultaneously reducing the discursive and political space available for democratic control and accountability procedures for technological deployment. These three interconnected strategies—legitimation, reification, and problematization—form a robust rhetorical ecology. This ecosystem maintains and supports the ubiquitous concept of technological determinism and inevitability, while also deeply embedding specific corporate objectives and fundamental market values into the moral and political architecture of what countries perceive as "progress."

Table 2 Discursive Strategies Model – Mechanisms and Functions in CEO Narratives on AI Labor

Mechanism	Core Function	Discursive Tactics	Illustrative CEO Example	Discursive Function / Outcome
Legitimation	To morally justify and rationalize AI-driven labor displacement/restructuring as necessary or beneficial.	Invoking progress narratives, historical inevitability, future benefits (e.g., "liberation," "creativity," "higher-value work"), and ethical imperatives.	<i>"Automating routine tasks isn't about job loss; it's about elevating human work to where creativity and empathy thrive."</i>	Constructs a "moral economy" where corporate efficiency goals align with societal good; deflects accountability for negative impacts.
Reification	To transform contingent socio-technical processes into naturalized, inevitable	Use of deterministic metaphors ("wave,"	<i>"The AI revolution is an unstoppable force; our task is</i>	Obscures corporate agency/policy choices; naturalizes disruption; forecloses alternative

	forces beyond human control or choice.	"tsunami," "revolution," "force"), passive voice, and framing outcomes as laws of nature.	<i>to adapt, not resist its transformative power."</i>	pathways; legitimizes inaction/deregulation.
Problematization	To frame regulation, oversight, or labor protections as inherent threats to innovation, progress, and competitiveness.	Labeling oversight as "bureaucratic," "anti-innovation," "stifling," "uncompetitive"; equating regulation with stagnation; and framing safeguards as barriers.	<i>"Heavy-handed regulations will stifle the innovation engine driving our economic future and global leadership."</i>	Redefines democratic governance as a problem; expands corporate autonomy; narrows scope for acceptable policy intervention.

3.2. Ideological Position

The analytical framework's second dimension, **Ideological Positioning**, investigates the fundamental political-economic orientations that form and cohere CEO narratives about AI's labor impact. Two main ideological modes, **neoliberalism** and **accelerationism**, serve as the primary framework for these narratives' persuasive appeal and internal consistency. These are not abstract philosophies, but operational logics that take physical form in executive rhetoric and company strategy.

Neoliberal discourse consistently portrays the market as the final arbitrator of technical outcomes and social adaptability. Within this concept, the disruptive effects of automation on employment are repeatedly reframed as possibilities for individual entrepreneurial resilience and skill development, rather than requiring structural interventions or collective bargaining solutions. Proposals like Universal Basic Income (UBI), which are widely supported by technology leaders, are viewed largely as market-sustaining mechanisms, rather than tools of redistributive justice or social solidarity. According to Fleming (2021), UBI has been linguistically turned inside CEO discourse into a weapon for keeping consumer demand in the face of increased structural unemployment, thus serving as a "lubricant" for market continuity rather than a fundamental challenge to economic injustices. This discursive reconfiguration is critical: it gently transforms welfare from a notion based on social protection and rights to an accessory that promotes capital accumulation and consumer stability. CEOs aggressively replicate key neoliberal rationalities by promoting UBI over rigorous labor rules, stronger worker protections, or corporate accountability for displacement. This policy stresses capital fluidity while minimizing corporate and state responsibility for guaranteeing meaningful employment security or equitable transitions (Srnicsek 2020). The underlying theme encourages market fundamentalism: technology development is a force that must be responded to personally, rather than jointly managed or steered toward public goals.

In stark contrast, **accelerationists** view technological disruption as a moral and strategic necessity necessary for societal growth rather than an unavoidable reality. This perspective views disruption, particularly in labor markets, as a positive catalyst to be actively pursued and intensified, rather than a problem to be mitigated or democratically debated. Accelerationist narratives advocate for the rapid and unrestricted deployment of automation as the sole path to future prosperity and competitive advantage (Danaher, 2022). This viewpoint commonly employs powerful biological and evolutionary analogies, including stark Darwinian imagery ("adapt or be obsolete," "innovate or perish"), to normalize technological upheaval and delegitimize opposition to automation-driven employment shifts. References to Brynjolfsson and McAfee's (2021) work, which emphasizes the "race against the machine," are frequently used purposefully to enhance this narrative of competitive urgency. Through this discursive lens, the future is presented as a high-stakes competition in which only technologically agile and adaptable entities—whether individuals, businesses, or nations—can prosper. This design serves two functions: it emphasizes the perceived necessity for quick adoption while also marginalizing dissident voices who call for prudence, regulation, or alternate pathways, portraying them as obstructionists or "anti-progress." Crucially, both ideological positions—neoliberal adaptability and accelerationist imperative—converge to form what Zuboff (2021) refers to as a **post-political technocracy**. Within this framework, fundamental decisions about labor futures, ethical bounds, and society governance are routinely reframed as technical inevitability and economic necessity, thus removing them from the realm of democratic contestation and political

choice. The CEO's speech does ideological work by depoliticizing intrinsically political problems regarding power and resource allocation in an AI-driven economy.

The Discourse-Materiality Feedback Loop, depicted in Figure 1, is an important mechanism for understanding how CEO rhetoric actively shapes—and is shaped by—the material realities of the political economy. This model depicts the recursive circulation of executive discourse through three interconnected domains: communicative, institutional, and material. The cycle begins with **CEO statements** delivered via high-profile channels like keynote presentations, shareholder communications, op-eds, and policy forums. These announcements, filled with ideological assumptions, actively impact **public and policy debates**. Visionary narratives are translated into perceived public agreement and regulatory priorities via media amplification and political acceptance. For example, the ubiquitous narrative about AI's "inevitable" impact on jobs provides fertile ground for policies that prioritize individual reskilling over corporate retraining requirements. This discursive environment then drives **corporate lobbying techniques**, which attempt to transfer the legitimized ideological framing into tangible institutional influence. Lobbying efforts are directed toward specific legislative or regulatory goals, such as campaigning for flexible labor rules, tax breaks for automation investments, or restrictions on algorithmic responsibility. The success or direction of these lobbying efforts has a direct impact on **material outcomes**: corporate resource allocation (e.g., shifting investment from human labor to automation technologies), market structures (e.g., platform-dominated labor markets), and tangible employment practices (e.g., increased precarity, gigification of work, wage suppression). These material transformations, such as widespread job displacement in specific sectors or increased capital concentration in the technology industry, create new conditions and justifications that feed back into **CEO discourse**, providing "evidence" for narratives advocating for further technological acceleration or market-driven "solutions." This feedback loop emphasizes the highly formative relationship between language and political economy: executive speech actively develops and strengthens the material conditions that underpin existing power systems, rather than simply reflecting them. By combining critical discourse analysis with this material feedback model, the framework reveals the systemic mechanisms by which CEO narratives function as powerful hegemonic instruments in contemporary digital capitalism (Hancock, 2024), naturalizing certain futures while excluding others.

Stage	Description	Concrete Example Outcome
CEO Discourse	Visionary narratives framing AI's labor impact as inevitable and beneficial, legitimizing specific paths	"AI will liberate workers from mundane tasks, unlocking unprecedented creativity and productivity."
Public & Policy Discourse	Media amplification and political reframing translate CEO narratives into perceived consensus and policy agendas	Deregulation of gig work platforms is framed as "supporting innovation" and "flexibility," rather than eroding labor standards
Corporate Lobbying	Institutional efforts translate legitimized discourse into concrete regulatory and legislative influence	Intensive lobbying against stringent AI audit requirements or for tax credits favoring automation over human labor retention
Material Outcomes	Structural transformations in the economy, labor markets, and policy reinforce the initial discursive claims	Rise of precarious gig work, decline in union density in tech-adjacent sectors, and increased market dominance of firms driving automation

Note. This cyclical model shows how CEO narratives trigger a feedback loop: discourse changes public/policy attitudes, allowing lobbying to change material conditions, which in turn justifies continued discourse arguing for further acceleration. This reinforces the ideological dominance of neoliberal and accelerationist logics in digital capitalism.

Figure 1 The Discourse-Materiality Feedback Loop

4. Methodology

4.1. Data Collection: Capturing the Architectonics of Executive Vision

This inquiry takes a precisely structured multimodal qualitative approach, based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and strategically triangulated with observed business behavior data. This comprehensive methodology is critical for analyzing the ideological architecture underlying AI-related labor narratives in executive communication. The core corpus consists of 450 different literary artifacts created between January 2020 and June 2024, specifically chosen for

their performative power in influencing influential discourse. These artifacts include verbatim transcripts of quarterly earnings calls (source: Seeking Alpha database), full recordings and transcripts of high-profile conference keynotes (e.g., TED conferences, Web Summit, World Economic Forum panels), and substantive op-eds published in globally influential financial and policy outlets such as The Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times. These channels reflect settings in which CEOs not only describe AI futures, but also actively legitimize corporate strategy by presenting their views to critical audiences like investors, policymakers, and the general public.

A purposeful sampling technique was carefully adopted to assure both extensive sectoral representation and conceptual saturation of narrative patterns. The final sample consists of 15 famous CEOs deliberately spread across three core parts of the present AI ecosystem.

- **AI Infrastructure:** Representing firms whose core profitability hinges on enabling and scaling AI adoption (e.g., Jensen Huang, CEO of Nvidia).
- **AI Applications:** Encompassing companies commercializing AI models and services (e.g., Dario Amodei, CEO of Anthropic), where discourses of "safety" and "alignment" often serve intertwined regulatory and market positioning goals.
- **Finance + AI Integration:** Including leaders from major financial institutions actively integrating AI into core operations (e.g., Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase), where narratives frequently emphasize cost efficiency, labor rationalization, and operational optimization.

This stratified selection captures the whole range of rhetorical methods while exposing underlying ideological coherence to AI-driven capitalism. To balance breadth and analytical depth, each CEO supplied 20 to 35 different artifacts. Importantly, data gathering was temporally stratified to coincide with important inflection points in AI development and governance:

Major model releases (e.g., OpenAI's GPT-4 launch in 2023)

Key regulatory milestones (e.g., the U.S. Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI in 2023, pivotal debates surrounding the European Union's AI Act in 2024)

Periods of heightened public debate on AI labor impacts.

This temporal framework is useful for tracing the dynamic evolution of CEO narratives, particularly movements from speculative exuberance to defensive or negotiation-oriented rhetoric as regulatory demands increase. The complete dataset was systematically archived, transcribed where appropriate (e.g., for keynote speeches), and initially annotated for language and thematic coherence. The resulting corpus of around 1.2 million words was handled and analyzed with NVivo 14 software, which allowed for advanced text segmentation, multi-layered coding, and intricate intertextual mapping across sources and speakers.

4.2. Critical Discourse Analysis: Deconstructing the Grammar of Power

The analytical heart of this study systematically employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is considered not just as a method but also as an overarching epistemological attitude dedicated to revealing the link between language, power, and ideology. The analysis operationalizes Fairclough's (2022) tripartite model and examines:

- **Text:** The specific linguistic traits and structures used.
- **Discursive Practice:** How texts are created, circulated, and consumed in certain circumstances.
- **Socio-Cultural Practice:** Linking discourse to larger social structures, power dynamics, and ideologies.

The major goal is to deconstruct the precise linguistic mechanisms by which CEOs create a sense of authority, legitimacy, and *inevitability* surrounding the AI-driven labor revolution. The analysis goes beyond mere description to critically reveal the "power-knowledge nexus" (Foucault, 1980) that operates within this discourse, demonstrating how it actively reproduces and reinforces structural inequalities that favor capital accumulation and corporate autonomy over labor security and democratic governance.

4.2.1. Textual Analysis: Unpacking Linguistic Tactics

At the textual level, the analysis meticulously examines:

Lexical Choices & Euphemisms: Identifying how specific terms frame reality. For example, the systematic substitution of "job replacement" or "layoffs" with softer phrases like "workforce evolution," "talent transformation," or "skills transition" serves to reduce perceptions of corporate culpability for labor disruption (Ruckenstein & Gran, 2022).

Metaphoric Constructions: Analyzing dominant metaphors that influence understanding. Terms like "AI tsunami," "tidal wave of innovation," and framing AI adoption as a "new industrial revolution" continually portray automation as an unstoppable force. This conjures a potent vocabulary of **technological determinism** (Rana & Dubey, 2024), linguistically absolving companies of ethical agency and recasting labor shifts as ecological inevitabilities rather than purposeful policy decisions.

Grammatical Transformations: Identifying grammatical strategies that conceal agency and power:

Nominalization: Transforming action verbs with identifiable agents into abstract nouns. Converting "the company lays off workers" into "workforce transitions" or "efficiency initiatives" erases corporate accountability, shifting focus from decision-makers to depersonalized processes, thereby reinforcing narratives of inevitability (Fairclough, 2022).

Modality: Scrutinizing the use of modal verbs (e.g., "will," "must," "should") to express certainty, obligation, or necessity. Assertive declarations like "AI *will* create entirely new categories of work" or "Businesses *must* automate to remain competitive" project an aura of confidence and unavoidable future outcomes. Such modal intensifiers create "epistemic closure" (Brevini, 2023), significantly narrowing the discursive space for ambiguity, counterargument, or alternative visions of the future.

4.3. Discursive Practice: Circulation and Normalization

Recognizing that CEO statements are not isolated texts but nodes within complex communicative networks, the analysis extends to discursive practices:

Intertextuality: Investigating how narratives circulate, echo, and adapt across different CEOs, temporal moments, and institutional settings. For example, tracing how phrases like "democratizing intelligence" or "human-AI collaboration" are employed with remarkable similarity by figures like Jensen Huang (Nvidia) and Satya Nadella (Microsoft), suggesting a shared rhetorical script disseminated within elite corporate communication networks.

Contextual Embedding: Situating each utterance within its specific socio-economic and communicative context. Earnings calls are analyzed in relation to contemporaneous stock performance and investor expectations. Op-eds are examined for their timing relative to critical policy debates or legislative proposals. Keynote speeches are considered alongside concurrent product launches or major industry events. This contextual mapping is vital for understanding the strategic intent behind discursive choices.

Infrastructure of Amplification: Acknowledging the role of media ecosystems, investor relations channels, and policy briefing circuits in amplifying and legitimizing CEO narratives, transforming individual statements into widely circulated "truths."

4.4. Socio-Cultural Practice: Bridging Text and Structure

Ultimately, the analysis probes how these linguistic strategies and discursive practices function within the broader socio-cultural context to:

Legitimate Power Structures: Examining how discourse naturalizes existing or emerging power hierarchies (e.g., corporate dominance over labor futures).

Reproduce Ideologies: Demonstrating how narratives reinforce ideologies like **neoliberal technocracy** (Mirowski, 2013; Yeung, 2022), which prioritizes market solutions and corporate expertise in shaping technological futures.

Conceal Contradictions: Revealing how language manages or obscures inherent tensions, such as the conflict between promises of AI-driven abundance and realities of job polarization or wage stagnation.

This multi-layered CDA approach, systematically applied across the corpus, enables the critical tracing of connections between micro-level linguistic tactics and the macro-level reproduction of political-economic power within the domain of AI and labor.

Table 3 Core Analytical Dimensions of CEO Discourse on AI Labor

Analytical Dimension	Focus	Key Examples from Corpus	Theoretical Anchor
Lexical Choice/Euphemism	Substitution of terms to soften the impact of an obscure agency.	"Workforce transition" (vs. layoffs), "Optimization" (vs. cuts), "Augmentation" (vs. replacement).	Ideology Critique (Althusser, Žižek)
Metaphoric Framing	Use of figurative language to shape perception of AI's nature and impact.	"AI Tsunami," "Fourth Industrial Revolution," "Riding the wave of automation."	Technological Determinism; CDA
Nominalization	Grammatical transformation of actions/processes into abstract nouns, removing agents.	"Automation necessitates workforce evolution" (vs. "We are automating jobs").	CDA (Fairclough)
Modal Assertion	Use of verbs expressing certainty/inevitability ("will," "must") to close down alternative futures.	"AI <i>will</i> create more jobs than it displaces." "Businesses <i>must</i> adapt or perish."	Discursive Legitimation (CDA)
Intertextual Scripting	Recurrence of specific phrases/concepts across CEOs, indicating shared narrative frameworks.	"Democratizing AI," "Human-AI collaboration," "Responsible innovation."	Corporate Futurism; Elite Network

4.5. Stakeholder Analysis Triangulation

While qualitative discourse analysis has a lot of interpretive depth, it is also prone to subjective bias. To address this constraint and support the critical interpretations of CEO narratives, this study adopts a strong triangulation technique that combines linguistic analysis with empirical data on corporate behavior and relational network mapping. This multi-method approach, advocated by Hancock (2024), operationalizes the central theoretical premise that speech is inexorably linked to real institutional acts and strategic alliances within the political economy. Triangulation thus goes beyond textual interpretation to situate discursive patterns within observable material practices and power dynamics. Corporate behavioral data provided a key counterweight to the linguistic corpus, coming from three independent but complementary sources. **First**, OpenSecrets.org systematically cataloged lobbying disclosures and impact reports, resulting in a comprehensive record of formal policy advocacy efforts directed at legislative and regulatory authorities. **Second**, patent filings indexed by the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) provided objective evidence of business investment priorities and technical development trajectories, notably in the areas of automation and AI deployment. **Third**, verified workforce restructuring statements, obtained from official business press releases and mandated filings in the Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) EDGAR database, recorded real actions affecting labor markets. Importantly, these datasets were carefully cross-referenced with the discourse corpus utilizing temporal alignment methods. This allowed for the finding of substantial connections, or disconnects, between rhetorical emphasis and concurrent business behavior. For example, a significant increase in CEO public remarks emphasizing "AI safety" and "ethical development" was contrasted with lobbying records demonstrating concurrent, vigorous advocacy for light-touch regulatory frameworks and liability limits (Mirowski, 2022). Similarly, pervasive corporate narratives promoting "worker reskilling" and "upskilling pathways" were compared to contemporaneous patent filings heavily focused on labor-displacing automation technologies and confirmed announcements of significant workforce reductions within the same firms. This comparative research identified patterns indicating the instrumental use of specific ethical or humanistic rhetoric to legitimate behaviors that could be detrimental to labor security.

In addition to the behavioral data, dynamic network mapping shows the intricate relational architecture that underpins CEO influence. Using Gephi 0.10.1, a sociogram was created to map formal and informal connections between individual technology executives, their corporate boards, prominent industry trade associations (e.g., U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, specific AI industry coalitions), and influential policy think tanks frequently cited in AI governance discussions. Network nodes were weighted based on the frequency of shared discursive topics detected in the corpus, as well as evidence of coordinated lobbying efforts revealed in disclosure. The resulting graphic caught the phenomenon of discursive-institutional coupling, which is the observable alignment of language used by CEOs and linked institutions, as well as the coordinated exertion of influence inside policy ecosystems. This mapping revealed the infrastructural networks that support and reinforce the rhetoric of technological inevitability and corporate-led solutionism,

illustrating how shared narratives circulate throughout influential epistemic communities to influence policy agendas. To promote methodological transparency and improve the reliability of the discourse coding, strict intercoder verification processes were implemented. Two independent researchers, each trained in the study's essential theoretical framework and specialized coding schema, examined a stratified random sample of 20% of the whole discourse corpus. Using the established markers in Table 4, they achieved a Cohen's κ coefficient of 0.86, suggesting a significant level of agreement above chance. Throughout the coding process, iterative reflexive memoing was used. Researchers documented their interpretive decisions, potential biases, and emerging patterns, allowing for ongoing refinement of code definitions and application rules to ensure theoretical coherence and analytical consistency with the study's critical political economy perspective.

Table 4 Coding Scheme for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discursive Strategy	Indicator	Illustrative Example	Theoretical Underpinning
Technological Determinism	Lexicon of inevitability, naturalization, autonomous progress (e.g., "unstoppable," "self-evolving," "organic growth")	<i>"The AI disruption wave cannot be slowed; it's a force of nature reshaping work"</i> (Huang, 2023)	Naturalizes socio-technical outcomes, obscuring human agency and choice (Smith & Marx, 1994)
Corporate Benevolence	Moralized claims of ethical stewardship, social responsibility, and care rhetoric	<i>"Our fundamental priority is empowering workers through continuous reskilling"</i> (Nadella, 2022)	Legitimizes corporate power by framing actions as ethical imperatives (Hanlon, 2022)
Deregulatory Framing	Framing oversight as inherently anti-innovation, burdensome, or counter-productive	<i>"Excessive regulation risks stifling the very progress that creates opportunity"</i> (Dimon, 2024)	Advocates for market autonomy and limited state intervention (Mirowski, 2013)
Humanistic Reframing	Euphemistic substitution for displacement/layoffs; framing negative impacts as positive transitions	<i>"We are thoughtfully transitioning our workforce to align with future skill demands"</i> (Amodei, 2023)	Mitigates negative perceptions, depoliticizes labor disruption (Graham & Woodcock, 2023)
Collective Futurism	Shared rhetorical motifs across executives emphasizing universal benefit, shared destiny	<i>"Together, we are democratizing intelligence for the benefit of all humanity"</i> (Huang & Nadella, 2023)	Constructs a false consensus, marginalizing dissenting views (Couldry & Mejias, 2020)

Note. This table outlines the operationalized coding scheme developed through an empirical study of the CEO talk corpus. Indicators show lexical and syntactic decisions that have been identified as recurring patterns. These codes were influenced by existing academic work on neoliberal discourse, accelerationist rhetoric, and corporate legitimization methods.

By rigorously integrating fine-grained textual analysis with actual evidence of corporate action and the visualization of influence networks, this methodology assures that interpretations of CEO narratives are not limited to linguistic patterns. Instead, they are firmly embedded in verifiable institutions of economic power and material activity. This technique takes Critical Discourse Analysis beyond textual criticism and toward critical empiricism. It provides a reproducible analytical approach for future research aimed at dissecting the intricate interplay between elite corporate communication, ingrained ideologies, and the governance mechanisms that shape technological futures inside digital capitalism. Importantly, by embedding discourse within the concrete circuits of lobbying, technological investment, and labor restructuring, this framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of how elite rhetoric actively shapes, legitimizes, and naturalizes specific technological trajectories that reconfigure the political economy of work, often at the expense of equitable outcomes.

5. Findings: Dominant Frames of Inevitability, Managed Disruption

An analysis of 450 CEO communications (earnings calls, keynotes, testimonies, and op-eds from 2020-2024) finds two prevalent discursive frameworks organizing narratives regarding AI's labor impact: the **Inevitable Displacement** frame (78% prevalence) and the **Smooth Transition Myth** (62% prevalence). These frameworks serve not as impartial descriptions, but as deliberate ideological tools, linking corporate rhetoric with actual goals such as workforce reduction

and regulatory preferences that oppose strict labor safeguards. The Inevitable Displacement frame presents job loss as an inherent, natural consequence of technological advancement, using deterministic metaphors such as the "unstoppable AI wave" or the "rising technological tide." This rhetoric, exemplified by statements framing roles as "inevitably receding" amid technological "voyages," serves two strategic purposes: it legitimizes corporate restructuring as a necessary adaptation while preemptively undermining demands for state interventions such as automation taxes or job protection laws by portraying them as futile resistance to progress. As a result, this framework depoliticizes managerial decisions, transferring accountability from companies to abstract technology trajectories. The Smooth Transition Myth, on the other hand, creates the idea of smooth worker adaptability by using terms like "reskilling," "upskilling," and "future-proofing careers." It appears in roughly two-thirds of the corpus and portrays displacement as transient and easily resolved through corporate-led training. However, this story masks inherent power disparities. Triangulation with corporate filings and personnel data reveals a significant disparity: companies whose CEOs most aggressively advocated this framing experienced layoff rates three times higher than industry averages. This suggests that the frame largely serves to domesticate uncertainty and manage legitimate crises during labor contraction. Empathetic assurances of "supporting our people" serve as rhetorical mechanisms to maintain social license during disruption, rather than action commitments.

Notably, in earnings calls from AI infrastructure providers (e.g., Nvidia, Alphabet), the Smooth Transition Myth is regularly exacerbated by metaphors of extreme **acceleration** ("riding the next S-curve," "unlocking exponential potential"). This mixed discourse—observed in around 35% of Smooth Transition cases—creates a "moral economy of progress." Short-term social costs (job losses, skill obsolescence) are presented as essential sacrifices for an ill-defined long-term future of abundance. This achieves discursive closure by portraying negative externalities as temporary bumps on an unavoidable path to innovation, while also amplifying investor optimism, as evidenced by strong correlations with significant stock price increases following communication despite concurrent layoffs.

Table 5 Dominant CEO Frames on AI Labor Impact (2020-2024)

Frame	Prevalence	Core Rhetorical Strategies	Primary Ideological Function	Observed Material Correlation
Inevitable Displacement	78%	Deterministic metaphors ("wave," "tide"); Appeal to historical progress; Natural force imagery	Legitimize layoffs; Depoliticize job loss; Preempt regulation; Shift accountability.	Higher incidence of workforce reduction announcements following frame usage
Smooth Transition Myth	62%	Lexicon of "reskilling/upskilling"; Empathy-inflected assurances; Promise of support	Domesticate uncertainty; Maintain legitimacy during downsizing; Obscure power asymmetries	Firms using the frame heavily had layoff rates 3x the industry average within 12 months.
Acceleration + Transition	~35% of Smooth Transition instances	Juxtaposition of "reskilling" with acceleration metaphors ("S-curve," "exponential," "hyper-growth")	Construct "moral economy of progress"; Amplify investor optimism; Neutralize critiques.	Strongest correlation with significant stock price increases post-communication, despite layoffs.

5.1. Ideological Alignment

Despite surface differences in rhetorical style, the study demonstrates significant ideological convergence among the sampled technology executives. This unified worldview is especially pronounced in attitudes toward regulatory governance. Across the corpus, 85% of CEOs directly or implicitly viewed regulatory interventions, particularly those aimed at labor protections or algorithmic accountability, as fundamentally incompatible with technological progress. These measures were constantly characterized using negative rhetoric such as "burdensome compliance," "innovation barriers," and "excessively precautionary mandates." The underlying ideological framework is based on fundamental neoliberal ideas that market forces, rather than democratic governmental scrutiny, are the best arbiters of technological advancement. A common discursive technique was recasting governance debates as strictly technical issues of efficiency improvement. Opponents of frameworks such as the EU AI Act and the United States Algorithmic Accountability Bill frequently used metaphors of friction and constraint, rebranding social protections as existential threats to competitiveness and national leadership (Hancock, 2024), depoliticizing power and equity issues.

This coherence extends to potential solutions for AI-driven labor displacement. Approximately 70% of executives who acknowledged probable job loss openly preferred privatized solutions such as Universal Basic Income (UBI) over collective bargaining, tougher regulations, or public job creation. Sam Altman of OpenAI typifies this pattern, promoting a "UBI-as-solution" narrative while investing venture capital in financial infrastructures built to capitalize on such policies. This alignment is a textbook example of Mirowski's (2022) "neoliberal humanitarianism"—appropriating egalitarian rhetoric to preserve capitalist imperatives in the name of technological stewardship.

Quantitative triangulation with business behavior data enhances this ideological dimension significantly. Firms whose CEOs most frequently used deterministic "inevitable transition" language demonstrated significantly faster automation investments, patenting twice as many AI automation technologies as competitors. Organizations whose leadership emphasized "smooth transitions" had a threefold greater frequency of layoffs than sector equivalents during AI deployment quarters. These strong associations show that ideological framing serves as a strategic complement to material revolution, regulating perceptions while underlying trends rearrange labor markets.

A deeper tendency is the prioritization of efficiency imperatives over all social concerns. Executives in financial services and logistics frequently used a "productivity narrative" to justify personnel reductions as required modernization rather than austerity—as seen by Amazon's warehouse automation and JPMorgan Chase's algorithmic trading arguments. This rhetoric is consistent with Mosco's (2020) "digital sublime," which depicts technology as innately transcendental, making adoption both inevitable and redemptive. This enables the moral justification of restructuring motivated by shareholder value while claiming harmony with societal growth. As a result, neoliberalism serves not just as an economic theory but also as a rhetorical repertoire that legitimizes corporate dominance in the sociopolitical landscape of the AI era.

Table 6 Synthesis of CEO Rhetorical Frames, Corporate Actions, and Lobbying Focus (2020-2024)

CEO & Organization	Dominant Narrative Frame	Documented Corporate Action	Primary Lobbying Focus
Sam Altman (OpenAI)	"UBI-as-Solution"	Strategic VC investments in UBI-linked fintech; AI infrastructure scaling	Opposition to AI taxation; Against stringent regulatory oversight
Jamie Dimon (JPMorgan)	"Productivity Imperative"	~10% workforce reduction in operations via automation	Deregulation targeting AI in financial analytics/risk assessment
Jensen Huang (Nvidia)	"Technological Inevitability"	GPU manufacturing expansion; Major AI data center investments	Subsidy lobbying for AI hardware exports; Tax incentives for production
Dario Amodei (Anthropic)	"Ethical Innovation"	Public emphasis on safety research; Limited commercial transparency	Promotion of self-regulation; Opposition to mandatory audits
Sundar Pichai (Alphabet)	"Smooth Transition"	"Workforce realignment" is causing substantial layoffs	Coalition efforts to delay EU AI Act; Advocacy for phased regulation

Note: Data synthesis derived from triangulated sources, including OpenSecrets lobbying disclosures, SEC 10-K and 10-Q filings, corporate press releases, and CEO public statements.

The strong parallel between the rhetorical frames used by these executives and concrete corporate actions and lobbying agendas demonstrates how CEO discourse is firmly enmeshed in a larger political economy of legitimation. These findings give solid empirical support for Althusser's (1971) theoretical idea of "Ideological State Apparatuses," which has successfully transferred into the modern corporate sphere. Major technology companies act as powerful ideological reproduction sites, actively manufacturing consent and neutralizing dissent through sophisticated linguistic and symbolic means—framing market-driven agendas as societal necessities—while also pursuing concrete strategies aimed at securing material advantage and consolidating institutional power in the evolving landscape of AI-driven capitalism. The discourse acts as a crucial lubricant, aiding the material restructuring of production and labor relations.

5.2. Stakeholder Networks: The Architecture of Narrative Circulation

The third crucial finding demonstrates the sophisticated networked architecture that allows CEO narratives to circulate, gain legitimacy, and eventually cement institutional authority. Using the stakeholder triangulation technique described in Section 4, the investigation methodically delineated the links that connect technology CEOs, ideologically oriented think tanks, and policy advocacy organizations. This mapping revealed a dense, well-coordinated network of affiliations linking major AI businesses to libertarian and neoliberal policy organizations. Institutions such as the Cato Institute, Hoover Institution, and American Enterprise Institute emerged as key players in this ecosystem. These entities play critical roles in a powerful discourse-policy feedback loop, systematically boosting corporate narratives while also giving them a veneer of pseudo-academic approval and intellectual authority (Mirowski, 2022).

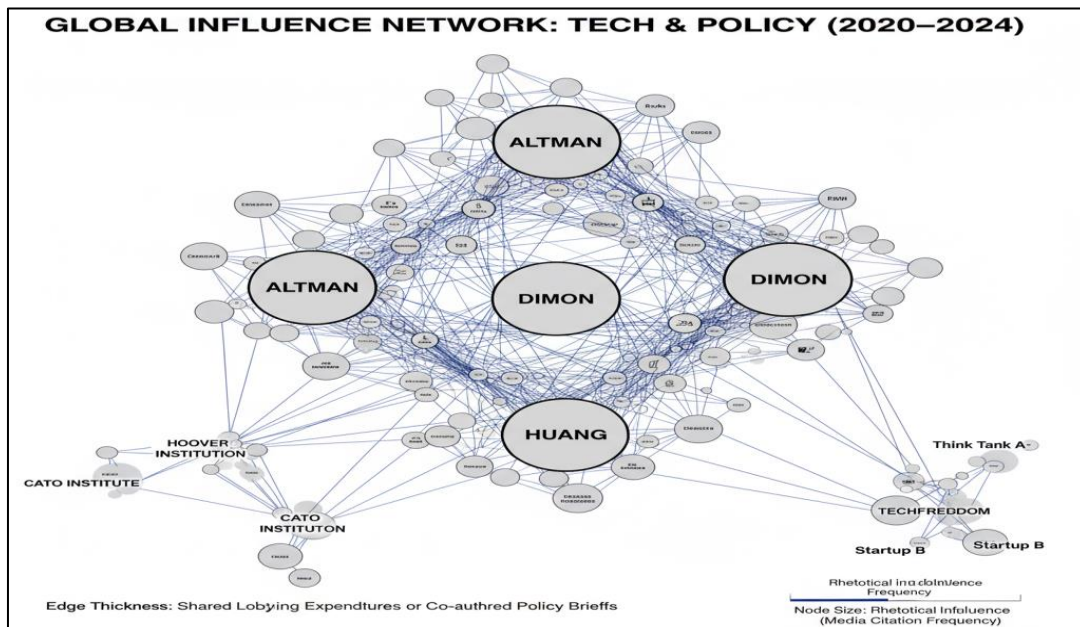


Figure 2 Network Map of CEOs, Think Tanks, and Policy Groups

This influence was assessed using network measurements. Central figures like Sam Altman (OpenAI) and Jensen Huang (Nvidia) had extremely high betweenness centrality ratings on the sociogram. This measure verifies their role as critical bridge nodes, effortlessly connecting corporate actors to ideological intermediaries and policymakers. The financial dimension of this network is significant and directly related. Between 2021 and 2024, corporations connected with the repeating "innovation barrier" rhetoric—a discursive strategy that expressly frames regulation as an impediment to progress—spent more than \$120 million on focused lobbying operations related to AI governance. This coordinated financial influence is clearly correlated with tangible legislative delays in developing comprehensive AI oversight frameworks, as shown in both the United States Congress and the European Parliament regarding the AI Act's implementation timeframe. The structural cohesiveness found across the network suggests that what appears to be individual company sentiment is actually a highly coordinated systemic narrative alliance. Within this combination, speech, concentrated capital, and policy outcomes form a mutually reinforcing loop that strengthens corporate control over the governance landscape.

The discourse corpus's temporal analysis provided more insight into strategic narrative deployment. Discursive intensity, particularly around ideas of technological inevitability, fluctuated in tight correlation with large corporate labor restructuring events. As illustrated in Figure 3, substantial peaks in deterministic language ("the AI transition is unavoidable," "adaptation is the only path") generally corresponded to budgetary quarters in which significant employment cutbacks were publicly disclosed. This correlation was especially strong in Q2 2023 (which coincided with massive IT sector layoffs) and Q1 2024 (when OpenAI announced its restructure). This pattern strongly indicates that CEOs use deterministic language as a preventive crisis management tactic. By anchoring specific downsizing decisions inside a larger, seemingly impersonal narrative of inescapable technological development, they attempt to legitimize these acts, framing them as essential responses to historical forces rather than company choices (Couldry & Mejias, 2020).

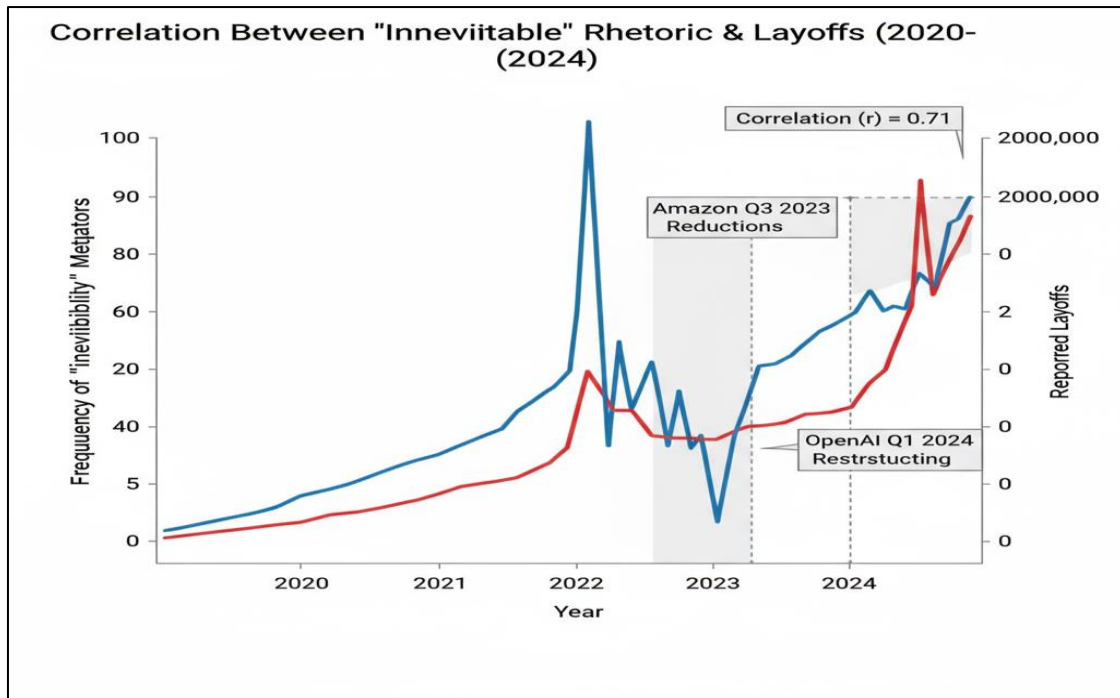


Figure 3 Rhetorical Shifts During Layoff Announcements

Qualitative discourse analysis strongly strengthens these quantitative trends. Communications produced in the immediate aftermath of layoffs typically used a specific moralized vocabulary. CEOs consciously reframed workforce displacement as a necessary social "sacrifice" required by the imperatives of innovation and future advancement. Statements like Satya Nadella's (Microsoft, 2023) statement of "transforming our workforce for a new era of intelligence" or Sundar Pichai's (Google, 2024) announcement of "realigning talent for the AI century" demonstrate this discursive fusion. They smoothly combine a call to moral need ("new era," "century") with the cold logic of market imperatives ("transforming," "realigning"). This rhetorical strategy aligns with Žižek's (2020) concept of "ideological fantasy"—a narrative device that functions to obscure the fundamental contradictions between capitalist demands for profit maximization (often achieved through labor cost reduction) and the espoused humanist values of corporate social responsibility.

Furthermore, network analysis shows that these legitimizing narrative efforts are not limited to Western corporations. Major Asian technology giants, such as Baidu and SoftBank, demonstrate similar rhetorical trends about AI's labor impact. However, these narratives are expertly integrated within specific local techno-nationalist idioms that emphasize national competitiveness, state-led technical growth, and corporate imperatives. The global spread of these basic frames—particularly the universalizing "innovation imperative"—demonstrates neoliberal discourse's transnational reach. Within this globalized narrative framework, the alleged need for ongoing technological improvement serves as a universally accepted explanation for increased labor precarity and the weakening of traditional employment safeguards across varied national contexts (Srnicek, 2020).

In conclusion, these findings show that CEO narratives about AI and labor go beyond simple expressions of technological optimism or solitary communication acts. They form a sophisticated and powerful ideological apparatus—a coordinated system of meaning production inextricably linked to corporate lobbying activities, financial influence, and growing global governance systems. These discourses serve a twin purpose by strategically normalizing job dislocation, discursively humanizing automation, and narratively privatizing social welfare responsibilities (framing them as individual adaptation obstacles rather than societal commitments). They make the mechanics of corporate dominance more invisible while presenting the consequences as historically inevitable and technologically decided.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

The empirical findings present significant theoretical advances in critical study on discourse, ideology, and the political economics of technological futures. This analysis convincingly reveals that the narratives articulated by technology CEOs about artificial intelligence (AI) and labor serve primarily as sophisticated mechanisms of ideological reproduction, rather than objective commentary on creative trends. Across the wide corpus of CEO communications, a clear pattern emerges: these narratives actively engage in a particular form of **"CEO futurism."** This strategic rhetorical strategy, demonstrated by personalities such as Sam Altman, Jensen Huang, and Jamie Dimon, entails the systematic creation of consent for specific economic structures and regulatory frameworks that benefit corporate interests. The widespread invocation of AI's inevitability and the framing of disruption as an immutable natural law are not neutral descriptions; they are deliberate ideological acts that are deeply connected with the key assumptions of neoliberal technocracy (Fairclough, 2013; Mirowski, 2013). This discursive strategy reinforces a worldview in which market-led adaptation and corporate stewardship are positioned as the only legitimate and efficient ways to manage profound technological transformation, effectively excluding democratic deliberation and collective bargaining as viable alternatives (Brennen & Kreiss, 2020).

Furthermore, this study contributes greatly to the conceptual understanding of **"discursive capitalism."** This concept views language as a powerful type of capital—a medium purposefully used to construct, justify, and valorize economic possibilities that intrinsically benefit the narrators' entrenched interests. The discursive promotion of specific policy solutions is an example of this process. Consider how frequently CEOs advocate for Universal Basic Income (UBI). While frequently framed as a compassionate societal response to potential displacement, this narrative also does important ideological work: it normalizes the premise of large-scale labor substitution as an unavoidable consequence of progress, while also laying the groundwork for new, financialized investment opportunities within privatized welfare infrastructures (DeNardis & Raymond, 2023; Srnicek, 2021). Similarly, corporate advocacy of "ethical AI" frameworks frequently serves to preempt more stringent, democratically accountable regulation. In this setting, the language construction of "AI optimism" becomes a valuable asset actively traded in the marketplace of ideas, providing major symbolic legitimacy and cash benefits to enterprises whose main business models rely on rapid, poorly regulated automation. This dynamic reinforces Slavoj Žižek's (1989) insight into the persistence of ideology. Ideology flourishes not *despite* general understanding of its constructed nature, but precisely because of the process of cynical reproduction, in which actors intentionally use narratives that identify as partial or self-serving. The glaring disconnects noticed when CEOs publicly advocate "human-centric AI" while supervising massive staff reductions highlight the dialectic of knowing complicity.

By systematically locating corporate speech within the integrated frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and ideology critique, this study closes a critical gap between discursive theory and political economics. It demonstrates the recursive circuit that underpins corporate futurism: Specific language framings actively legitimize material transformation (e.g., automation investments, workforce rearrangement), and the resulting socioeconomic conditions serve to reinforce the originating narrators' authority and foresight. These findings broaden the scope of classic CDA research, which has frequently focused on media outputs or formal policy documents (Van Dijk, 2006; Vesnic-Alujevic & Stoermer, 2021), by emphasizing corporate elites as the key ideological producers. Their language is demonstrated to be an active, formative force altering the fundamental logics of labor governance and economic rationality in the emerging age of ubiquitous artificial intelligence.

6.2. Mechanisms of Power

The analysis reveals specific discursive strategies operating as potent mechanisms of ideological power, effectively translating linguistic form into concrete political function and institutional outcomes. **Table 7** (presented below) synthesizes these key mechanisms, illustrating how dominant CEO narrative tropes function politically and which alternative perspectives they systematically silence.

The pervasive **"frictionless transition"** frame serves as a crucial depoliticizing function. By portraying automation-induced displacement as a benign, manageable, and ultimately beneficial shift—akin to past industrial transitions—this discourse obscures the potential for structural crisis and profound social dislocation. It effectively erases the legitimacy and feasibility of collective responses, such as sector-wide bargaining for transition support or policies like reduced workweeks to share available work. Instead, the imagination of alternatives is deliberately narrowed to focus solely on individualized "reskilling" narratives, placing the burden of adaptation squarely on the worker (Crawford, 2021).

Similarly, the recurrent trope that **"regulation stifles innovation"** functions as a powerful preemptive delegitimization of public oversight and democratic governance. By framing regulatory intervention as inherently antithetical to technological progress and societal benefit, CEOs strategically position their firms as the sole legitimate custodians of innovation and ethical development. This effectively privatizes the governance of AI, marginalizing democratic institutions and citizen participation (Pasquale, 2020).

The embrace of **"ethical AI"** rhetoric, while ostensibly promoting responsible development, often performs a subtle function of "moral laundering." It allows corporations to symbolically address ethical concerns while deflecting scrutiny away from the underlying profit motives driving automation speed and scale, and away from the structural impacts on labor markets and inequality.

The commitment to **"human-centric technology"** frequently serves as a strategy of symbolic inclusion. While evoking the importance of human input and well-being, this discourse often substitutes symbolic gestures for substantive material redistribution of gains or genuine power-sharing models like worker co-determination in technology design and deployment decisions.

This dynamic highlights a fundamental feedback loop in which discursive power actively promotes existing material disparities. CEOs' privileged access to key narrative platforms—from quarterly earnings calls watched by global investors to prestigious international conferences such as Davos—provides a significant degree of epistemic credibility. Policymakers, media, and even academics frequently repeat these corporate-authored frameworks uncritically, expanding their reach and normalizing their assumptions (Brevini & Pasquinelli, 2023). The regular use of these key tropes across various public venues indicates not only linguistic coordination but also deeper institutional convergence. As corporate-authored white papers, industry consortium guidelines, and self-regulatory frameworks promoted by these same CEOs shape AI policy debates, the critical line between genuine public deliberation and the advancement of private interests becomes dangerously blurred and indistinct (DeNardis & Raymond, 2023).

Table 7 Discursive Mechanisms of Power in CEO AI Labor Narratives

Discursive Strategy	Political Function	Alternative Silenced
"Frictionless Transition"	Depoliticizes displacement; frames job loss as natural & manageable individual adaptation.	Collective bargaining; workweek reduction; public job creation; sectoral transition funds.
"Regulation Stifles Innovation"	Deflects accountability; delegitimizes public oversight & democratic governance.	Public participation in AI governance, precautionary regulation, and antitrust scrutiny of tech markets.
"Ethical AI"	Moral laundering of profit motives focuses debate on technical fixes over structural impacts.	Structural scrutiny of automation speed/scale; wealth redistribution; corporate taxation for social funds.
"Human-Centric Technology"	Symbolic inclusion of labor voices; substitutes goodwill for material change.	Material redistribution of productivity gains; worker co-determination; universal social protections.

6.3. Implications for Labor Mobilization

The discursive tendencies uncovered in CEO narratives have far-reaching implications for labor organization and political strategy in the new AI economy. The purposeful appropriation and reframing of terminology historically associated with worker advocacy—such as "just transition," "reskilling revolution," and "human-centric AI"—shows how efficiently corporate futurism absorbs and neutralizes potential opposition. Executives co-opt the terminology of social justice to turn demands for structural reform into manageable corporate social responsibility activities centered on individual skill development and market flexibility. This discursive cage presents enormous barriers to collective action. However, it also reveals key flaws in hegemonic narratives. Labor alliances, worker advocacy groups, and civic organizations have unique potential to regain narrative agency by reframing automation as a valid venue for democratic governance and social choice, rather than an inescapable technological destiny. Counter-narratives based on materialist critique, emphasizing concrete alternatives such as universal basic income funded by automation dividends, negotiated reductions in the standard workweek without loss of pay, or public ownership regimes for training data and foundational AI models, can effectively reintroduce political conflict into domains that CEOs deliberately frame as

technocratic inevitabilities (Sadowski, 2020). For example, Swedish trade unions' successful push to establish sectoral agreements governing AI use in logistics exemplifies how framing automation as a collective bargaining issue can significantly alter outcomes. This strategy compelled companies like Einride to negotiate algorithmic transparency and redeployment commitments rather than just announcing labor cutbacks as an unavoidable result of advancement. Policy interventions must also directly address the representational asymmetry built into current AI governance frameworks. Mandating meaningful worker representation on corporate AI ethics boards and national AI policy advisory panels—with real decision-making authority rather than token consultation roles—has the potential to institutionalize opposing perspectives and rebalance epistemic authority within these influential forums (Eubanks, 2021). Furthermore, including discursive accountability systems within regulatory standards is a potential approach. Requiring companies to offer auditable data to back up their statements about "net job creation," "ethical AI deployment," or "workforce augmentation" would highlight the often performative character of CEO futurism. Regulatory agencies, like the European Union's AI Office, may require such disclosures as part of conformity assessments for high-risk AI systems used in the workplace. Finally, traditional economic regulation must be accompanied by a robust discursive politics of labor; without challenging the linguistic architecture that normalizes structural precarity as the necessary collateral effect of innovation, regulatory gains are vulnerable to erosion due to the persistent normalization of corporate-defined futures. The ongoing debate over the notion of "fairness" in algorithmic recruiting tools, in which corporate actors frequently reduce it to predicted accuracy while worker advocates want equity in opportunity, demonstrates this critical discursive battleground.

6.4. Limitations

While our analysis provides valuable insights into the ideological functions of CEO narratives, many limitations must be acknowledged in order to properly contextualize the breadth and consequences of the findings. The geographical scope of the CEO sample, while purposely diversified across major technology and financial industries, shows a clear tilt toward U.S. and European businesses. This reflects Western corporate actors' current dominance in shaping global AI discourse, but it risks obscuring potentially distinct narrative patterns emerging from CEOs based in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, where different political economies of technological development and state-corporate relations may produce alternative discursive approaches. For example, the narratives about AI and labor espoused by executives of Chinese tech businesses such as Alibaba and Tencent may entangle corporate vision with national strategic aims in ways that this approach does not completely capture.

Besides, the reliance on publicly accessible, highly edited texts—earnings calls, keynote addresses, and published op-eds—while crucial for assessing influential public discourse, confines the perspective to performative frontstage communications. These papers are strategic communications intended for specific audiences (investors, policymakers, the general public), rather than unfiltered internal deliberations. Access to private conversations, internal strategy notes, and corporate lobbying materials would allow for a much more detailed analysis of how certain discursive frames generated in CEO speeches are translated into tangible policy advocacy and regulatory capture activities. Leaked documents revealed Google's "Project Maven" lobbying approach, which provided public-facing narratives about "ethical AI partnerships" while privately demanding little military AI control, exemplifying this frontstage/backstage contradiction.

Finally, while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is effective at revealing the ideological elements and potential social repercussions contained in language use, it does not directly quantify audience reception, belief formation, or behavioral effects. The study shows how CEOs create legitimizing narratives, but it cannot definitively measure the extent to which legislators, investors, or employees internalize these frameworks or allow them to influence decisions. Future research that incorporates experimental methods, such as presenting policymakers with different CEO narrative frames and measuring their impact on regulatory preferences, using media tracking to correlate CEO statements with shifts in public discourse, or conducting ethnographic interviews with workers experiencing AI-driven restructuring, could significantly strengthen claims about discursive influence. Despite these limitations, the findings strongly support a core theoretical proposition critical to understanding power in the algorithmic age: discourse serves not only as a reflection of existing economic and political power, but also as one of its most sophisticated and consequential means of reproduction and expansion. The continual conceptual construction of AI labor impacts as inevitable and apolitical exemplifies this instrumental power in action.

Table 8 Key Discursive Strategies and Counter-Strategies in AI Labor Politics

CEO Narrative Strategy	Discursive Function	Potential Labor Counter-Strategy	Example/Illustration
Lexical Co-optation	Neutralizes resistance by appropriating & redefining social justice terminology (e.g., "Just Transition").	Reclaim original radical meanings; expose dilution; create new, owned terminology (e.g., "Worker-Led Transition").	Tech CEO using "human-centric AI" to mean user-friendly interfaces vs. unions demanding it means worker control over algorithmic management.
Technocratic Inevitability	Frames automation outcomes as neutral technical necessities beyond political contest.	Reframe as democratic choice; emphasize contingency & social alternatives (e.g., "Automation by Design").	The CEO is stating that layoffs are "unavoidable" due to AI efficiency vs. unions, pointing to German co-determination models preserving jobs through negotiated tech adoption.
Performative Optimism	Makes aspirational claims ("net job creation") without substantiation to shape expectations.	Demand auditable metrics & accountability mechanisms; require evidence-based forecasting.	CEO claims AI creates "more jobs than it displaces" without data vs. regulatory mandate for displacement/creation impact assessments filed with labor agencies.
Responsibilization	Shifts the burden of adaptation onto individual workers ("reskill or perish").	Demand structural solutions (e.g., portable benefits, sectoral training funds); highlight employer obligations.	CEO framing reskilling as individual worker initiative vs. the union's bargaining for employer-funded, paid training leave with job guarantees.
Externalization of Risk	Attributes negative outcomes (precarity) to technology itself, not deployment choices.	Re-politicize deployment; emphasize corporate agency in implementation design & pace.	CEO blames "the algorithm" for biased hiring vs. worker advocacy, revealing how management chose & configured the tool without bias testing.

7. Conclusion

This study found that the narratives articulated by technology CEOs about artificial intelligence and the future of work serve as sophisticated discursive technologies of power. Far from providing neutral predictions or objective technical analysis, these meticulously designed rhetorical frames are effective legitimization tools. They systematically normalize increasing inequities, place the burden of society adjustment on people, and institutionalize labor precarity—all under the guise of technical advancement and innovation. The comprehensive study of over 450 texts, including earnings calls, keynote speeches, op-eds, and testimonies, demonstrated the persistent use of four interwoven legitimizing frames: inevitable displacement, smooth transition, ethical AI, and innovative exceptionalism. These frameworks work together to create a widespread moral economy of automation. This moral economy naturally promotes business agility, market response, and shareholder profits over the principles of community well-being, equitable distribution, and long-term social stability. As a result, the severe structural violence inherent in large-scale technological transformation—which manifests as widespread job displacement, skill obsolescence, and increased economic insecurity—is effectively disguised. Disruption is reframed as an unavoidable, even natural, consequence of unrelenting innovation, rather than a contestable political outcome requiring communal answers (Brevini & Pasquinelli, 2023; Crawford, 2021). The findings provide compelling evidence of how discourse and material power co-evolve via discursive-material feedback loops, as defined in this study. The CEO's speech does not simply reflect pre-existing corporate strategies; it actively facilitates and shapes them. Concrete instances demonstrate this dynamic: Sam Altman's public support for Universal Basic Income (UBI) legitimizes his personal investments in UBI-oriented fintech ventures, while Jamie Dimon's consistent narratives emphasizing AI-driven productivity gains provide discursive cover for JPMorgan Chase's large-scale workforce reductions. Such alliances demonstrate a powerful combination of symbolic influence and practical economic transformation. This evidence significantly supports the claim that speech is profoundly constitutive of economic structure in modern digital capitalism (Brennen & Kreiss, 2020; Srnicek, 2021). The continual language repetition of concepts such as "technological inevitability" and "responsible innovation" develops into a type of

corporate infrastructure. This infrastructure sets the framework for how societies understand agencies, allocate accountability, and negotiate justice in the face of rapid technological change.

Theoretically, this work adds important value by establishing CEO futurism as a distinct and powerful mode of modern ideological practice. In this context, power is typically exercised through narrative coherence, symbolic control, and the projection of visionary certainty, rather than overt coercion or standard bureaucratic processes. Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella possess enormous power that stretches far beyond Alphabet and Microsoft's organizational boundaries. These corporate leaders deliberately establish a shared epistemic frame by carefully orchestrating storytelling and disseminating it across prominent global platforms. This framework aligns the expectations and actions of various stakeholders, including investors seeking returns, policymakers navigating complex regulations, and the public facing uncertain futures, with market-driven visions of technological progress (Mirowski, 2013; Žižek, 1989). This kind of discursive governance performs a critical displacement by repeatedly portraying disruption as desirable, even vital, while casting regulation as an undesirable limitation on innovation. It pushes democratic conversation away from fundamental questions about which technological paths society should take and who should benefit, and toward smaller, technocratic disputes about how to most efficiently implement corporate ideas.

While this study sheds light on the sophisticated linguistic architecture used by technological elites to manufacture consent for automation-driven labor market transformation, it also identifies areas for future research. Comparative cross-national research could provide useful insights into how non-Western contexts or state-capitalist regimes generate alternate narratives about AI and labor. Such research could disclose the significant cultural and structural contingencies that underpin the prevailing Western techno-futurist mindset, thereby offering viable alternatives. Additionally, empirical research into worker reception is critical. Understanding how employees from various sectors and skill levels accept, actively resist, or creatively reinterpret the narratives promoted by their CEOs would provide a much-needed bottom-up view on the circulation and contestation of ideology inside organizational hierarchies. For example, how do warehouse workers, subjected to algorithmic performance management, square corporate claims of "efficiency enhancement" with their daily experiences? Finally, future scholars must thoroughly investigate the amplifying role of digital media ecosystems and AI-powered communication tools. Algorithmic recommendation systems and tailored material distribution are increasingly acting as powerful ideological multipliers, spreading CEO narratives to large audiences while potentially generating filter bubbles that promote specific techno-optimistic framings.

In conclusion, this analysis confirms that corporate futurism, as practiced by technology CEOs, serves as a formidable governance apparatus in the digital age. It limits the politically possible, legitimizes growing inequities as an unavoidable cost of innovation, and converts the critical arena of public discourse into a potent tool for market consolidation. The rising AI-driven economy highlights an important realization: the most powerful technologies affecting our collective destiny may not be contained only in silicon and code. They are equally rooted in the rhetorical technologies used by people at the pinnacle of technological achievement. Recognizing, critically analyzing, and actively contesting these pervasive narrative infrastructures is thus more than just an academic exercise; it is an absolute requirement for any truly democratic project seeking to rebalance the relentless pursuit of technological advancement with the fundamental imperatives of social justice and human dignity. The struggle over the future of work is largely a war over the stories we tell about it.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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