The Dawn of A Intelligence Era

By <u>Sean Huang</u>

From Industrial to Internet to Intelligence

Sometime in the mid-18th century, the first **Industrial Revolution mechanised muscle**. Steam engines, powered machines shifted production from handcraft to factory, driving unprecedented gains in productivity, urbanisation and growth. Work moved from fields and small workshops into large-scale plants, gradually eliminating the need for physical labour and toil, birthing a new industrial working class and reshaping social structures, family life, education and economic growth.

In the late 20th century, the internet age digitised information. From the 1970s onward, information and communication technologies (ICT) – microprocessors, computers, telecommunications, transformed economies into systems centred on data, software and networks. Routine clerical and manufacturing tasks were increasingly delegated to computers, lifting productivity and enabling global supply chains and connectivity.

The **intelligence era, now unfolding, is automating judgment.** Artificial intelligence systems no longer simply retrieve, store and transmit information; they interpret medical scans, draft legal documents, optimise logistics, generate strategy options and code. In many domains, AI is becoming a default "second brain" for professionals, not merely a tool but a partner in decision-making that shapes how we see problems, what we notice, and which options we consider. Therein, a hidden cost is emerging. And if not addressed honestly and systematically, will lead us to our next crisis of our generation.

The Increasing Demand for Human Cognitive Skills

We're living through a strange paradox. At the exact moment when artificial intelligence can generate a strategy deck in seconds, analyse market data in milliseconds, and draft communications at superhuman speed, the ability to think deeply has never been more valuable, or more endangered.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, during an interview with CNN recently, put it bluntly: **"In order to ask good questions, it is a highly cognitive skill."**
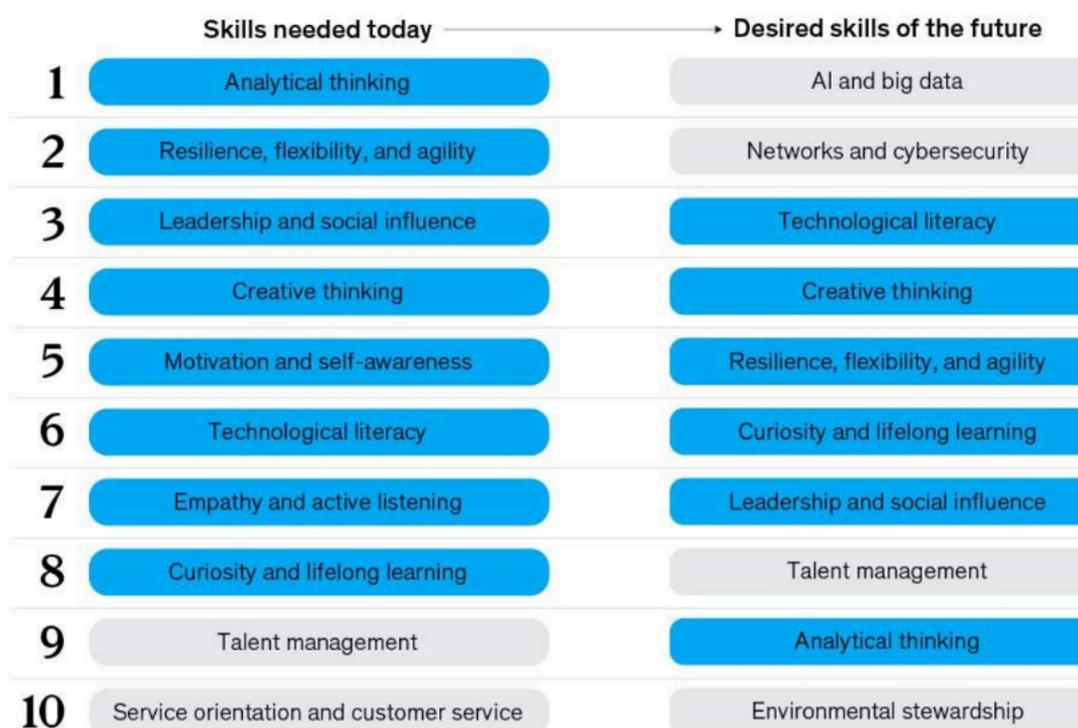
Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, a renowned organisation psychologist also wrote in an article for Forbes: "The paradox of the AI era is that **the more machines can think for us, the more consequential it becomes that we think about what they are thinking for.** In that sense, thinking is not obsolete. It is merely undervalued."

The demand for human thinking capability and judgment is further supported by the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025, which offered a crucial data point: **8 out of 10 core skills needed by 2030 are cognitive capabilities (creative thinking, analytical thinking, systems thinking)**, self-efficacy skills (self-awareness, agility, resilience), and management abilities (leadership, social influence).

Brain skills are overrepresented in the skills employers are demanding, both today and in the future.

Skills needed today and desired skills of the future, ranking — ■ Brain skills

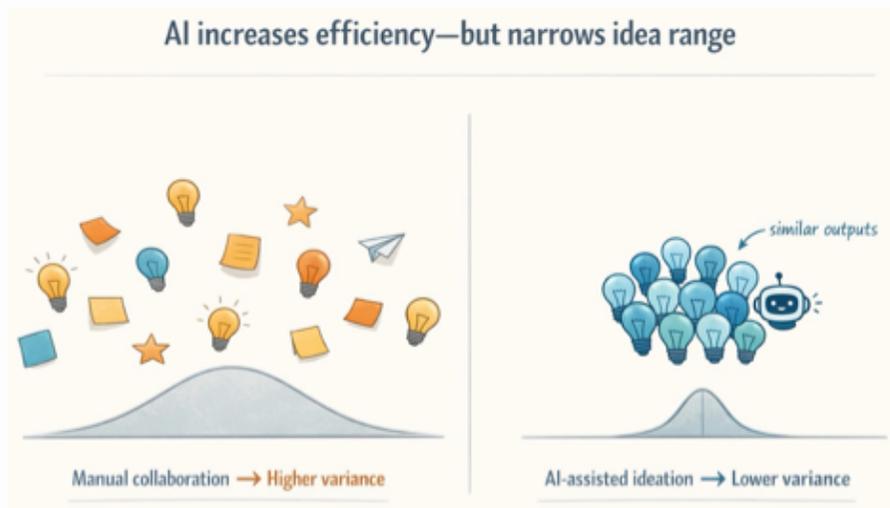|	Skills needed today		Desired skills of the future
1	Analytical thinking		AI and big data
2	Resilience, flexibility, and agility		Networks and cybersecurity
3	Leadership and social influence		Technological literacy
4	Creative thinking		Creative thinking
5	Motivation and self-awareness		Resilience, flexibility, and agility
6	Technological literacy		Curiosity and lifelong learning
7	Empathy and active listening		Leadership and social influence
8	Curiosity and lifelong learning		Talent management
9	Talent management		Analytical thinking
10	Service orientation and customer service		Environmental stewardship

Source: *Future of jobs report 2025,* World Economic Forum

The organisations betting their talent strategy entirely on AI fluency are preparing for yesterday's future. The winners will be those who place dual bets - on AI literacy and on the distinctly human capabilities that AI can't replicate: judgment under uncertainty, ethical reasoning, creative synthesis, and the leadership presence that comes from deep subject-matter mastery.

The Emergence of a Thinking Crisis: What The Evidence Tell Us

In today's rush to adopt AI at scale, we're abandoning the very capability that makes us irreplaceable, and the cost is higher than we think. The evidence is quietly alarming.

AI increases efficiency—but narrows idea range

Manual collaboration → Higher variance | AI-assisted ideation → Lower variance
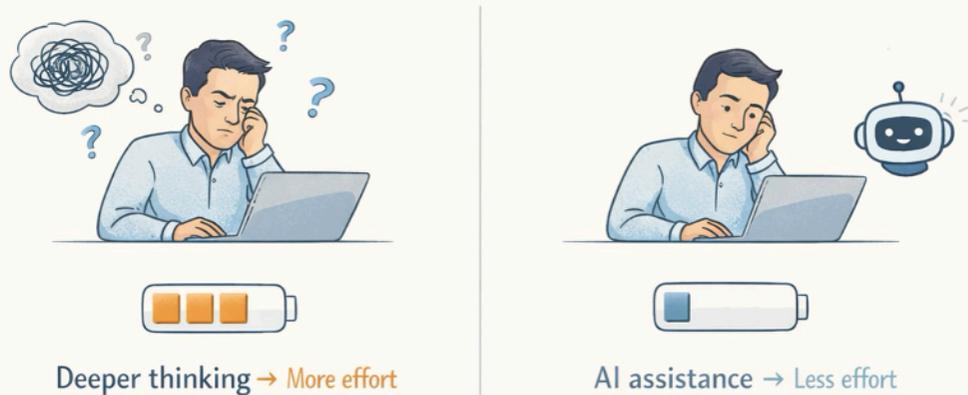
Impact on Creativity

On a collective level, knowledge workers using AI assistance produce a smaller range of ideas than a group working manually (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023).

Impact on Critical Thinking

Knowledge workers reported that putting less effort into critical thinking when working with AI than when working manually. And this effect was greater when workers have greater confidence in AI, and less confidence in themselves (Lee et al., 2025).

Data showed that knowledge workers reported putting less effort into critical thinking when working with AI than when working manually

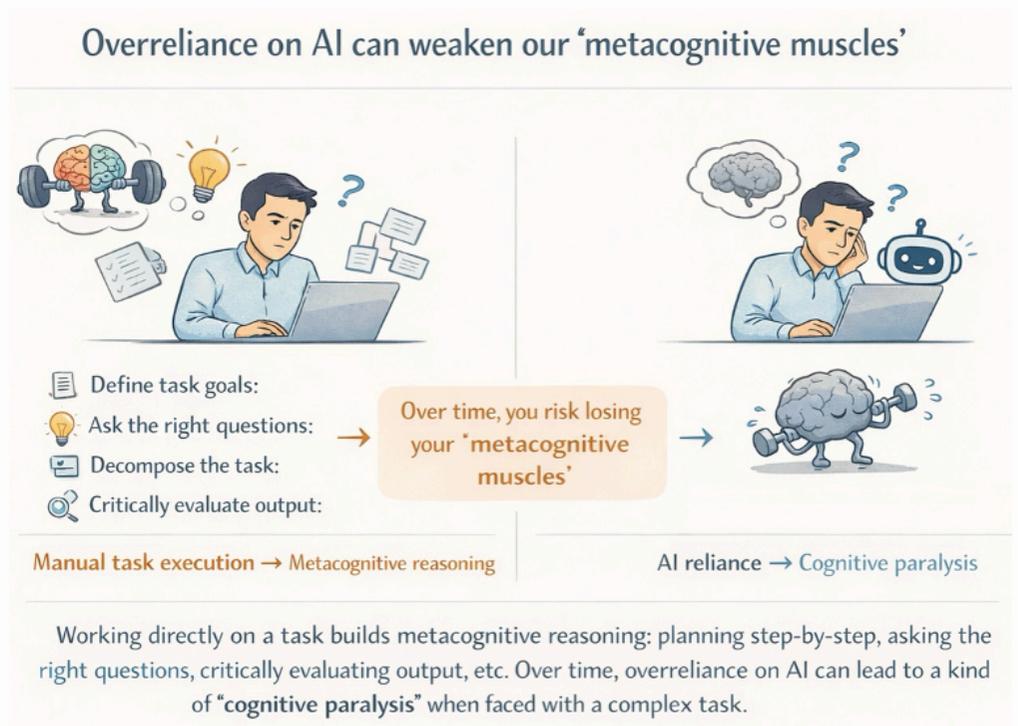Deeper thinking → More effort | AI assistance → Less effort

When people rely on AI to write for them, they remember less of what they wrote. And when they read AI-generated summaries, they remember less than if they had read the document.

Manually writing → Remember more | AI-assisted writing → Remember less

Reading full document → Remember more | Reading AI summary → Remember less

Impact on Memory

When people rely on AI to write for them, they remember less of what they wrote. And when they read AI-generated summaries, they remember less than if they had read the document (Oakley et al., 2025).

Dell'Acqua, F., McFowland III, E., Mollick, E. R., Lifshitz-Assaf, H., Kellogg, K., Rajendran, S., Krayer, L., Candelon, F., and Lakhani, K. R. (2023). Navigating the jagged technological frontier: Field experimental evidence of the effects of AI on knowledge worker productivity and quality. Harvard Business School Technology & Operations Mgt. Unit Working Paper, (24-013).

Lee, H.-P. H., Sarkar, A., Tankelevitch, L., Drosos, I., Rintel, S., Banks, R., and Wilson, N. (2025). The impact of generative ai on critical thinking: Self-reported reductions in cognitive effort and confidence effects from a survey of knowledge workers. In Proceedings of the 2025 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, CHI '25, New York, NY, USA. Association for Computing Machinery.

Impact on Metacognition

We lose exercising our "metacognitive muscles" when we rely on AI too much, and as a result, risk "cognitive paralysis" when a complex task demands it (Tankelevitch et al., 2024).

Overreliance on AI can weaken our 'metacognitive muscles'

- Define task goals:
- Ask the right questions:
- Decompose the task:
- Critically evaluate output:

Over time, you risk losing your 'metacognitive muscles'

Manual task execution → Metacognitive reasoning

AI reliance → Cognitive paralysis

Working directly on a task builds metacognitive reasoning: planning step-by-step, asking the right questions, critically evaluating output, etc. Over time, overreliance on AI can lead to a kind of "cognitive paralysis" when faced with a complex task.

Call to Action: Building Thinking Capable Organisations

The solution isn't to reject AI. That's neither realistic nor wise. The solution is to develop what we term as "cognitive hygiene" - deliberate practices that preserve and strengthen thinking capabilities even as we leverage AI's power. Specific recommendations include:

For individual leaders:
- Reserve AI for ideation and exploration, not for answers you simply adopt
- Create "no-AI zones" for critical decisions where you think through problems manually first
- Use AI outputs as sparring partners to pressure-test your own reasoning, not as substitutes for it
- Track your idea generation over time - are you generating more original insights, or fewer?

Oakley, B., Johnston, M., Chen, K.-Z., Jung, E., and Sejnowski, T. (2025). The memory paradox: Why our brains need knowledge in an age of ai. In The Future of Artificial Intelligence: Economics, Society, Risks and Global Policy. Springer Nature.

Tankelevitch, L., Kewenig, V., Simkute, A., Scott, A. E., Sarkar, A., Sellen, A., and Rintel, S. (2024). The metacognitive demands and opportunities of generative ai. In Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, CHI '24, New York, NY, USA. Association for Computing Machinery

For talent strategy:
- Invest in developing systems thinking - the ability to see patterns, feedback loops, and unintended consequences
- Cultivate creative problem-solving through deliberate practice, not just AI-assisted brainstorming
- Prioritise self-awareness and metacognition - the ability to examine one's own thinking
- Develop resilience and agility in leaders who can hold complexity without rushing to resolution

For organisations:
- Embed critical thinking development into leadership programmes with the same rigour you'd apply to financial acumen
- Reward depth over speed in strategic work, creating space for contemplation
- Build "red teams" explicitly tasked with challenging AI-generated recommendations
- Measure cognitive capabilities in talent reviews alongside traditional performance metrics

Conclusion

The thinking crisis isn't just academic. This is empirical evidence of what neuroscientists call "metacognitive laziness" - a measurable erosion of judgment that compounds over time. When leaders habitually accept AI's first-draft thinking, they're not just saving time. They're atrophying the neural pathways that allow them to evaluate complexity, spot hidden assumptions, and make nuanced calls in ambiguous situations. Organisations who want to thrive in today's intelligence era cannot afford to adopt a singular focus on technology adoption - they must invest equally, if not more, in the systematic development of the human cognition, thinking and decision-making capability.

Find Sean Huang on 🔗. Visit Point3's website.

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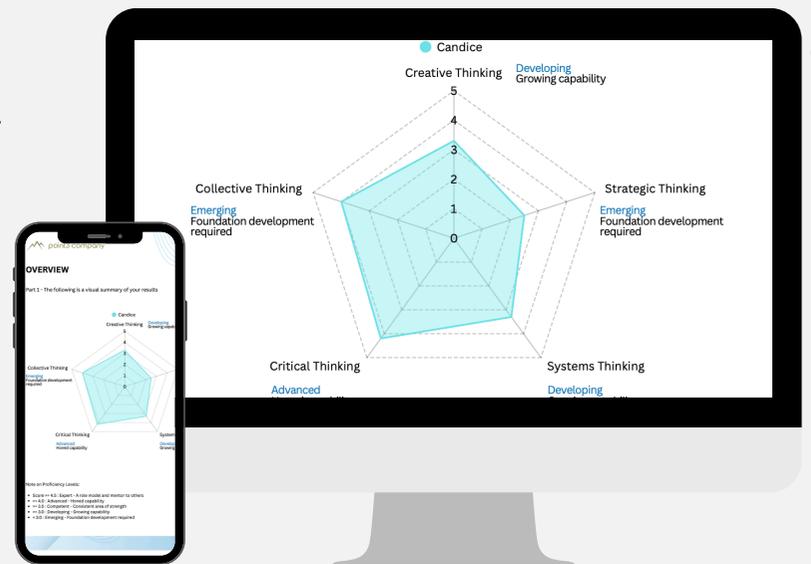
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Building Thinking Capabilities With Point3 Company

1. Next Level Decision Making Assessment

Our proprietary assessment measures five key thinking capabilities that enable effective decision-making:
- **Creative Thinking**
- **Strategic Thinking**
- **Systems Thinking**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **Collective Thinking**

We have four versions of the assessment report available. Each armed with contextual insights that will help you develop your thinking capabilities and elevate your decision-making in your specific use case:
- **Individual Summary** - for quick insights into developmental areas
- **Individual Full Report** - for a deep dive analysis into thinking capabilities
- **Team** Report - for team-level insights on team's thinking capabilities
- **Facilitator** Report - team thinking dynamics for facilitators and consultants

Click here to find out more

2. Think Better With AI

When we outsource thinking to AI without critical judgment, we accept AI outputs without rigourous evaluation, become proxies to "AI decision-makers", and most importantly, our cognitive skills atrophy like unused muscles. This masterclass will cover:

- **Strategic Questioning** - Enhance your ability to frame problems that unlock AI's full potential
- **AI Output Evaluation** - Apply intellectual standards to assess AI output with rigour
- **Sustainable AI Habits** - Build repeatable protocols that make critical thinking with AI automatic

3. Referring Up

AI is enabling your team with unmatched productivity. They are eager to go but are experiencing a frustrating reality - decisions are at a bottleneck because approvals sit three levels above you, buried in endless email chains and calendar conflicts.

In today's complex organisations, "referring up" has become the silent killer of innovation, agility, and value of AI adoption. Meanwhile, your competitors move faster, your people lose momentum, and opportunities slip away.
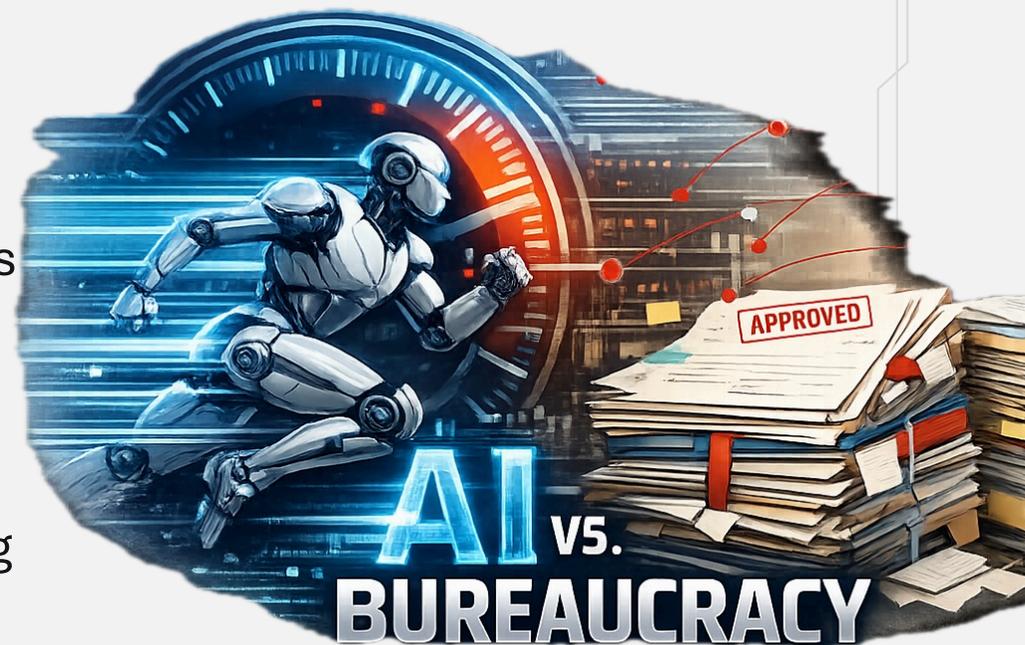
In this masterclass, we'll cover:
- **Red Tape Audit** - Diagnose the specific bureaucratic friction points slowing down teams
- **Hollywood Movie Experience** - Discover strategies that create unstoppable momentum involving a Hollywood movie experience
- **Super Charge Decision Velocity** - Streamline decision architectures that reduce decision cycle time and empower middle management with clear decision rights and accountabilities

The most consequential investment you can make in the AI era isn't in the latest tools. It's in preserving and developing the one capability that truly can't be automated: the ability to think clearly, critically, and courageously about what matters. The next strategic advantage are those who can harness the full potential of AI with distinctively human thinking, judgment and decision-making.

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