

# A New Bargain

Re-establishing Mutuality, Trust and Value in the AI-Powered Workplace



From the *Hearts, Minds and Hands* Trilogy

## A New Bargain

Redefining Work, Value & Trust  
in the AI-Powered Workplace

JOHN HARDING

## Executive Summary

'A New Bargain' responds to one of the most significant but underdeveloped questions in the AI conversation: what kind of relationship between employer and employee is fit for an AI-powered workplace?.

The book argues that AI is not only changing tasks, roles and workflows. It is changing the underlying assumptions that have held the employment relationship together. The old bargain between employer and employee was built around a familiar exchange: employees offered effort, loyalty, skill, time and experience; enterprises offered income, stability, opportunity, development and belonging. AI is now unsettling that logic. As AI absorbs more work, reshapes roles and changes the economics of human labour, the relationship between enterprise and employee requires a more explicit, honest and mutual foundation.

The central proposition of 'A New Bargain' is that AI transformation cannot be sustained through technology, productivity and efficiency alone. It must be held together by trust, mutual responsibility, contribution, capability and human relevance. In this sense, 'A New Bargain' is the relational book in the trilogy. 'The Jinji Method' addresses enterprise transformation. 'HPOD' addresses individual relevance and contribution. 'A New Bargain' addresses the relationship between the two: the renewed psychological contract required for the AI-powered workplace.

## About the Author - John Harding

John helps enterprises to navigate the complex, people-driven challenges of AI transformation. He helps enterprises navigate the human side of AI deployment: preserving trust, redefining human contribution, and rebuilding the employment relationship for the AI-powered workplace.

Described as an Enterprise AI Transformation 'Broker', the notion of 'brokering', rather than managing change, is a one of the 8 Principles within The Jinji Method.

### Author - Speaker AI Transformation Broker

- 25+ yrs consulting & leadership experience
- Consulted to 150+ enterprises
- Across 10 of 11 industry sectors
- SME\* in 15 functional areas
- Conducted 600+ workflow process engineering and improvement initiatives
- Developed & delivered 200+ training courses
- 7,000+ individuals trained in person



# Problem Statement

## *What 'A New Bargain' Aims to Solve*

The employment relationship is under strain because AI is changing what enterprises need from people and what employees can credibly offer in return.

The traditional psychological contract of work has relied on assumptions of stability, progression, loyalty, recognition, opportunity and a degree of security. These assumptions were never perfect, but they gave the employment relationship a recognisable structure. In an AI-powered workplace, that structure is weakening. Tasks are being automated, roles are being rewritten, career pathways are becoming less predictable, and job security is increasingly connected to relevance rather than performance alone.

This creates a deeper problem than job displacement, although job displacement remains material and serious. The deeper problem is the erosion of mutuality.

Enterprises are under pressure to deploy AI, increase productivity, improve efficiency, reduce cost and remain competitive. Employees, meanwhile, are trying to understand what AI means for their security, identity, value and future. These two perspectives often use different language. Enterprises speak of innovation, transformation, automation, productivity and scale. Employees may hear uncertainty, redundancy, loss of agency and threat.

The result is a widening gap between enterprise ambition and employee expectation. If this gap is not addressed, AI transformation risks becoming something that is done to people rather than built with them. That creates distrust, resistance, superficial compliance, disengagement and cultural fragility.

The problem, therefore, is not simply that AI may replace tasks. The problem is that AI may break the trust and mutual expectation that make enterprise transformation possible.

# Opportunity Statement

## *What 'A New Bargain' Aims to Seize*

The opportunity is to rebuild the employment relationship around a more honest, explicit and future-fit bargain.

'A New Bargain' identifies an opportunity to move beyond the narrow debate about whether AI will replace jobs. That question matters, but it is not enough. The more important question is how enterprises and employees can establish a renewed basis of mutual responsibility in a world where work, value and contribution are changing.

The opportunity is to create a bargain in which both sides elevate their offer.

Employees will need to adapt, learn, work with AI, strengthen their Human Point of Difference, and contribute value beyond process execution. Enterprises will need to provide trust, clarity, capability, opportunity, dignity and a credible pathway to relevance. This mutual commitment is

positioned in the book as essential to sustaining both human relevance and enterprise performance.

This creates a powerful reframing. The employee is not simply a cost to be reduced or a resource to be redeployed. The employee becomes a contributor to value creation, reinvention and growth. The enterprise is not simply a buyer of labour. It becomes a steward of capability, trust and human relevance.

The opportunity, then, is not to preserve the old bargain. The old bargain assumed stability. The new bargain must be built for reinvention.

## Proposition: 'A New Bargain' as the Solution

### *How 'A New Bargain' Addresses the Problem and the Opportunity*

The proposition of \*A New Bargain\* is that the AI-powered workplace requires a renewed employment relationship grounded in mutuality, trust and human relevance.

The book does not argue that nothing should change. It does not reject AI. It does not promise that every role will remain intact. Instead, it argues that AI transformation must be approached through a more mature and explicit relationship between enterprise and employee.

That relationship has two sides.

For the enterprise, the new bargain requires bold commitments. These include a commitment to continuity, a commitment to contribution and a commitment to capability. The enterprise must be honest about change, invest in people, create pathways to relevance, redesign work around value creation, and treat trust as essential infrastructure rather than a soft cultural preference.

For the employee, the new bargain requires active participation. Employees must accept that relevance can no longer be defined only by role, tenure, task performance or process expertise. They must build AI fluency, develop adaptive capability, strengthen their HPOD, and participate in value creation as work changes.

The book's solution is not a one-sided demand for employee resilience. Nor is it a one-sided demand for enterprise protection. It is a reciprocal proposition: enterprises must create the conditions for people to remain relevant, and employees must step forward into the work of relevance.

### **Core Argument**

The core argument of 'A New Bargain' is that AI changes the employment relationship because it changes the economic and psychological basis of human work.

If AI can perform more tasks faster, cheaper, more accurately and at greater scale, then human relevance can no longer be assumed through the old logic of task performance. Human contribution must be redefined around higher-order value: judgment, creativity, empathy,

problem-solving, innovation, ethical reasoning, relationship, context and enterprise entrepreneurship.

At the same time, enterprises cannot expect employees to make that shift without trust, clarity, support and opportunity. If enterprises ask people to adapt while communicating poorly, moving recklessly, or treating job loss as a narrow efficiency gain, the psychological contract will fracture.

This is why trust sits at the centre of the book. Trust is not sentiment. It is the architecture that allows the new bargain to hold. Without trust, AI transformation stalls because employees withdraw, resist, comply superficially or interpret each deployment through the fear of replacement. With trust, people are more likely to learn, experiment, contribute and participate in reinvention.

The new bargain is therefore both practical and moral. It is practical because AI transformation will fail without workforce engagement. It is moral because people deserve honesty, dignity and a meaningful role in the future of work.

### **Strategic Significance**

The strategic significance of 'A New Bargain' is that it fills a major gap in the AI narrative.

Much of the AI conversation focuses on technology capability, productivity uplift, automation, skills and job displacement. 'A New Bargain' addresses the relational system beneath all of those issues. It asks whether the employment relationship itself is strong enough, honest enough and mutual enough to carry the weight of AI transformation.

That makes the book significant at three levels.

At the enterprise level, it gives leaders a framework for sustainable AI transformation that does not sacrifice trust for speed or people for short-term efficiency.

At the employee level, it gives individuals a clearer understanding of what they must now offer: not just task execution, but contribution, learning, adaptability and value creation.

At the societal level, it provides a way to discuss AI, work and human dignity without falling into either denial or technological determinism.

The book's position is not anti-AI. It is anti-fragile transformation. It argues that AI can create enterprise value and growth, but only if the relationship between enterprise and employee is rebuilt to support that change.

### **Concluding Proposition**

'A New Bargain' is a solution to the employment relationship crisis created by AI.

It does not promise certainty in a period of uncertainty. It does not offer shallow reassurance. It does not pretend the old bargain can survive unchanged.

Instead, it offers a more honest proposition: the AI-powered workplace requires a new basis of mutuality between enterprise and employee.

Enterprises must offer trust, capability, opportunity, dignity and credible pathways to relevance.

Employees must offer adaptability, learning, contribution, AI fluency and a willingness to create value in new ways.

In its simplest form, the proposition is this:

**AI may change the work. A new bargain must rebuild the relationship.**

That is the book's core value. It gives language, structure and principle to the relational challenge at the heart of AI transformation: how enterprises and employees can move forward together when the old assumptions of work no longer hold.