

AI-Enhanced Soft Skills Training: A Leadership Framework for Thailand's Workforce Transformation

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Abstract

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) across Thailand's labor market has intensified automation-driven layoffs and workforce uncertainty. Consequently, soft skills—such as adaptability, communication, and emotional intelligence—have become essential for sustaining employability and organizational resilience. This study examines how AI-enhanced soft skills training can reshape Thailand's workforce and how leadership strategies can optimize training investments while strengthening human potential.

A critical interpretive synthesis of 28 research articles and reports published between 2022 and 2025 was conducted. The findings indicate that AI technologies can personalize soft skill development through continuous learning and real-time feedback, thereby enhancing employee adaptability, engagement, and innovation capacity while reducing costs associated with turnover and retraining. Moreover, leadership that strategically integrates AI-driven learning fosters agile, future-ready organizations capable of sustaining competitive advantage in the digital era. Theoretically, the study extends leadership and human capital development perspectives by positioning AI as a strategic partner in learning and adaptability rather than a mere automation tool. Practically, it reframes cost optimization as a balanced strategy aligning technological innovation with human capital investment. Overall, the results provide actionable managerial insights into leveraging AI as a catalyst for sustainable workforce transformation in Thailand.

Keywords: AI adoption; Soft skills development; Leadership strategies; Workforce transformation; Cost optimization; Human capital; Thailand

Introduction

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into Thailand's labor market has transformed the nation's economic and employment landscape at an unprecedented pace. By 2025, automation and digital systems have expanded beyond manufacturing and logistics into finance, education, and healthcare, leading to massive workforce displacement across several sectors (Cramarenco et al., 2023; Joshi, 2025). While AI adoption has improved efficiency and reduced operational costs, it has also created job insecurity, especially among mid-level employees who lack adaptability and interpersonal capabilities (Babashahi et al., 2024). Technical expertise alone is no longer sufficient; in an era where humans and AI coexist, the ability to communicate, empathize, and problem solve that collectively known as soft skills, has become central to workforce competitiveness and organizational resilience (Ciaschi & Barone, 2024; Kutchaval et al., 2025; Singh & Chouhan, 2023).

Thailand's national initiatives, such as its Digital Economy and Industry 4.0 policies, have made significant progress in promoting technical upskilling. However, most programs remain narrowly focused on technological readiness rather than human readiness (Shokran et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2024). The majority of training curricula emphasize data literacy, programming, and automation tools, while neglecting leadership, collaboration, and emotional intelligence competencies that are crucial for human-AI collaboration (Nadeem, 2024; Kutchaval et al., 2025). This imbalance has resulted in a persistent gap between *technology investment* and *workforce sustainability*, contributing to high turnover rates, repeated reskilling costs, and a gradual erosion of institutional knowledge (Babashahi et al., 2024; Jaiswal et al., 2021; Morandini et al., 2023).

Existing research in Thailand primarily views AI through a technological or policy-driven lens, whereas international studies increasingly highlight its potential to enhance behavioral learning and human capability development (Arman & Lamiya, 2023; Malik et al., 2022; Ridley et al., 2023). Yet, few studies have synthesized these dimensions to explain *how* AI can be leveraged to develop soft skills in Thai workers, and *how* leadership can align these initiatives with cost optimization strategies (Jaiswal et al., 2021; Morandini et al., 2023; Nadeem, 2024). Understanding the intersection of AI, soft skills, leadership, and cost optimization is therefore crucial for achieving both economic efficiency and social sustainability (Albassam, 2023; Babashahi et al., 2024; Cramarenco et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how AI-enhanced soft skills training can transform Thailand's workforce and identify leadership frameworks that balance cost efficiency with human capital investment. The key research questions are as follows:

1. How can AI strengthen human-centered skills that remain irreplaceable by machines?
2. What forms of leadership can optimize costs without increasing layoffs?
3. How can organizations integrate AI into human development strategies rather than using it solely for labor reduction?

Ultimately, this study argues that the sustainability of Thailand's AI transition depends not on how advanced the technology becomes, but on how leaders harness it to amplify human potential. Leadership not automation but will determine whether AI evolves into a force for workforce displacement or empowerment.

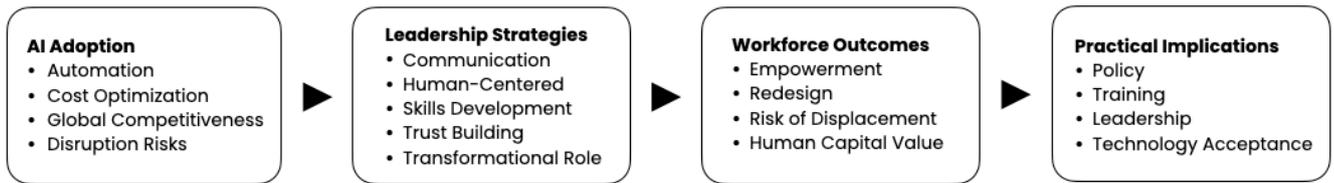


Figure 1 presents the Author’s Proposed Framework, which synthesizes insights from the reviewed literature and builds on established theories, including Kotter’s (1996) model of organizational change, Bass’s (1990) and Burn’s (1978) transformational leadership, and Barney’s (1991) Resource-Based View (RBV). The framework contextualizes these perspectives within the dynamics of AI adoption, leadership strategies, and workforce transformation in Thailand.

Methodology - Systematic and Critical Literature Synthesis

This study employed a systematic and critical literature synthesis approach to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can be leveraged to develop soft skills and inform leadership strategies for cost optimization in the Thai workforce. The methodology followed four structured stages aligned with best practices for evidence-based management research and the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, adapted for conceptual synthesis.

The scope of the review was defined to address three central research questions:

1. How has AI been integrated into workforce transformation and soft-skill development across global and Thai contexts?
 2. What leadership strategies enable organizations to optimize costs while preserving human potential?
 3. What risks and ethical considerations emerge from AI adoption in employment systems?
- This structure provided a coherent lens through which to examine Thailand’s workforce challenges and leadership responses.

A total of 28 research articles and policy papers published between 2022 and 2025 were selected through a structured search in Scopus, Google Scholar, SSRN, and Thai academic databases such as TCI and NRCT Digital Repository. Inclusion criteria were: (1) Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and institutional reports. (2) Explicit focus on AI adoption, workforce transformation, or soft-skill development. (3) Empirical or conceptual relevance to Thailand or comparable emerging markets. (4) Exclusion criteria removed opinion pieces and purely technical AI studies without workforce implications. The sources were classified into two major groups: Thai-context studies covering workforce readiness, labor market transitions, and SME adoption and Global-context studies addressing leadership, cost optimization, and cross-cultural workforce adaptation.

The study utilized a Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) approach to combine descriptive evidence with interpretive insight. Each document was coded according to key analytical dimensions: AI Functionality (automation, augmentation, analytics), Human Skill Domain (emotional, cognitive, adaptive, social), and Leadership Implication (cost, ethics, workforce integration). Themes were then synthesized using pattern matching and cross-context comparison to identify recurring leadership models and soft-skill impacts.

This method allowed the author not only to summarize existing literature but also to critically reinterpret findings within the Thai socio-economic context.

Findings were cross-checked against established theories including Human Capital Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), and the Human-Centered AI Framework to ensure both conceptual and managerial coherence. From the RBV perspective, AI adoption and soft-skill development are viewed as strategic resources that create sustained competitive advantage when they are rare, valuable, and hard to imitate. In Thailand's context, human adaptability, creativity, and emotional intelligence constitute intangible assets that, when enhanced through AI-driven training, increase organizational resilience and cost efficiency.

Integrating these frameworks allows the synthesis to move beyond descriptive observation toward theoretical contribution, positioning soft skills and leadership capability as dynamic resources that strengthen organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness in the AI economy. As a literature-based synthesis, this study does not include primary field data such as interviews or surveys. However, the triangulation of 28 sources across multiple geographies strengthens the analytical validity and situates Thailand's case within a broader comparative perspective.

From the author's perspective, the methodological design of this study is intentional and strategic: the goal was **not merely to summarize existing literature**, but to reinterpret global evidence through the lens of Thailand's workforce reality marked by layoffs, skill gaps, and leadership hesitation toward AI adoption. By combining Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) with the Resource-Based View (RBV), the methodology allows soft skills and leadership capability to be treated as **strategic assets**, rather than "HR activities." This perspective is crucial in the Thai context, where organizations often view training as a cost instead of an investment. The structured coding of 28 papers across Thai and international sources enables the author to identify patterns that traditional literature reviews may miss particularly the connection between **AI adoption, cost optimization, and human capital preservation**. The absence of primary data is acknowledged, but the comparative cross-market synthesis provides a strong foundation for future empirical studies and helps shape a more actionable, leadership-oriented framework.

AI Adoption and Workforce Displacement

The global integration of artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly transformed labor markets, reshaping both employment structures and the nature of work itself. Across advanced economies, AI has automated repetitive, predictable tasks, generating new efficiencies but also significant workforce displacement. Studies reveal that while automation drives productivity, it simultaneously exacerbates job polarization—expanding high-skill digital occupations while eroding mid-skill administrative and manual positions (Babashahi et al., 2024, Cramarenco et al., 2023; Joshi, 2025; Shokran et al., 2025). This dynamic has forced organizations to reconfigure workforce strategies, prompting leaders to balance innovation with the preservation of human capability. In Thailand, the pattern mirrors global trends but with deeper socioeconomic consequences. The Thai workforce, traditionally dependent on service, manufacturing, and retail sectors, has faced accelerated disruption due to automation in logistics, finance, and hospitality (Jitvirat, 2023; Verma et al., 2024; Tanoamchard & Ceienwattanasook, 2024). As of 25, reports from the National Economic and Social Development Council indicate a surge in layoffs related to AI-driven restructuring, particularly among clerical, customer service, and data-entry employees. These job losses highlight a pressing

national concern: while digital adoption advances, reskilling initiatives remain fragmented and unevenly accessible across industries.

Unlike in high-income economies, Thailand's workforce displacement challenge is compounded by skill gaps and limited institutional readiness. Research indicates that most Thai organizations adopt AI for cost optimization rather than for capacity enhancement (Baki et al., 2023; Ostin, 2023; Ruenphongphun & Khumtha, 2025; Thanyawatpornkul, 2024). As a result, employees are often excluded from the upskilling processes that accompany digital transitions, increasing vulnerability to redundancy. Moreover, the absence of cohesive policy frameworks for digital reskilling and lifelong learning perpetuates inequality between large corporations and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs). In contrast, international cases demonstrate that leadership vision plays a decisive role in mediating AI's impact. For instance, multinational enterprises (MNEs) have mitigated layoffs by integrating human and AI collaboration programs, redeploying workers into data oversight, human-interface, and creative coordination roles (Jaiswal et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2022; Shokran et al., 2025). These strategies underscore the principle that technology alone does not dictate employment outcomes, but leadership decisions do. Nations like Singapore, South Korea, and Germany illustrate how coordinated reskilling ecosystems, led by public-private partnerships, convert displacement risk into opportunity for workforce transformation (Nadeem, 2024; Ridley et al., 2023).

For Thailand, leadership thus emerges as the critical determinant of whether AI adoption becomes a mechanism of workforce exclusion or empowerment. Thai business leaders and policymakers must recognize that cost optimization through automation cannot rely on labor reduction alone. Instead, the emphasis should shift toward cost reallocation and channeling efficiency gains into human capital investment. By reinvesting saved resources into AI-driven learning systems, organizations can build adaptive, future-ready employees who coexist with intelligent technologies rather than compete against them. This adaptive approach requires a redefinition of success: rather than celebrating short-term cost cuts, leadership in Thailand must pursue strategic resilience also the capacity to sustain productivity while maintaining workforce inclusion. Such leadership reframes AI not as a threat to jobs but as a lever for reengineering work processes, stimulating innovation, and unlocking latent human potential (Morandini et al., 2023; Singh & Chouhan, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). The trajectory of Thailand's labor transformation will ultimately depend on this balance between automation and human adaptation, guided by leaders capable of transforming displacement into reinvention.

From the author's perspective, AI-driven workforce displacement is not a technology problem but a leadership problem. The literature consistently shows that when leaders adopt AI primarily for cost cutting through labor reduction, organizations gain short-term efficiency but incur higher long-term costs from turnover, loss of expertise, and repeated retraining of new hires. Conversely, companies that adopt AI as a human-capital amplifier using automation to remove low-value tasks while reskilling employees into higher-value roles achieve sustainable productivity gains and retain institutional knowledge. In Thailand, layoffs linked to automation reveal a reactive leadership mindset focused on reducing expenses rather than reallocating efficiency gains toward employee development. The author argues that effective leadership should view investment in soft skills and reskilling not as a cost, but as a strategic asset that increases organizational resilience and competitive advantage. AI does not replace people, but leaders do. AI becomes either a mechanism for exclusion or a catalyst for workforce reinvention depending on leadership choices and the willingness to invest in human potential.

AI-Enhanced Soft Skills as a Strategic Resource (RBV Perspective)

Traditional workforce development in Thailand has long emphasized technical proficiency, yet during the acceleration of automation and layoffs, it has become evident that technical skills alone no longer ensure employability. Studies show that AI increases efficiency in routine and analytical tasks, resulting in job redesign and workforce reduction, especially for repetitive cognitive roles (Arman & Lamiya, 2023; Ciaschi & Barone, 2024; Joshi, 2025). However, research across global labor markets consistently demonstrates that soft skills—communication, adaptability, empathy and emotional intelligence remain difficult for AI to replicate and therefore hold sustained value (Kutchaval et al., 2025; Nadeem, 2024; Singh & Chouhan, 2023).

Using the Resource-Based View (RBV), soft skills can be treated as *VRIN resources* meaning are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. These traits meet RBV criteria because soft skills derive from a combination of personal experience, emotional maturity, and contextual interpretation which capabilities that cannot be fully automated or cloned by AI (Kutchaval et al., 2025; Nadeem, 2024). Unlike procedural knowledge, soft skills are tacit and deeply embedded in individual behavior and social interaction, making them strategically defensible assets that differentiate high-performing organizations.

AI does not replace soft skills; instead, it accelerates their development. AI-based training platforms enable continuous learning, real-time feedback, and simulation-based practice (e.g., conversational bots for negotiation, VR training for leadership situations) (Babashahi et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). These tools shorten learning cycles and increase personalization, leading to measurable improvements in behavioral competency (Albassam, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). As a result, AI becomes a *capability amplifier* plus augmenting rather than substituting human strengths.

This synthesis reframes the narrative that AI is not the source of competitive advantage, but people are. Organizations that leverage AI to strengthen human capital rather than reduce it are more likely to achieve sustainable workforce transformation. The RBV lens therefore positions soft skills not as an optional enhancement, but as a core strategic capability that protects organizations from homogeneous technology-driven competition.

From the author's standpoint, the Resource-Based View (RBV) is the most appropriate lens for positioning soft skills as Thailand's strategic differentiator in the AI economy. While the literature confirms that AI enhances productivity and accelerates task automation, it also reveals a critical oversight among organizations that treat AI as the *primary* source of competitive advantage. Technology is increasingly commoditized that any company can acquire the same AI tools, automation systems, or analytics platforms. What cannot be purchased, copied, or automated is the unique human capacity to interpret context, regulate emotions, negotiate meaning, and build trust. These soft skills are inherently experiential and relational, and thus perfectly align with RBV's definition of VRIN resources. In Thailand's case, the author argues that soft skills are not simply a talent-development priority, but a national economic defense mechanism against the rising cycle of layoffs and job displacement. When organizations use AI to accelerate soft-skill development rather than replace humans that they unlock a compounding effect: lower operating costs, higher employee adaptability, and stronger long-term competitiveness. In this view, AI serves as the catalyst, but human capability remains the true source of value creation.

Leadership and Cost Optimization Through Human-Centered AI Adoption

While AI presents opportunities for efficiency, many companies especially during periods of economic pressure—default to headcount reduction as their primary cost optimization strategy (Jaiswal et al., 2021; Joshi, 2025). However, layoffs generate hidden long-term costs in productivity loss, rehiring, retraining, and reduced employee morale (Morandini et al., 2023). Literature on AI adoption warns that treating technology purely as a mechanism for labor substitution results in short-term savings but long-term strategic erosion (Cramarenco et al., 2023; Singh & Chouhan, 2023).

In contrast, leadership that applies AI through a human-centered strategic framework achieves both productivity and cost efficiency. Studies show that leaders who integrate AI into learning and development processes rather than workforce reduction benefit from higher adaptability, innovation, and employee retention (Ridley et al., 2023; Shokran et al., 2025). By aligning AI with workforce skill transformation, the cost structure shifts from replacement to capability investment, unlocking sustainable ROI through improved talent performance and lower turnover (Jaiswal et al., 2021). Effective leadership uses AI to (1) Reduce operational and training expenses by automating low-value tasks and enabling personalized learning at scale (Shokran et al., 2025). (2) Reallocate saved budget to develop strategic human capital, particularly soft skills that AI cannot replace (Kutchaval et al., 2025; Nadeem, 2024). (3) Strengthen employee value, improving workforce resilience and lowering future retraining costs (Babashahi et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). This reflects a shift from “cost cutting” toward **cost** optimization, where value creation is achieved by maximizing human potential with AI as the enabler—not the replacement.

Thus, leadership becomes the pivotal determinant of AI’s impact which AI is neutral as leadership strategy decides whether it displaces people or empowers them. Organizations that adopt AI with a human-centered philosophy outperform those that use AI merely as automation. The future workforce advantage lies not in how much AI is adopted, but in how effectively leaders integrate AI to elevate the capabilities of their people.

From the author’s viewpoint, leadership is not technology but the true economic differentiator in the AI era. The literature shows a recurring pattern: companies that rush into AI adoption with the primary goal of reducing headcount often overlook the hidden operational and human capital **costs** associated with layoffs, such as knowledge loss, disengagement, and rehiring expenses. In contrast, organizations that treat AI *as a* lever for human capability development capture both productivity gains and long-term financial resilience. For the Thai workforce context where layoffs due to automation are already visible - the author emphasizes that cost optimization must evolve from cost cutting to cost reallocation. Instead of removing people to save money, leaders can redirect freed capacity and budget into building irreplaceable soft skills and future-ready competencies. When AI takes over repetitive tasks, leaders have a strategic window to elevate employees into roles requiring judgment, problem solving, and emotional intelligence areas where AI still lacks human depth. In short, AI does not determine the workforce outcome, but leadership philosophy does. Leaders who choose augmentation instead of substitution will unlock the highest ROI: empowered employees, reduced turnover, and a stronger organizational culture. This reframes AI adoption as *an investment in people*, not merely a reduction in payroll.

Discussion

The synthesis of 28 studies reveals a converging reality: AI does not inherently threaten human labor, but leadership choices determine its consequences. In economies experiencing rapid automation, such as the United States and Europe, AI adoption leads to job restructuring and displacement when leaders use technology primarily to reduce labor costs (Albassam, 2023; Joshi, 2025). By contrast, organizations that adopt AI with a developmental mindset observe gains in productivity, innovation, and employee engagement (Shokran et al., 2025; Singh & Chouhan, 2023). For Thailand, where layoffs have sharply increased in 2024–2025 and the economy remains vulnerable to external volatility, the implications are significant. The Thai workforce has historically relied on technical skills and task execution rather than on adaptive or strategic capabilities. Therefore, when automation replaces routine tasks, workers without soft skills face a higher risk of displacement. Studies demonstrate that adaptability, resilience, communication, creative problem solving, and emotional intelligence are consistently ranked as the least replaceable skills across industries (Ciaschi & Barone, 2024; Kutchaval et al., 2025; Singh & Chouhan, 2023).

From the RBV perspective, soft skills qualify as strategic resources because they are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable. AI, meanwhile, becomes a capability amplifier: it accelerates soft-skill acquisition via personalized learning, simulation, and feedback loops (Babashahi et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). Therefore, the competitive advantage does not stem from AI itself, but from leaders who can integrate AI with human development. This reverses the traditional equation: Instead of using people to get results through AI, leaders must use AI to amplify the potential of people. Yet research also warns that AI deployment can create unintended consequences: bias in decision-making, reduced human connection, surveillance-like monitoring, or emotional detachment at work (Cramarenco et al., 2023; Nadeem, 2024). Hence, adoption must follow ethical and human-centered principles. The discussion makes clear that AI impacts are not universal, but they are contingent on leadership philosophy, organizational culture, and the intentional development of human capital. Thus, AI-driven soft-skill development is not merely training but it is a leadership strategy. From the author's perspective, the turning point for Thailand is not whether AI will replace jobs but whether leaders are prepared to redesign work so humans can operate at a higher level of value. The literature confirms that nations and organizations treating AI merely as automation experience workforce erosion, whereas those using AI to upgrade human capital gain resilience and long-term performance. In Thailand, where layoffs in 2024–2025 reflect a reactive, cost-cutting mindset, the author argues that leadership must transition from efficiency thinking to *strategic reinvestment thinking*: savings generated from automation must be redirected into soft-skill development and continuous learning ecosystems. AI should be viewed as a workforce accelerator, not a workforce reducer. When leaders use AI to augment employee capability, they unlock a compounding return: lower turnover costs, faster time-to-competency, and increased innovation capacity. Ultimately, AI's impact in Thailand will not be determined by technological advancement, but by a leader's courage to invest in people even when automation offers an easier yet shortsighted alternative.

Author’s Recommendations on AI Adoption, Soft Skills, and Leadership Cost Optimization: An Action Framework

Focus Area	Organizational Level – Actions	National/Policy Level – Actions
AI Adoption Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrate AI into business processes with a clear roadmap linking efficiency goals to workforce impact. - Provide AI literacy training for executives and department heads. - Pilot AI tools in non-critical functions before scaling organization-wide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create national AI adoption guidelines tailored to SMEs and service sectors. - Fund AI sandbox programs for Thai companies to lower entry costs. - Support public-private partnerships for safe and ethical AI deployment.
Soft Skills Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinvest part of AI-driven cost savings into employee training on emotional intelligence, problem-solving, adaptability, and negotiation. - Incorporate blended learning (AI + human mentorship) into HR development plans. - Use AI tools for personalized learning paths while retaining human mentorship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Launch nationwide Future Skills Thailand program emphasizing soft skills as a complement to AI capabilities. - Partner with universities and training institutes for recognized certification programs. - Incentivize firms that allocate training budgets specifically for soft skills.
Leadership’s Role in Cost Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shift cost optimization focus from layoffs to productivity gains and role redesign. - Establish “cost-benefit + human impact” KPIs for executives. - Promote cross-functional leadership teams to oversee AI-human integration. - Develop leadership programs that combine AI literacy with ethical decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer tax incentives for companies that demonstrate sustainable efficiency without mass layoffs. - Recognize organizations that achieve cost optimization while protecting workforce well-being. - Embed leadership ethics and AI governance into national management training programs.
Workforce Displacement & Redeployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up redeployment programs for employees displaced by AI. - Provide career transition services (reskilling, job placement). - Create multi-role career paths to prepare staff for AI-driven roles. - Ensure transparent communication about roles at risk of automation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a national AI Displacement Response Unit to monitor high-risk sectors. - Co-fund redeployment and reskilling initiatives between government and private sector. - Provide safety nets and early intervention for workers most exposed to AI-driven displacement.
Transparency & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain open dialogue with employees about AI adoption and its impact. - Involve staff in workflow redesign to reduce resistance. - Share internal success cases to demonstrate benefits. - Promote leadership visibility during transitions to maintain trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote public awareness campaigns on AI’s role in the economy. - Provide dialogue platforms for policymakers, businesses, and workers to co-create AI strategies. - Build trust through transparent reporting on AI adoption’s impact on employment.

Note: This framework represents the author’s synthesis and recommendations. It is not directly derived from any single reviewed source but rather reflects the author’s integrative perspective on AI adoption, soft skills, leadership, and cost optimization.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This literature-based synthesis examined how AI-enhanced soft skills development can support workforce transformation and cost optimization in Thailand. The analysis of 28 studies revealed three key findings. First, AI adoption alone does not generate sustainable competitive advantage; value emerges when AI is paired with human capability development, particularly soft skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, communication, and problem-solving. Second, leadership plays a critical role as the strategic integrator of AI and soft skills development—determining whether AI becomes a tool for workforce displacement or workforce empowerment. Finally, when organizations view human capital as a renewable strategic resource, rather than as a cost to be minimized, cost optimization naturally shifts from short-term layoffs to long-term productivity and capability improvement.

Building from these findings, this paper contributes **new knowledge** by proposing an integrated conceptual model positioning (1) AI as a *human capital multiplier*, (2) leadership as a *knowledge designer*, and (3) soft skills as a *strategic value differentiator*. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), this model reframes cost optimization from labor reduction toward capability multiplication: AI accelerates learning, leadership transforms learning into institutional knowledge, and soft skills elevate organizational value and resilience. Rather than treating soft skills as supplemental qualities, this model demonstrates that - when strengthened by AI and guided by leadership which soft skills become strategic assets that enhance competitiveness and protect workforce relevance in AI-intensive labor markets. (see Figure 2)

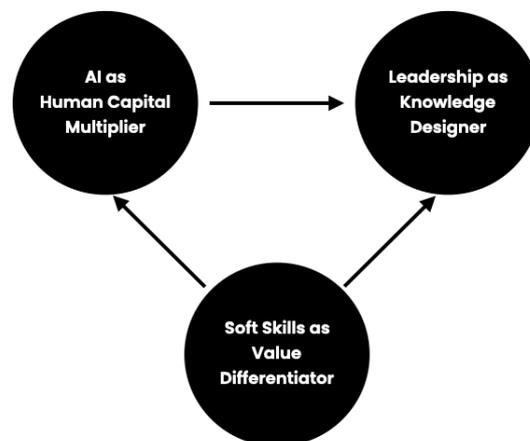


Figure 2: Conceptual model of AI, Leadership and Soft skills as a resilience and competitiveness cycle.

Source: Author's development (2025)

The practical implications are clear. For organizations, investing part of AI-related cost savings into employee soft skills development yields long-term returns, including lower turnover, faster adaptation to change, and greater innovation capacity. For leaders, cost optimization requires shifting from reducing headcount toward redesigning roles, workflows, and learning ecosystems. For policymakers, national workforce resilience requires supporting AI adoption while ensuring inclusive access to continuous upskilling—especially for SMEs and vulnerable worker segments. Leadership must balance efficiency with human impact, ensuring that technology strengthens rather than erodes workforce dignity and value.

This study is not without limitations. As a literature-based synthesis, findings depend on the quality and scope of the selected studies and reflect a bias toward English-language academic sources and non-Thai corporate contexts. Future research should validate the proposed model using empirical evidence from Thai organizations, including interviews, surveys, or AI-enabled training pilot programs. Researchers may also explore industry-specific implications of AI-enhanced soft skills and develop measurable indicators for assessing soft skill growth facilitated by AI.

In conclusion, the future of Thailand's workforce will not be determined by AI adoption alone, but by how leaders design meaningful human development around it. Organizations that combine AI-driven efficiency with investment in human capability will not only reduce costs—but will expand human potential and build a resilient, future-ready workforce.

From the author's viewpoint, Thailand is standing at a strategic crossroads. AI is not the turning point, but the leadership mindset is. Cost optimization should not equate to workforce reduction, but to *resource reallocation*, where efficiency gains from AI are reinvested into developing human capability. In the Thai context, layoffs may provide immediate budget relief, but they silently erode organizational knowledge and long-term resilience. Soft skills, strengthened through AI-enabled learning ecosystems, provide a sustainable competitive shield against automation. Thus, leaders must treat AI not as a replacement for people, but as a lever to amplify human potential and preserve workforce dignity.

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