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Rebuilding the Pyramid: AI's Impact on Staffing in the Knowledge Economy

Insights from Clearsight's 2026 Knowledge Economy Summit Panel

At Clearsight's 2026 Knowledge Economy Summit, our panel of industry leaders discussed a question increasingly raised across boardrooms and deal processes:

How will artificial intelligence impact the future of professional and tech-enabled services businesses?

Rather than focusing on headlines, the panel explored the practical implications for how services firms build teams, deliver work, and compete. Participants included:

- Stuart Ferguson, President, Pointe Advisory now part of Stout (*Moderator*)
- Will Hayllar, Global Managing Partner, OC&C Strategy Consulting
- Sanjaykumar Joshi, Global Lead - Data Management, EXL Services
- Nir Kaldero, Chief Data & AI Strategist, EPAM
- Yuriy Yuzifovich, CTO - AI, GlobalLogic

Explore five key takeaways from the discussion below.

1 The Shift is Real, But Gradual

The foundations of automation, low-code development, and modern data platforms have been gradually evolving for years. What we are seeing now is an acceleration of those trends rather than a sudden disruption.

Early impact is most visible in areas such as software development, analytics workflows, and operational processes where repetitive tasks can be completed more efficiently.

At the same time, many organizations still require significant work structuring data and redesigning internal workflows before the full benefits can be realized.

2 The Advisor Role Isn't Going Away

Panelists repeatedly emphasized the enduring importance of human expertise and client relationships.

Professional services engagements often involve complex decisions that require judgment, industry knowledge, and accountability- elements that technology alone cannot replicate.

AI can accelerate analysis and execution, but clients still expect experienced advisors who understand their business and can guide them through change. As technology becomes more accessible, trusted expertise may become more valuable.

3 The Advantage Lies in Context

As AI tools become more widely available, differentiation is shifting toward context and domain knowledge.

Access to technology alone is no longer a meaningful advantage. What matters now is how effectively firms connect those tools to their institutional knowledge, operating workflows, and industry expertise.

Several panelists pointed to the growing importance of industry-specific solutions built around deep sector understanding and proprietary insights. In other words, the advantage is not simply having the technology, it's knowing where and how to apply it.

4 AI Adoption is a Management Issue

For many organizations, the biggest hurdle is not the technology itself – it's the process of integrating new tools into how teams actually work.

Panelists noted that firms are spending as much time on change management, training, and workflow redesign as they are on the technology itself.

Introducing AI capabilities often requires organizations to rethink long-standing processes and collaboration models. Companies that invest in helping their people adapt, and approach adoption thoughtfully, are more likely to see meaningful results.

5 The Talent Pyramid is Changing, Not Collapsing

The panel returned repeatedly to one of the most widely discussed questions in the Knowledge Economy today: **What happens to the traditional staffing pyramid?**

The consensus was that the shift is more nuanced than many headlines suggest:

- Junior professionals become more productive with AI-enabled tools
- Certain execution layers may compress
- Experienced professionals gain greater leverage across teams

At the same time, the need to train future leaders remains unchanged. Rather than eliminating roles, the likely impact of AI on staffing is a gradual rebalancing of how teams are structured with greater emphasis on expertise, judgment, and collaboration.

The challenge ahead is designing new apprenticeship models that prepare the next generation of advisors while incorporating technology into how work is delivered.

“ **Technology is increasingly available to everyone. What differentiates firms is the depth of their industry knowledge and how well they apply it.** ”