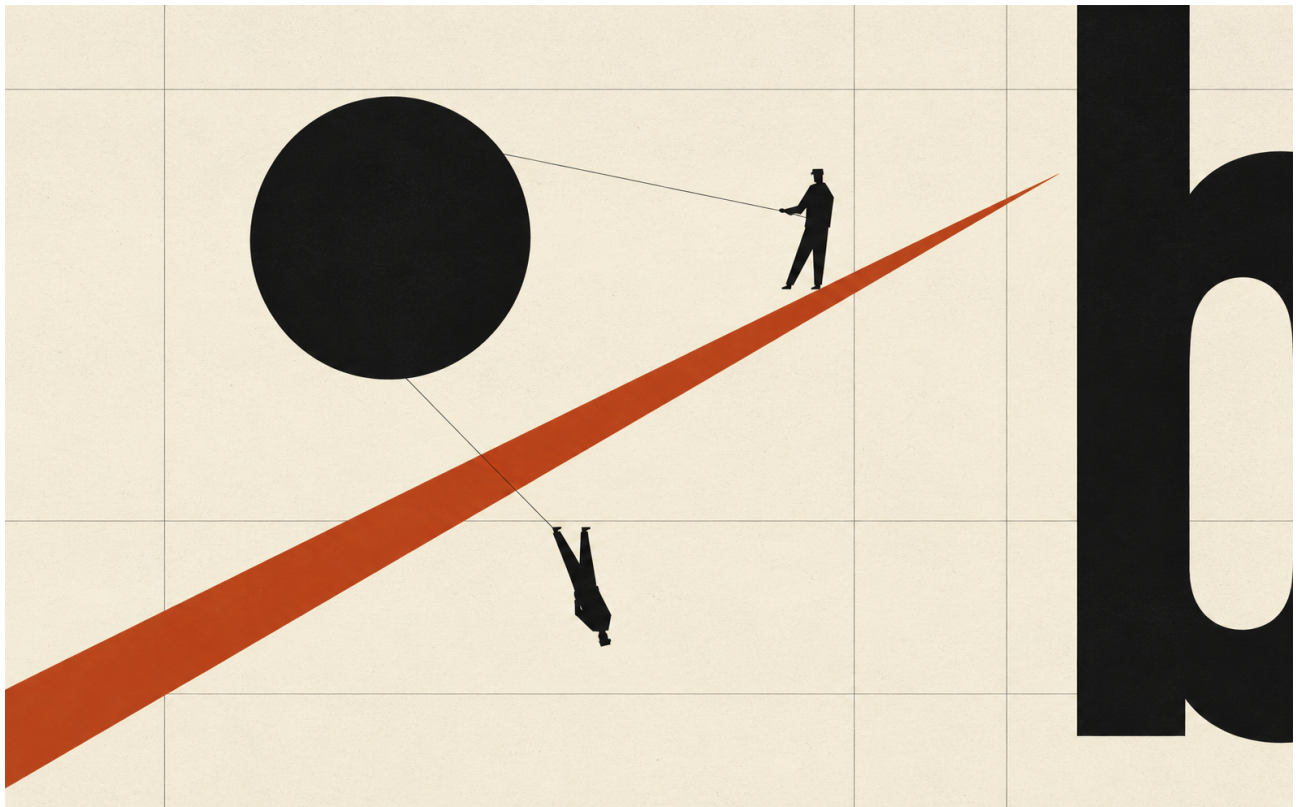


From Botsitting to Vibe Management

What New Terminology Can Tell Us About the
Possible Future of Work Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Our understanding of technology tends to focus far too much on the technology itself. This is an understandable bias, but a myopic one. In this whitepaper we instead look at the language now emerging around genAI in organizations, on the assumption that new words can capture not just the Zeitgeist but a Technikgeist, a new spirit of organizing. Two terms are at the core here. First botsitting, where employees no longer do the work but oversee the bots that do, with the attendant changes in motivation and work identity. Second vibe management, where managers outsource their own role to an outside, algorithmic party, with marked risks to trust and cohesion. Along the way we pick up meat proxies, airbrain, and relationslipping, none of which existed two years ago. Together, these terms point to a shift of agency, one where employees become overseers of algorithms and managers go to the same algorithms to manage the employees. The strange part is that this is not being imposed on us, and instead we're choosing it, something we've started calling self-industrialization.

KEY POINTS

01 Words matter, even when they're new.

Understanding the new language around work can help us see changes before they are fully realized.

02 Work with AI agents is turning into 'botsitting'.

As we become overseers of the algorithm, there is a risk that work gets increasingly emptied of meaning.

03 Managers are outsourcing their own role through 'vibe management'.

As more and more people in a management position (over-)utilize genAI, a foundation of trust and professionalism is at risk.

04 We have started 'self-industrializing'.

Many of these changes are not imposed, but made voluntarily. As strange as it sounds, we're choosing to become 'meat proxies'.

01

Why New Work Terminology Matters

The way we understand technology often focuses far too much on the technology itself. This is an understandable bias, but it still creates a myopia around new and interesting developments as technology starts impacting society and the organizations therein. By instead considering how, e.g., language changes as new technologies come in and change work, management, leadership, and the like, we can gain a better understanding not only of technology itself, but of the impact it is having.

Consider the term "surfing", which was a common term during the early years of the internet. Instead of saying that you "read" the internet or "consumed" the same, we started saying that we were surfing on it. Why? Because engaging with the internet was different from reading a newspaper or watching TV. While hopping from one thing to another is natural to us now, when it first came around it signaled an entirely new sense of freedom, one which felt, well, a little like surfing freely on a vast and shifting ocean. Today, we understand immediately when someone says that they've been "scrolling" (a term that comes to us from the Middle English scrowle, a roll of parchment with text on it) or "swiping left" on something (and if you don't, you've been lucky enough to escape the hellscape of contemporary online dating), terms which also affect how interfaces are designed.

Now, as generative AI (genAI) is becoming an omnipresent phenomenon in the contemporary corporation, it is important that we pay attention to what kind of language is starting to emerge around this, for understanding these terminological changes can also tell us about what technology is doing to us and our organizations, as well as the dangers that this can bring. For this reason, we at SDU CODES are always on the lookout for new terms and new turns of phrase, not just because we like to keep current, but because we believe these terms contain multitudes. In the following we will look at two critical positions in the organization – employees and managers – and what the latest terminology can tell us about how their positions are changing.

When it comes to employees, we will note how genAI is increasingly leading them toward practices such as botsitting, with the attendant changes in motivation and work identity. When it comes to leaders, we will look to the emergence of vibe management and how this can become an area with marked and critical risks in trust and cohesion. In both cases, the terms are pushing us to ask questions not only about technology but about the way in which these shape our practices, and how our choices are an active part of this.

Along the way we will note several other terms – meat proxies, airbrain, relationslipping – all of which point in similar directions. None of these existed two years ago, and all of them, like botsitting itself, arrived in the last six months. This is a finding in itself, and what we at CODES are arguing for in this whitepaper is that even such words matter, and that the way certain words can capture not just the Zeitgeist but a Technikgeist can be a valuable way to gain insight into the new spirit of organizing.

02

The Art of Botsitting

Most adult humans will know that babysitting isn't always easy, and everyone with children will appreciate the gift that is a good babysitter. This is an activity that demands attention, for babies can get into all kinds of messes, and yet one that can be quite dull. Just ask any parent who has had to endure rewatch number 237 of Paw Patrol... Babysitting is also an activity few see as a work task for adults (for if we do it with our own children or grandchildren it is just considered parenting, or the extension thereof), which is why it is often done by teenagers and the like. The assumption is that once you're fully grown, you'll have better things to do with your life.

This is why the new work term of *botsitting* (Crumley, 2026; Glean Work AI Institute, 2026) is so remarkable. What this refers to is a work task that is currently exploding in frequency, where professionals are tasked with the oversight of various AI bots, particularly in the field known as 'agentic AI'. While AI is already very capable, and becoming more capable every month if not quicker, there is still a need for a human to oversee the work, ensure that tasks are aligned, check for requisite quality of output, and so on. This may also involve tweaking the orders (or prompts) given to the AI agent, checking for inconsistencies, adjusting for misinterpretations, and so on. While AIs are less and less likely to produce outright 'hallucinations', there are many other ways in which an AI can produce results that deviate from what was intended, leading to the need for botsitting.

In some organizations, such as those that do software development, botsitting is already a key element of certain work positions. Rather than doing a specific task, a worker might juggle an entire team of AI agents, continuously checking that these are working as intended and doing the right things. While this might seem a rather stress-free form of labor, it is also a position that can be quite stressful. The person botsitting isn't doing any one thing, but rather hoping that all their wards (as it were) are behaving more or less well, and that none start going rogue – again, not unlike babysitting.

As innocuous as the term might sound, there are however several worrying signs about the future of work that can be discerned from it. One, it implies an increasing distance from the 'actual' work, which can lead to an experience of a loss of meaning and, over time, an emptying out thereof. Two, it creates what Madeleine Clare Elish (2019) has called "moral crumple zones", i.e. a situation where humans take on moral and legal responsibilities for issues they couldn't necessarily prevent, not to mention the issue that human actors mainly get involved with fixing mistakes rather than making their own, productive successes. Three, and perhaps most importantly, while it implies humans controlling the machine, it can also be interpreted as humans being reduced to servants of the same, similar to how a babysitter rarely feels empowered by their babysitting tasks.

03

On Becoming a Meat Proxy

If we look back to an earlier revolution in technology, namely industrialization, this obviously created tremendous efficiencies and built the world we know today. Still, it is important to remember what changes in work this wrought. Karl Marx, who wrote extensively on what industrialization did to society, might have been wrong when he predicted it would sooner or later lead to a communist utopia, but other parts of his analysis were quite astute. He noted that technology had the power to create **alienation**, i.e. a distancing from what made work feel meaningful for the worker. An example used by Marx was that of the watchmaker (Marx, 1867/1976). Back in the day, a watchmaker would build an entire watch from pretty close to scratch, understanding every spring, mechanism, and dial thereof (such masters still exist, but buying a timepiece made in this way takes the patience of an angel and the bank account of an oligarch). Industrialization meant that such artisans were outcompeted by technologies that made it possible to have one team make only springs, another only dials, and then a chain of workers assembling all the mechanisms one step at a time. This system created watches far faster, but none of the people taking part could build a whole watch any longer.

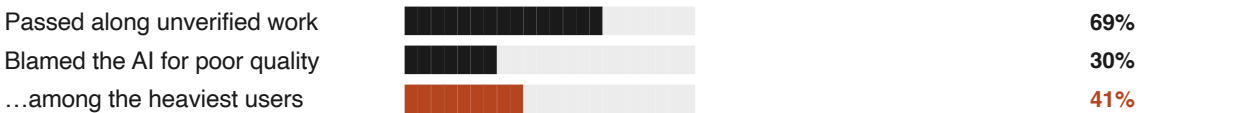
This was the way of alienation, where workers no longer had any control beyond their singular station, and no real way to understand how the final product came to be. You might think that this was just the transition from slow artisans to efficient industrial production, but with botsitting the same is coming not just to basic knowledge work but to most occupations and professions, including those in the creative sector (Braverman, 1974). As noted above, coders are already transforming into botsitters, as are professionals like claims adjusters. Doctors are already talking about spending less and less time with patients, and seeing a future with more and more time spent checking the diagnoses made by AI agents, the documentation made by other AI agents, and the prescriptions of yet others. In more and more professions, the engagement with the primary task is eroding, as bots take over tasks.

The end result can be seen in another term that is now emerging, namely that of **meat proxies** (Gruhn, 2026). Originally coined by Niklas Gruhn for people who simply pass along AI outputs without checking them, the term is one that we at SDU CODES have started using in a more structural fashion. Where the worker previously was a carrier of knowledge, an independent agent, language is already suggesting that workers may become so alienated from their tasks as to become mere proxies for genAI, the warm meat that keeps the digital wheels spinning. If this seems like scaremongering, visit any larger store. The main cashiers are today automated ones, run by the customers themselves, following strict instructions. Store employees are on hand, but primarily to run machine-mandated checks – meat proxies for their automated bosses. As more and more work tasks become similarly automated, the future of work is looking... well, less engaged and engaging. More importantly, data is increasingly supporting this.

Consider the Work AI Index 2026 (Glean Work AI Institute, 2026), which presented the results of a survey of 6,000 digital workers in the US, the UK, and Australia over late 2025 and early 2026. In this, a whopping 69% of those who used AI regularly admitted to passing along work they hadn't verified, didn't fully understand, or couldn't defend if challenged. Further, close to a third of

respondents, and over 40% of the heaviest users, blamed the AI for poor quality, even though they had signed off on the work. In other words, botsitting is already here and human proxies are starting to carry responsibility for work they don't understand. Meanwhile, over on the management side...

FIG. 1



Self-reported figures from the Work AI Index 2026 (6,000 digital workers in the US, the UK, and Australia). Top: share of regular AI users who admitted passing along work they had not verified, did not fully understand, or could not defend. Below: share blaming the AI for poor quality, overall and among the heaviest users.

04

The Emergence of Vibe Management

In February 2025, Andrej Karpathy introduced the term vibe coding (Karpathy, 2025) as a term of art for creating software less by coding and more by describing what you want to create to a genAI agent and dealing with what the AI returns. It became popular enough to be named Collins' "Word of the Year" for 2025 (Collins, 2025), and has only become more common since. Today, vibe coding spans a broad range of practices, from absolute amateurs creating slop software with prompts alone, to highly skilled coders utilizing teams of AI agents to build various bits and pieces of complex IT systems. While the industry is transparent about the fact that this contains risks, the fact is that vibe coding has been massively successful and revolutionized parts of software development.

Now, something similar is also happening in the world of management, on all its levels, and at CODES we have started to call this **vibe management**. Managers today are increasingly using tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, or similar to help them with their tasks, ranging from creating reports and decks to letting genAI agents make actual management decisions. This is far removed from the decision support systems of yore, where a DSS could give data points or stress-test assumptions, and neither is it "algorithmic management" as this has sometimes been discussed in the literature (see e.g. Kellogg et al., 2020). Instead, this is a process through which managers choose to 'outsource' their management role to an outside, algorithmic party.

This is not a minor issue, nor a future one. In several surveys, the number of managers who state that they have used AI to make decisions regarding issues such as delegation, hiring, or promotions has already gone over 60% (ResumeBuilder, 2025), and as early as 2025, about one in five of those managers stated that they always or often went with the final call of a genAI agent in a management decision. In other words, while there is an increase in algorithmic management, i.e. companies putting in place processes that let AI make internal decisions (if mostly with a botsitter checking up on these), managers are also automating management by way of vibe management, in effect alienating themselves from their own tasks.

Now, vibe management is not as general or accepted a term as vibe coding is, but it is likely to become so. From our work with top executives, as well as from the surveys we see about management adopting AI tools, the direction is obvious. AI is taking over tasks that we've long considered innately human, and the shocking thing is that we humans are ourselves active agents in this transformation.

05

An Age of Airbrain?

Now, both botsitting and vibe management do have things going for them. The former is by now an established part of some work processes, and the alternative (wholly unsupervised AI agents) is unlikely to be all that popular given the current technological limitations. In a similar manner, there are several cases where vibe management can be a good thing. We know from research (and experience) that managers are not infallible, and may have biases that color their decisions. In such a situation, getting support from an AI agent (assuming this does not carry the same bias) can lead to better results. Anecdotal evidence exists of cases where a manager using an AI system to rank workers made fairer decisions as a result, as well as of AI systems spotting errors that managers would otherwise have missed.

What one might miss here, just as one might if one only focuses on the errors or hallucinations of vibe management, are the longer-term effects. The cultural critic Kyle Chayka has in a number of publications critiqued contemporary design for producing "AirSpace" (Chayka, 2016), a bland and innocuous style that can today be found in places such as Copenhagen cafés, Cape Town co-working spaces, and airport lounges absolutely everywhere. AirSpace is a design language that has lost all touch with local heritage, historical craft, and true aesthetics, but which survives due to being easy to adapt, offensive to no one, and suitable for Instagram. Recently, Aaron Horwath has suggested that over-reliance on genAI is doing the same in knowledge work, spreading a mode of 'thinking' that can be termed **airbrain** (Horwath, 2026).

What happens when managers increasingly rely on vibe management is that the important processes of learning and experience become hollowed out. If managers become meat proxies for genAI's management suggestions, they develop less and less of their own management nous, and increasingly spread a knowledge version of the AirSpace design style. Note that this style might work, up to a point, but as it does so it also eats away at core skills and learning opportunities (Ferdman, 2026) – an analogy might be going to the gym, using tools to automate the lifting of weights, and then wondering why one doesn't get stronger or fitter. In a similar way, we could imagine an organization that seems to be doing all the right things, but as bosses are increasingly vibe managing and workers increasingly botsitting, skills atrophy until the organization is little more than a few meat tendons moving in concert with the algorithm.

Skills atrophy until the organization is little more than a few meat tendons moving in concert with the algorithm.

06

Relationslipping and Self-Industrialization

What do such terms actually tell us? We do not know for certain, for as anyone who has worked with innovation knows, the future is very difficult to predict. What we do get are possibilities, and issues to pay heed to. One of these is the issue of trust in the age of AI. Botsitting is all well and good until the botsitters start getting tired and unfocused (Bainbridge, 1983). Although the work task is assumedly one of trust (we trust a human to oversee the algorithm), it is also one where it becomes easy to just accept more and more things from the AI agent. The end point is workers becoming meat proxies, accepting whatever the algorithm outputs. Another thing may happen with vibe management, for if employees start suspecting that they are led by genAI, with managers as mere conduits, trust can erode completely in the organization. These kinds of processes have recently been referred to with another new term, namely **relationslipping** (Niederhoffer et al., 2026).

Here too we at SDU CODES have taken the term and extended it. For what is it that is happening in all these new shifts? Well, the relations between people and between people and their work are... slipping. Botsitting indicates a slippage not unlike alienation, in which our relation to the work we're used to performing starts slipping away. At the level where we are fully alienated, mere meat proxies, we may feel that not only has our relationship with work shifted, but so has our relation with other people in the organization, and maybe even with meaning itself. Vibe management means that the trusted relation between manager and employee is slipping, and becoming more and more automated. When this has turned knowledge work – which here encompasses both management itself and that of the employees – into instances of airbrain, i.e. genAI leading botsitters, little remains of the real relationships of the organization. We might even say that they've become fully automated, mere prompts for the algorithmic mill.

A key element in all this is that whereas previous technological revolutions meant that much of this was pushed onto us by owners, managers, and consultants, the new change in work organizations is to a distinct degree driven by... us. No one is telling managers to reach for vibe management; they choose to do so. When it comes to botsitting, that may at times be imposed by the corporation, but often it is something that employees not only accept, but choose. At CODES we've called this *self-industrialization* (see Rehn, in press), a process where we are ourselves willing parties in our own alienation. In this, we are in a very real way actually relationslipping not only in our relations to others and to work, but to ourselves, or at least to our work and professional identities. And why do we do this? Because it feels good. In Anthropic's Economic Index: Cadences (2026) it was reported that those who delegate the most to bots (i.e. self-industrialize most) are the most optimistic when it comes to their future work and their future skills. A staggering 57% stated that their skills were becoming more valuable, and that share rose the more they handed over, all while no more of them said they were learning than those who delegated least. Turns out that people can enjoy turning into meat proxies. Who knew?

07

A Checklist for the Attentive Manager

So what is a manager to do with all this? There is no singular recipe, for there is no singular issue. Instead, these terms indicate changes that call for managers to pay attention to specific things in the work organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS — FIVE MOVES

- A** Accountability is key. Ensure that everyone in the organization knows that they are responsible for what is put out, even if it came from an AI. It is when people simply hand over outputs from agents that relationslipping occurs, be it from managers to employees, from employees to managers, or from employees to employees.
- B** Protect the core. Botsitting might become part of many jobs, and vibe management might at times be helpful. It is when they take over and become seen as the new normal things go awry. Make sure that employees have tasks they feel full ownership and pride over, make sure managers remember what their role is.
- C** Delegate background work, not decisions. There is a difference between asking for support, and letting a machine doing your job for you. The danger in vibe management in particular is that managers start delegating the kind of tasks that take judgement and emotional intelligence, a decision which would start the atrophy of both.
- D** Preserve the learning curve. The organization can likely well handle if a senior manager or employee delegates some tasks to genAI. More problematic is if new managers or junior employees become accustomed to always offloading the 'heavy lifting' to the algorithm. Difficult decisions are learning opportunities, and we need to hold on to them.
- E** Mind the trust. An organization is a network of trust. We need to trust our colleagues, and that the work that they've done is something they take responsibility for. We need for there to be trust in management, for without it there is only hierarchy and resentment. This is where relationslipping can become toxic, one unit of workstop at a time.

08

Coda: Our Choices, Ourselves

None of this whitepaper should be read as an argument against AI, genAI, or using the tools of the same. We at CODES are all keen to use AI tools, and believe they can do much good in organizations and in the world. We also believe that digitalization does create value, and we understand the appeal of turning to genAI when things get tricky, even for managers.

Yet we believe that these new terms are telling us that we need a deeper conversation about how work and work organizations are changing. We have presented them here not as static objects, nor as pejoratives or honorifics. Instead we have introduced them as terms of art for a changing world, terms that can be used to inquire into what is happening to work and management at this specific time. It is a shift of agency, one where employees become overseers of algorithms and where managers go to the same algorithms to manage the employees. As above, so below, as the alchemists and magicians of old would have it (or, if you prefer the Latin, "Quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius."). It is not a future that is here yet, but it is a future the shape of which we're already starting to see. It is also a future in which humans become less and less engaged, and where what is slipping away is not just some forms of work, but things such as intra-organizational trust, confidence in management as a function, professional identities, and more. Or at least it might be.

For this is, for us, a time of questions. As we offload work to AI agents, and even let the tricky work of managing be handled by bots, what remains? What parts of the craft of work or management do we need to retain, and what challenges this? Who will be left to lead, if both employees and managers slowly turn into proxies for the machine? Who will choose to self-industrialize, and who will stick to the old ways? In many organizations, the answers to these questions will decide their future.

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SDU CODES is the Center for Organizational Datafication and its Ethics in Society at the University of Southern Denmark. It is a research center that studies how datafication, AI, and emerging technologies reshape organizing, work, management, and society.