# Duolingo scales back AI workforce plans to safeguard human teachers



Duolingo’s recent pivot towards a more measured approach to artificial intelligence (AI) illustrates the tension many tech companies face as they navigate the complexities of integrating AI while responding to valid public concern. Following backlash against its aggressive plans to implement AI in place of human employees, CEO and co-founder Luis von Ahn has reassured stakeholders that this technology will serve primarily as a tool to enhance—not replace—human work.

In a detailed LinkedIn post, von Ahn outlined his commitment to an evolving workplace, asserting that Duolingo remains actively engaged in hiring and supports its employees in adapting to new technological advancements. He stated, “The sooner we learn how to use it, and use it responsibly, the better off we will be in the long run.” This statement comes as a response to criticism aimed at the company, which earlier hinted at a significant reduction in its human workforce, particularly in contracting roles that could be automated. The prior messaging, coupled with von Ahn’s comments in various podcasts where he suggested that AI could outperform human teachers, sparked significant frustration among users and educators alike.

User reactions on social media platforms reflected a visible discontent, with many questioning if human teachers were still a part of their learning experience. Some even jested about the app’s reliance on AI, prompting Duolingo to respond with a light-hearted video featuring von Ahn himself, aimed at assuring users that AI’s role is to facilitate growth rather than diminish the human element.

A spokesperson for Duolingo clarified that while AI tools will be integrated into various functions, all AI-generated content will still be overseen by experts in language learning to ensure accuracy and quality align with international educational standards. This assurance appears pivotal, particularly as other tech entities face scrutiny over their handling of AI. For instance, Klarna’s chatbot failed to meet expectations and led to a reassessment of their strategy, while Shopify faced backlash over similar claims regarding AI’s potential to replace human roles.

Von Ahn has previously acknowledged in interviews that while AI may disrupt several professions, teaching remains a domain where human presence is vital. He articulated that the moral character and inspirational capability inherent in skilled teachers are qualities that AI cannot replicate. This nuanced understanding reflects a broader conversation within the industry regarding the balance between leveraging AI and preserving the essential human components of work, especially in education.

Recent academic research echoes these sentiments, revealing that the anticipated productivity enhancements from widespread AI adoption are not being realised at the levels anticipated. A study from the National Bureau of Economic Research, which monitored over 25,000 workers across AI-influenced sectors, found negligible improvements in both earnings and efficiency, prompting the need for a more cautious, considered approach to AI integration.

As Duolingo navigates this pivotal transition, it exemplifies the challenge many companies face: embracing innovation while remaining sensitive to the human factors that define their mission and values. Strategies that once aimed to dramatically prioritise AI integration are being replaced with more balanced frameworks that prioritise employee engagement and oversight, ensuring that technology acts as a means to enhance, rather than supplant, the human experience in learning.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/technology/news/story/duolingo-ceo-pushed-ai-at-work-now-says-he-does-not-see-it-replacing-human-employees-2731128-2025-05-27), [[4]](https://hrnewscanada.com/duolingo-pivots-to-ai-first-strategy-plans-workforce-transformation/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/technology/news/story/duolingo-ceo-pushed-ai-at-work-now-says-he-does-not-see-it-replacing-human-employees-2731128-2025-05-27), [[2]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/annaesakismith/2024/05/28/ai-will-displace-humans-in-many-jobs-but-teachers-hard-to-replace-says-duolingos-von-ahn/), [[5]](https://campustechnology.com/articles/2025/05/06/duolingo-embraces-ai-in-push-for-scalable-learning.aspx)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.hrgrapevine.com/us/content/article/2025-05-02-artificial-intelligence-to-replace-contractors-at-duolingo), [[6]](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/technology/tech-news/duolingo-ceos-all-hands-email-to-employee-says-we-are-becoming-ai-first-and-these-jobs-will-go/articleshow/120731541.cms)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/annaesakismith/2024/05/28/ai-will-displace-humans-in-many-jobs-but-teachers-hard-to-replace-says-duolingos-von-ahn/), [[4]](https://hrnewscanada.com/duolingo-pivots-to-ai-first-strategy-plans-workforce-transformation/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://campustechnology.com/articles/2025/05/06/duolingo-embraces-ai-in-push-for-scalable-learning.aspx), [[6]](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/technology/tech-news/duolingo-ceos-all-hands-email-to-employee-says-we-are-becoming-ai-first-and-these-jobs-will-go/articleshow/120731541.cms)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/technology/news/story/duolingo-ceo-pushed-ai-at-work-now-says-he-does-not-see-it-replacing-human-employees-2731128-2025-05-27), [[7]](https://www.computing.co.uk/news/2025/ai/duolingo-goes-ai-first-as-it-phases-out-human-contractors)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/technology/news/story/duolingo-ceo-pushed-ai-at-work-now-says-he-does-not-see-it-replacing-human-employees-2731128-2025-05-27> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annaesakismith/2024/05/28/ai-will-displace-humans-in-many-jobs-but-teachers-hard-to-replace-says-duolingos-von-ahn/> - In a 2024 interview, Duolingo CEO Luis von Ahn discussed the impact of AI on various professions, stating that while many jobs might be replaced by AI, teaching remains a resilient profession due to the human-centric value teachers bring to the classroom. He emphasized the importance of teachers' moral character and their ability to inspire students, qualities that are challenging for AI to replicate.
3. <https://www.hrgrapevine.com/us/content/article/2025-05-02-artificial-intelligence-to-replace-contractors-at-duolingo> - In May 2025, Duolingo CEO Luis von Ahn announced plans to reduce reliance on contractors by integrating AI into tasks such as content creation and translation. The company aims to become an AI-first organization, with AI playing a central role in hiring decisions and performance evaluations. Von Ahn emphasized the need for urgency in adopting AI to stay competitive, even if it means occasional minor compromises in quality.
4. <https://hrnewscanada.com/duolingo-pivots-to-ai-first-strategy-plans-workforce-transformation/> - Duolingo is shifting to an AI-focused business model, as announced by CEO Luis von Ahn in April 2025. The strategy includes phasing out contractor positions for tasks that AI can handle, incorporating AI usage into hiring criteria and performance reviews, and limiting new hires to teams that cannot automate their work. Von Ahn highlighted the importance of embracing AI to scale content creation and enhance efficiency.
5. <https://campustechnology.com/articles/2025/05/06/duolingo-embraces-ai-in-push-for-scalable-learning.aspx> - Duolingo is adopting an 'AI-first' strategy, moving beyond merely integrating AI into existing workflows to fundamentally redesigning them. The company plans to phase out contractors in favour of AI tools, evaluate employee performance based on AI adoption, and restrict headcount growth unless teams can prove that automation isn't an option. CEO Luis von Ahn framed this shift as a means to remove bottlenecks and allow employees to focus on creative and meaningful tasks.
6. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/technology/tech-news/duolingo-ceos-all-hands-email-to-employee-says-we-are-becoming-ai-first-and-these-jobs-will-go/articleshow/120731541.cms> - In April 2025, Duolingo CEO Luis von Ahn announced a strategic shift towards an 'AI-first' operational model, integrating artificial intelligence into workflows. This transition will lead to the elimination of certain job roles that can be effectively automated by AI, affecting contractors and influencing hiring and performance evaluations. The company aims to scale content creation and enhance efficiency through AI, augmenting full-time employees rather than replacing them.
7. <https://www.computing.co.uk/news/2025/ai/duolingo-goes-ai-first-as-it-phases-out-human-contractors> - Duolingo is transitioning to an 'AI-first' strategy, phasing out human contractors for tasks that AI can handle, such as content creation and translation. CEO Luis von Ahn informed staff of this decision in an internal memo, which was later shared on LinkedIn. The company will approve new hires only if teams can prove the work cannot be automated. AI will also play a role in recruitment and performance reviews, signalling a deep integration of automation across Duolingo’s operations.