Against All Odds: Deskilling and Reskilling in the Face of Artificial Intelligence Redundancy Threats in Records Management and Archival Science

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Abstract

Ever since the Industrial Revolution began, machines have been replacing humans in numerous occupations and professions. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) are often regarded as disruptive, especially when one looks at how they impact human employment in different sectors of the economy. While it is true that machines are displacing humans from their jobs, there is a need to devise means and ways of preparing for the inevitable labour crisis. This study proposes upskilling and reskilling in records management and archival science as a way to circumvent the impending AI-induced deskilling labour crisis. The study is very useful to serving records management and archival science practitioners who often find it difficult to cope with change, resulting in them being rendered redundant and their many years of work experience washed down the drain. The study shows the importance of education and skills upgrade in records management and archival science for personnel to remain relevant in the midst of the AI revolution. Using Lewin's change management model, the study guides records and archives management practitioners to ride with the tide lest they are pushed off the pedestal. Data in this conceptual study are obtained from a systematic literature review of the Scopus and Google Scholar databases, focusing on sources published between 2021 and 2025. The query string involved the keywords: "deskilling AND reskilling AND AI job threats OR records management and archival science".

Keywords: artificial intelligence, job losses, deskilling, reskilling, skills, skills redundancy, upskilling

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Introduction

> As the professional environment continues to evolve, upskilling, reskilling, and mega-skilling have become essential strategies for workforce development. Upskilling enhances current capabilities, reskilling prepares employees for new roles, and mega-skilling integrates knowledge across disciplines to address complex challenges. (Ayinde et al., 2024, p. 3)

Ever since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, machines have been replacing humans in many occupations and professions. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) are many times regarded as disruptive, especially when one looks at how they impact human employment in different sectors of the economy. Technological change, one of the major challenges of the 21st century (Schneider & Vipond, 2023), is the most divergent driver of labour-market change in the world today (World Economic Forum, 2025). While it is true that machines are displacing humans from their jobs, there is a need to devise means and ways of preparing for the inevitable labour crisis. This study proposes upskilling and reskilling in records management and archival science as a way to circumvent the impending labour crisis, where many work processes and procedures now centre around AI. AI, which is the replication of human intelligence by machines, has been defined differently by different scholars. For purposes of this study, the term refers to the use of intelligent robotic machines and AI-powered software and applications to manage records and archives (Modiba & Shekgola, 2024).

Records management is a discipline that specialises in managing documents and information, in paper, electronic, and audio-visual form. It is defined by Mohamed and Bunawan (2022) as the effective and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of records that are either received or created in the conduct of business. Organisations must pursue the professional management of records to ensure accountability, transparency, decision-making, and to uphold the rights and obligations of various parties (Agu et al., 2022). Important records of enduring value become the archives of the organisation or country. Archives, unlike records, are permanently preserved for future use and reference. Records and archives organisations have evolved from manual record systems to automated systems, including the trending AI technology. Thus, like any other current organisation, records offices, records centres, and archival centres are using various AI technologies in their work (Modiba, 2022). The rate of use and the magnitude of AI application in records and archives management are rendering traditional records and archival skills obsolete, and this is the basis on which this study is set. The study is very useful to serving records management and archival science practitioners who often find it difficult to cope with change, resulting in them being rendered redundant and their many years of work experience washed down the drain. The study highlights the importance of education and skills upgrades in records and archives management for personnel to remain relevant amid the AI revolution.

Objectives of the Study

1) To identify AI-induced deskilling threats in the records management discipline.
2) To propose upskilling and reskilling as strategies to fend off current and future employment threats in the records management discipline.

Research Problem

While a lot of literature has been published on the impact of AI on employment in many sectors of the economy (Jayes & Schneider, 2022; Rafner et al., 2021; Sun, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2025), little has been published on the impact of AI in records management, and more so, on mitigation measures to save humans from job redundancy in the field of records management. The few studies that have focused on AI and records management, such as Jaillant and Rees (2022), Modiba (2022), and Modiba and Shekgola (2024), have tended to focus on the role and application of AI in records management, and scantly touched on the impact of such technology on the workforce and possible remedies in the new era. This study seeks to fill such a gap and complements the efforts of scholars, such as Hernández and Rockembach (2025), who have begun addressing means and ways of making records management and other information professionals remain relevant in the age of technological advances such as AI, robotics, and quantum computing. The transition from the 4th to the 5th Industrial Revolution has resulted in the dawn of newer and more complicated technology that calls for both upskilling and reskilling, lest machines take over jobs that used to be the preserve of humans. Ayinde et al. (2024) aver that there has been limited exploration of the impact of the transition from the 4th to the 5th Industrial Revolution on information professionals due to technological shifts, as well as of the possible remedies to avert the impending human resources disaster.

Conceptual Framework

This study is informed by Lewin's change management model. In 947, Kurt Lewin introduced the change management model, which comprises three stages: unfreeze, change, and refreeze. Lewin came up with this model after observing change unfolding during the mid-19th century and averred that there was supposed to be a model that guides people, organisations, and countries as they transition in relation to change within their environments. In the first stage of the change process, which he referred to as the unfreeze stage, people begin to realise that there is a need for change and to let go old habits, and embrace an array of possibilities to deal with the new situation (Majka, 2024). They weigh the merits and demerits of change. Lewin referred to the exercise as the force field analysis (Connelly, 2020). If change is seen as imminent and desirable, the transition process gets to the second stage, the "change" stage. Majka (2024) states that during the change stage, people and organisations practically undertake steps that transform the organisation from its current state to the envisioned future. Action is called for at this stage, and this may include, among other things, learning, training, coaching, and mentorship (Connelly, 2020). Once new skills are acquired through some form of training, there is a need to reinforce behaviour so that people and organisations operate according to the new and desired way. Lewin calls the third transitional stage "refreezing". New skills, organisational culture, and operational frameworks are solidified, routinised and reinforced (Majka, 2024).

The model applies to this study where technological changes in records management are inevitable. As the discipline moves from the 4th Industrial Revolution's automated records management systems to the 5th Industrial Revolution AI-based records management system, there is a need for the adoption of a model to guide the change process. Lewin's change process helps people and organisations to unfreeze their skills as the industry deskills. This prepares the ground for them to be ready for change by engaging in action-oriented activities, such as acquiring improved and new skills through workshops, short courses, mentoring, online

courses, blended courses, and university courses. Such training either improves the skills of records managers (upskilling) or inculcates new skills (reskilling) in them.

Methodology

The researcher employed a qualitative, systematic literature review-driven method, utilising a change management conceptual framework to explore means and ways of mitigating AI-induced skills redundancy threats in records and archives management. A total of 25 Scopus and Google Scholar database documents were reviewed. Amongst them were journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings. The search query string involved the keywords: "deskilling AND reskilling AND AI job threats OR records management and archival science". The use of the Boolean operator "OR", as indicated above, yielded many documents as opposed to the use of "AND records management and archival science", which yielded very few documents. As a result, many documents from different disciplines were found. After reading the abstracts of the documents, many were discarded due to thematic misalignment, resulting in the two database searches yielding 25 papers that focused on the research problem of the study. The search was restricted to sources in the English language and published between 2021 and 2025. Scopus and Google Scholar databases' sources are renowned for their rigorous peer-review process, making them very reliable sources of information and knowledge. Issues of skills upgrades and reskilling as a panacea to deskilling with the advent of emerging technologies, such as AI, are recent phenomena, making it important to rely on more recent sources. Data were analysed thematically in line with the two objectives of the study.

Deskilling as a Cause of AI-Redundant Threats in the Records Management Discipline

One challenge that affects the field of records management today is deskilling, a phenomenon characteristic of the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolutions (Bossen & Naja, 2025; Minardi, 2022). Deskilling refers to workers' loss of professional skills due to technological or work practice changes (Rafner et al., 2021). Deskilling occurs when some skills become redundant, a phenomenon caused by, among other developments, automation, outsourcing, offshoring, and the implementation of cost-cutting measures (Adepoju & Esan, 2023). It should be noted that while earlier technology enhanced work processes conducted by humans, AI technology is replacing and displacing the very humans that it is supposed to help. In the context of this study, deskilling in records management comes as a result of automation, where several AI technologies are roped in to replace or work alongside humans in conducting business.

AI is now widely used in records management. For example, machine learning is used in records management to analyse large data sets and make predictions faster and more accurately than humans (Adepoju & Esan, 2023). Colavizza et al. (2021) define machine learning as computer programmes that learn from data. Among other things, machine learning is used for data extraction, indexing, searching, retrieval, and disposal. Omigie et al. (2023) single out machine learning as one AI technology that has caused a lot of concern about the future of work, as it is displacing humans from their jobs. Another AI technology, natural language processing, is used in processes such as text generation, transcription and translation (Hernández & Rockembach, 2025). Robots, which are also part of AI technologies, are used to share and distribute paper-based records within an organisation or in a records or archival centre. Theodotou (2023) adds to the list of AI technologies, deep learning, and robotic process automation as AI technologies that are instrumental in enhancing records and archives management activities. AI can be used to perform almost all records management activities, for example, records creation, classification, filing, storage, retrieval, and disposal (Thabakgolo

& Mosweu, 2025). This is supported by scholars such as Colavizza et al. (2021) and Jaillant and Rees (2022), who state that AI is instrumental in automating archival workflows around the "capture" and "organise" dimensions of the records continuum theory, while Modiba (2022) avers that it is applicable throughout the records life cycle. This has resulted in some records management professionals losing jobs as machines are taking over many work processes. In showing the negative effects of deskilling due to automation, some Danish physicians label the phenomenon "destructive digitalisation" (Bossen & Naja, 2025, 3).

Deskilling is unstoppable because most jobs are increasingly becoming automatable. Schneider and Vipond (2023) give the example of jobs in the United States of America, where they found that 47% of jobs are automatable. The records management and archival science discipline is not immune to such developments and eventualities, making it important for them to consider upskilling and reskilling to save themselves from the impending labour crisis. Many factors drive skills disruption in the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolutions. According to the World Economic Forum (2025), the five drivers are technological change, geoeconomic fragmentation, green transition, demographic shifts, and economic uncertainty. Adepoju and Esan (2023) hold that 4th Industrial Revolution technologies, such as AI and robotics, are the leading causes of deskilling because of their economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in accomplishing tasks. With deskilling comes reduced labour costs, increased efficiency, and improved product quality (Adepoju & Esan, 2023). Thabakgolo and Mosweu (2025) add to the list business efficacy and streamlining business operations as benefits of deskilling, where humans are gradually replaced by machines and other digital technologies. Raghunath (2021) argues that technological skills are continuously changing and, as a result, no one is safe from job redundancy in the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolutions. He firmly points out that no human is permanently tech-savvy, making it important for all humans to upgrade their skills or acquire new ones. This includes millennials (born between the 1980s and the 1990s) and Generation Z, or zoomers (born between 1997 and 2012),), the renowned technologically-savvy age group.

The World Economic Forum's Global Skills Taxonomy, published in 2025, indicates that the world average for skill disruption by 2030 stands at 39% and amongst the countries to be affected are Zimbabwe at 48%, the United Arab Emirates (41%), Canada (38%), the United States of America (35%), China (34%), France (33%) and Denmark (33%) (World Economic Forum, 2025). Amongst the new upcoming skills by 2030 are AI and big data, networks and cybersecurity, technological literacy, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, and agility. The World Economic Forum (2025) holds that AI is likely to make 9 million redundant jobs and, at the same time, create 11 million jobs. The creation of jobs because of AI is affirmed by Omigie, Krubu, and Anthony (2023), who predicted that AI is set to create 2.8 million jobs in Nigeria by 2030. This is further supported by Schneider and Vipond (2023), who hold that during the last 200 years, despite technological changes, more new jobs have been created than lost. However, to achieve this, employees should upskill and/ or reskill to be able to fit into the new skills realm. Table 1 below shows potential new general and records management-specific job roles that are likely to be created by the AI revolution in the next few years.

Table 1
Potential New General and Specific Job Roles Created by the AI Revolution

No.	Possible new general roles created by the AI revolution	Possible new records management roles created by the AI revolution
1	Natural Language Processing (NLP) Specialist	AI Trainer or Model Specialist
2	AI Ethics Consultant / AI Ethicist	Intelligent Enterprise Content Management Analyst
3	Responsible AI & People Governance Manager	AI Metadata Manager
4	AI Policy Analyst	Predictive Records Lifecycle Analyst
5	AI Productivity Coach	AI Computational Archivist
6	Human-AI Interaction Designer	AI Metadata Architect
7	Machine Learning Engineer	Digital Archival Search Engineer
8	AI Strategy Consultant /	AI Audit and Compliance Officer
9	AI Product Manager	AI Records/Information Governance Specialist
10	AI Sustainability Analyst	AI Support & Integration Analyst

Lewin's change management model was used to inform this study. The deskilling stage in the records management industry is akin to Lewin's unfreezing stage. With deskilling, workers lose professional skills as upgraded or new technology is introduced. At this stage, workers need to ride with the tide and deskill as well, by letting go of old skills (unfreezing) to make room for the acquisition of new skills. In records management, paper records management skills, such as manual records filing, manual records classification, and manual records appraisal, should be discarded as records management professionals set the stage to embrace new AI-based skills, such as robotic process automation (for electronic filing and classification), as well as machine learning and deep learning (for electronic records appraisal). Automated processes, such as computer-based or electronic documents and records management system-based records creation, filing, classification, and disposal, should also be deskilled as AI technology becomes widely used in records management. This makes it necessary for records management professionals to let go of old, automated skills to make room for new AI records management skills. This is equivalent to Lewin's unfreezing stage. Workers' deskilling does not necessarily mean that they actually eradicate and forget the old skills, but metaphorically implies removing an unnecessary set of skills from their mind and hands to make space for new AI skills.

Upskilling as a Measure to Circumvent AI-Induced Employment Threats in Records Management and Archival Science

As new technologies are introduced in records management, employees need to acquire new skills to remain relevant in their current and future roles, chief among which are AI skills. This is supported by Sikhakhane (2025), who avers that records professionals require appropriate skills to effectively use AI to enhance the records management tasks, and this can be achieved through upskilling and reskilling in AI and other current disruptive technologies. At the same

time, Jaillant and Rees (2022) highlight that insufficient skills are a huge barrier to AI implementation in records management and archival science. In the context of this study, skills are specific technical and non-technical competencies and specialised knowledge that humans should possess to work effectively with AI technologies and systems (ARISA, 2023). Theodotou (2023) also views skills as learned abilities that enable humans to achieve predetermined results with high levels of certainty and precision. Thus, he holds that organisations should invest resources in AI upskilling and reskilling, or else humans would be gradually displaced from their jobs now and in the future.

Skills upgrades can be partly achieved through upskilling. Upskilling refers to the acquisition of broader, and higher-level skills to cope with changes in technology (Rafner et al., 2021). For example, records managers who used to classify records in Microsoft Excel need new training to pass on the job to robotic process automation, an AI technology that can be used to perform routine and repetitive processes such as records classification, filing, and inventoring. There is an upgrade of skills from being computer literate in Microsoft packages to being literate in AI technologies and packages. This implies that humans from time to time need to align themselves with technologies to remain relevant, a regrettable situation that makes them slaves of and to technology. Commenting on this scenario, Krook (2025, 1) asserts that, “The biggest threat to humanity is therefore not that machines will become more like humans, but that humans will become more like machines”. He thus labels humans in the present and future as happy slaves of technology.

Upskilling is mostly prevalent during the transition from the 4th Industrial Revolution to the 5th Industrial Revolution. According to Ayinde et al. (2024), while the 4th Industrial Revolution focuses on automation, the 5th Industrial Revolution focuses on the integration of advanced technologies with human creativity and expertise, inclusive of human-computer interaction. Thus, with upskilling, records managers do not necessarily need a set of new skills, but an upgrade and broadening of the same to be equal to the new technological demands of their day.

Reskilling as a Measure to Circumvent AI-Induced Employment Threats in Records Management and Archival Science

Reskilling is the process of training workers to acquire new skills that are required for new and different roles, in line with technological changes that make some roles obsolete (Ayinde et al., 2024). Reskilling and upskilling are sometimes used interchangeably. For example, Adepoju and Esan (2023) define reskilling as the acquisition of new skills or the upgrading of old skills to perform new roles. This study considers them as different, with upskilling referring to the enhancement of current capabilities, and reskilling referring to the acquisition of new skills for new roles in line with the technological demands of the day. Reskilling is one thing that organisations need to embrace in their strategic plans because, as previously pointed out, deskilling is the reality of life, making the acquisition of new skills mandatory. Adepoju and Esan (2023) state that reskilling is inevitable due to technological advancements, the need to cut production costs, and the need to remain competitive in the industry. Records managers need to ride with the tide so that they are not left behind. For example, records management professionals need new skills to train AI algorithms, to understand AI technologies, and to collaborate with AI technologies in conducting records management duties. This set of skills depends on the programmed level of human involvement in how machines are set to work, among which are human in the loop (HITL), human on the loop (HOTL), and human out of the loop (HOOTL).

HITL involves humans planning, executing, and evaluating the work that machines carry out, making it necessary to retain a few people to interact with machines (Rafner et al., 2021). A few records management professionals may have to be retained in order to train AI algorithms, plan, design, and evaluate the work that various AI technologies conduct. This may include prioritising which records are to be appraised first and which ones are to be transferred for permanent preservation first. The evaluation of the effectiveness of a natural language processing translator is best conducted by humans, who then make recommendations to maintain or improve how the technology works. AI technology has been accused of lacking ethical norms (Modiba, 2022; Thabakgolo & Mosweu, 2025). Humans may have to be in the loop to determine the ethical status of AI technologies and decide what to do with them in line with the ethical expectations of society. HOTL is not very different from HITL, as both scenarios involve human involvement in machine operations. However, in HOTL, humans play the role of monitoring as they only check the outcome of the process (Rafner et al., 2021). In HOOTL, humans are not involved at all in the way machines work, as machines complete transactions without human intervention (Rafner et al., 2021). The first two scenarios, HITL and HOTL, go a long way in enhancing human-machine interaction, where some humans retain their jobs, but with new skills acquired to be able to meaningfully interact with the machines. Thus, with relevant training, some humans retain their jobs as they interact with machines or as they work collaboratively with them. Added to them are newly skilled records management professionals who would be ready to take up completely new job roles brought about by AI, as explained below.

In reskilling, both technical and non-technical skills are required. AI technical skills in records management may include technical aspects such as algorithmic training and machine learning, while non-technical skills, which ARISA (2023) refers to as soft skills, may include support roles such as ethical control, regulatory control, quality control, and problem solving. The duration of training depends on the nature of the skill in question. ARISA (2023) points out that AI technical skills require longer and in-depth training than non-technical skills. Thus, AI roles such as AI training and machine learning engineering may need long college or university courses, while non-technical skills such as AI ethics, records management, and AI records management legal compliance may be done as short training courses through workshops and mentoring. The guiding principle should be an AI skills intelligence audit where a needs assessment is first conducted before the nature and duration of training can be determined. This is affirmed by Mugwambi and Mutsagondo (2024), who hold that assessing employees' training needs is a necessary condition for there to be productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Adepoju and Esan (2023) opine that organisations should conduct regular skills assessments where they identify skills that have become obsolete and go on to implement training programmes that meet the new needs of the job. They hold that the training should, among other things, involve coaching and mentoring, especially as employees prepare for new organisational roles. Reskilling and upskilling can be effected by training employees in both hard and soft skills in line with the strategic direction of the organisation, as well as in response to environmental forces at play, amongst which are technology, social, and economic forces (Ayinde et al., 2024). Adepoju and Esan (2023) add that new general training is required in digital literacy, data analysis, programming, cybersecurity, human resources, software analytics, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking, where new technical skills, soft skills, and new knowledge are acquired. Reskilling is one thing that organisations need to embrace in their strategic plans because, as previously pointed out, deskilling is the reality of life, making the acquisition of new skills mandatory. Adepoju and Esan (2023) state that reskilling is

inevitable due to technological advancements, the need to cut production costs, and the need to remain competitive in the industry.

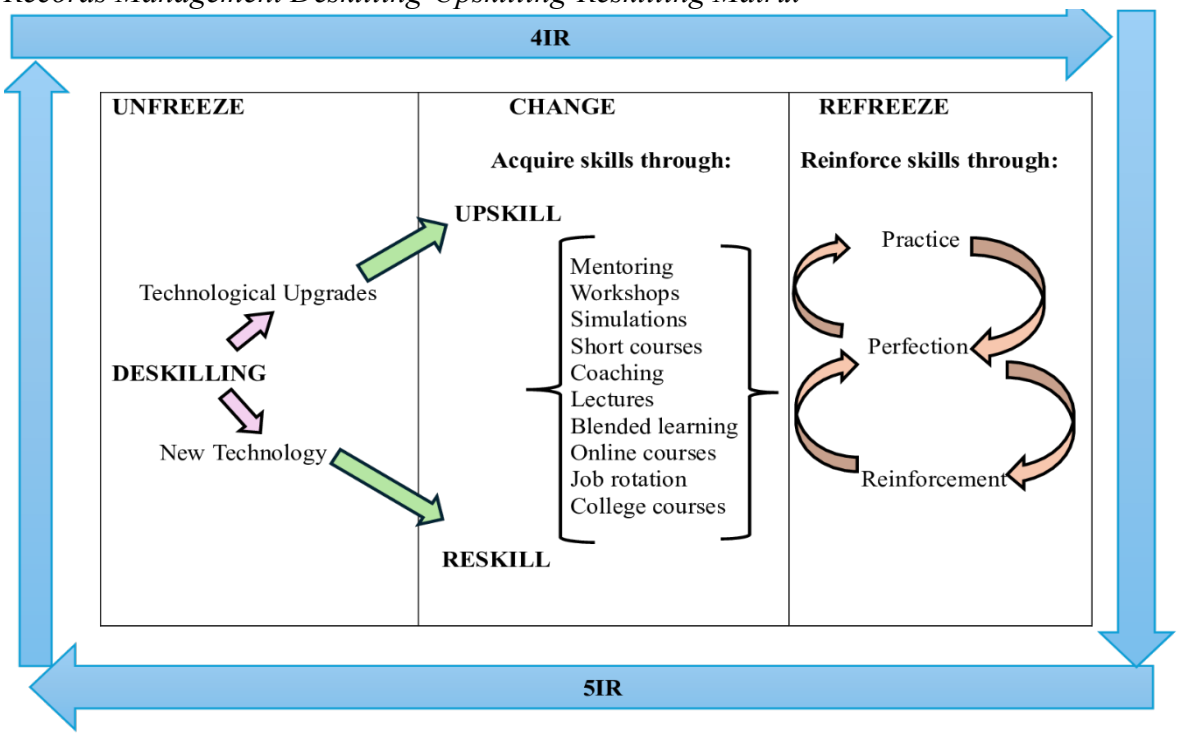
As shown in Table 1, a wide array of skills is required for records management professionals to operate at an optimal level. Ayinde et al. (2024) refer to this skill acquisition and development as mega-skilling. They define mega-skilling as a holistic approach to skill development where humans integrate knowledge and expertise from multiple fields and disciplines, including technology, ethics, and strategic management. For example, with mega-skills, records management professionals can train AI models, assess their ethical conduct, assess their regulatory frameworks, and engage in strategic management activities. This implies that while upskilling and reskilling are important, mega-skilling is even more important. As such, training for records management professionals should be broad-based, all-inclusive, and holistic as opposed to narrow-based, restricted, and fragmentary in nature. Mega skills can be acquired through workshops, seminars, online learning, hybrid learning, and even college or university courses.

Upskilling and reskilling involve a change process where records management professionals undergo training to meet the new demands of their jobs. This stage is equivalent to Lewin's change stage, where Majka (2020) states that at the change stage, people should practically transform from their current to envisioned state through different forms of training, such as learning, adaptation, training, coaching, and mentorship. Upskilling is a change that caters to technological upgrades, for example, from computerised and records management systems to AI-based records management systems. Reskilling is a change that caters to the emergence of new technology and new roles, where records management professionals need a new set of skills to effectively and efficiently apply themselves in new AI-based roles.

Once upgraded and new skills are acquired, there is a need to reinforce these skills so that they become deeply entrenched in employees. According to Lewin, in the third stage of the change management model, which he calls refreezing, new skills should be solidified and reinforced (Majka, 2024). There is a need for records management professionals to reinforce AI records management skills, such as AI model training, AI metadata analysis, and AI records management auditing, through continuous practice, perfection, and reinforcement, and through repeated practice to make the newly acquired skills deeply entrenched and embedded. In short, it should be realised that the acquisition of upgraded and new skills without their reinforcement is not enough. This makes it important to rope in Lewin's change management model in records management upskilling and reskilling. Figure 1 below is an illustrative summary of how Lewin's model can be used in enhancing upskilling, reskilling and mega-skilling to avoid AI-induced job redundancy in records and archives management within the context of the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions.

Figure 1

Records Management Deskilling-Upskilling-Reskilling Matrix



Conclusion

This study has shown that deskilling is a reality of life. It has affected records management, as the discipline has evolved from manual to automated and to AI systems. With upskilling and reskilling, skills disruption or deskilling does not necessarily result in unemployment since the acquisition of upgraded and new skills prepares employees for upgraded and new roles. As a result, in addition to working with machines or alongside machines, records management professionals are capable of assuming new roles, such as AI model training, AI ethics consulting, AI metadata architecture, and AI records governance. The failure to upskill and reskill leads to skills redundancy in records management, as the above-stated roles cannot be held by traditionally trained records management professionals. Lewin's change management model helps to reinforce the deskilling, upskilling, and reskilling matrix in records management, as his unfreeze, change, and refreeze stages speak to the deskilling, upskilling, and reskilling scenarios discussed in this study.

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