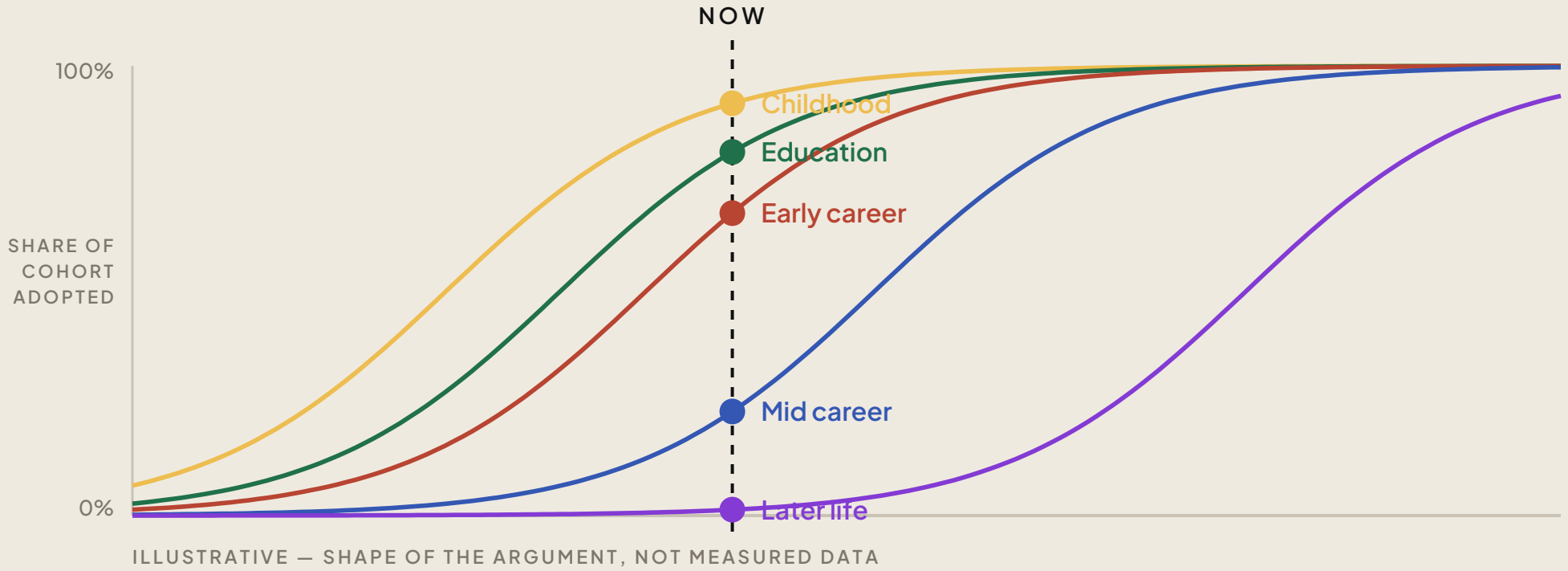
AI arrived before most people had a chance to choose.

The adoption curve assumes a decision. Most people didn't get one.
Where judgement gets formed depends on where you were standing.



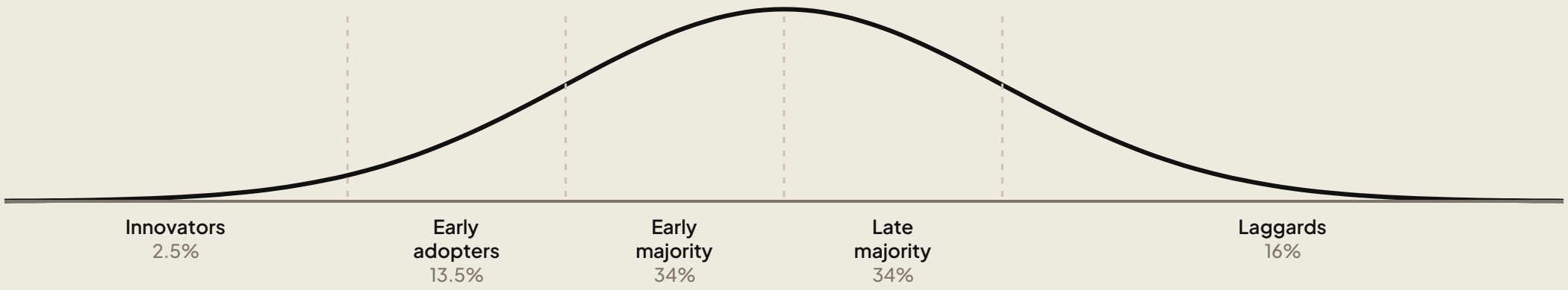
One moment in time. Five cohorts, five different positions.

I was watching the wrong variable.

I tracked who adopted. What mattered was what each cohort stopped learning. Diffusion describes how a technology spreads; arrival describes where people are when it lands.

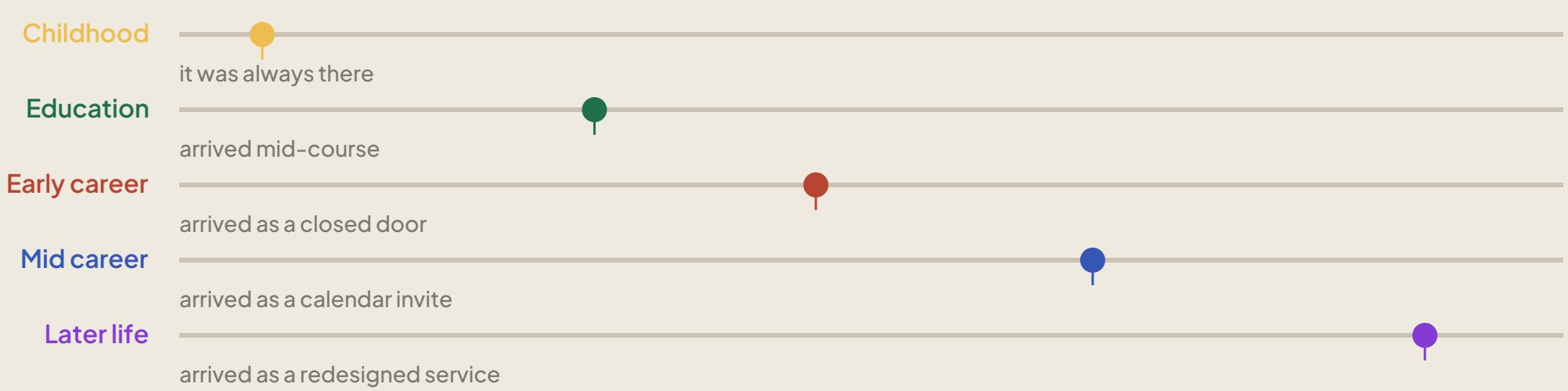
Q: WHO ADOPTS NEXT, AND WHO DO I PERSUADE?

DIFFUSION — EVERETT ROGERS, 1962



Q: WHO HAD A CHOICE?

HISTORICAL ARRIVAL — ONE MOMENT, FIVE COHORTS

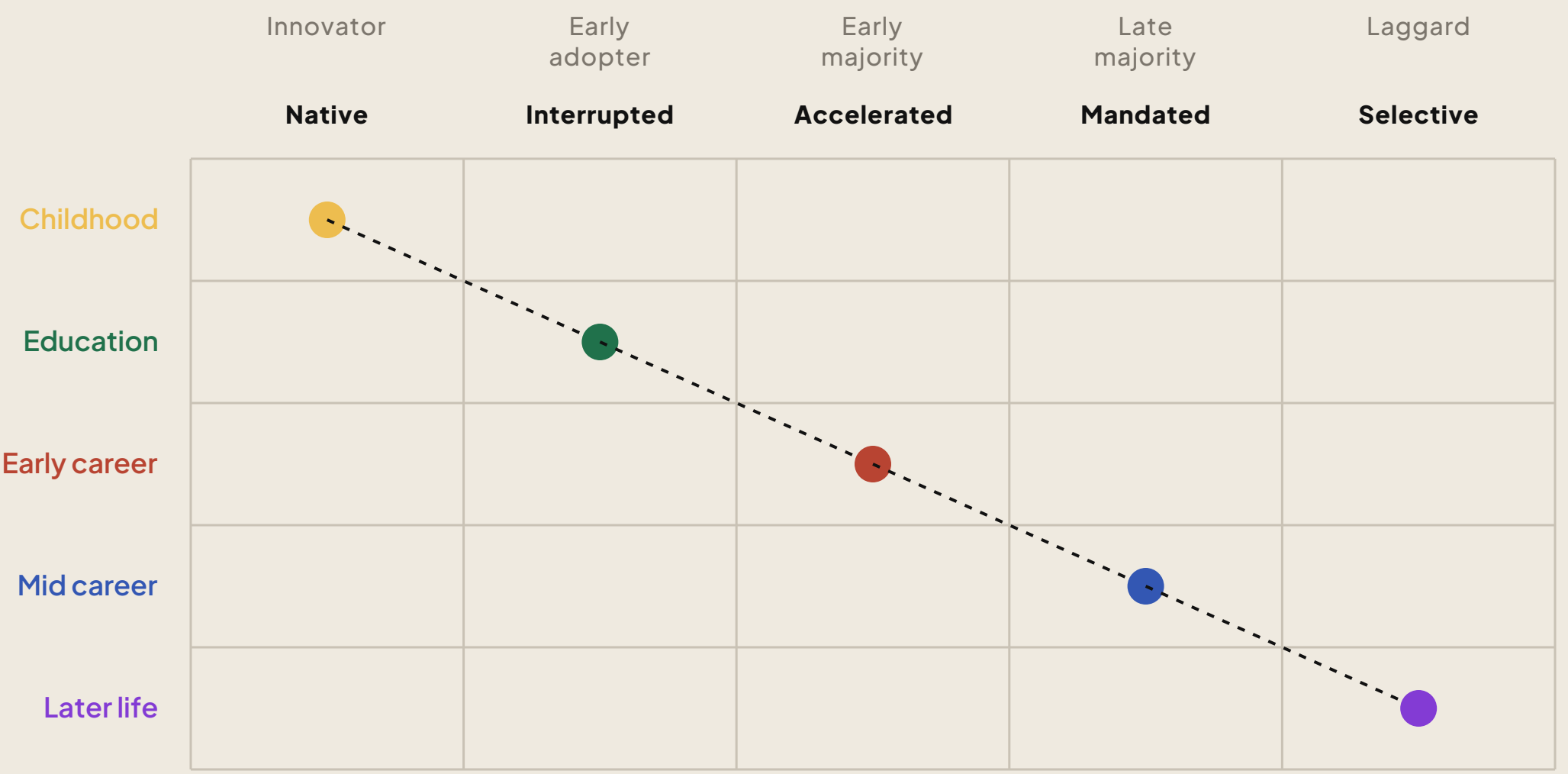


Rogers explains diffusion. This explains arrival.

And if AI changes where judgement is formed, then adoption isn't the story. Learning is.

Same diagonal.
Different vocabulary.

Rogers' categories describe a population that chose. These five describe how it arrived.

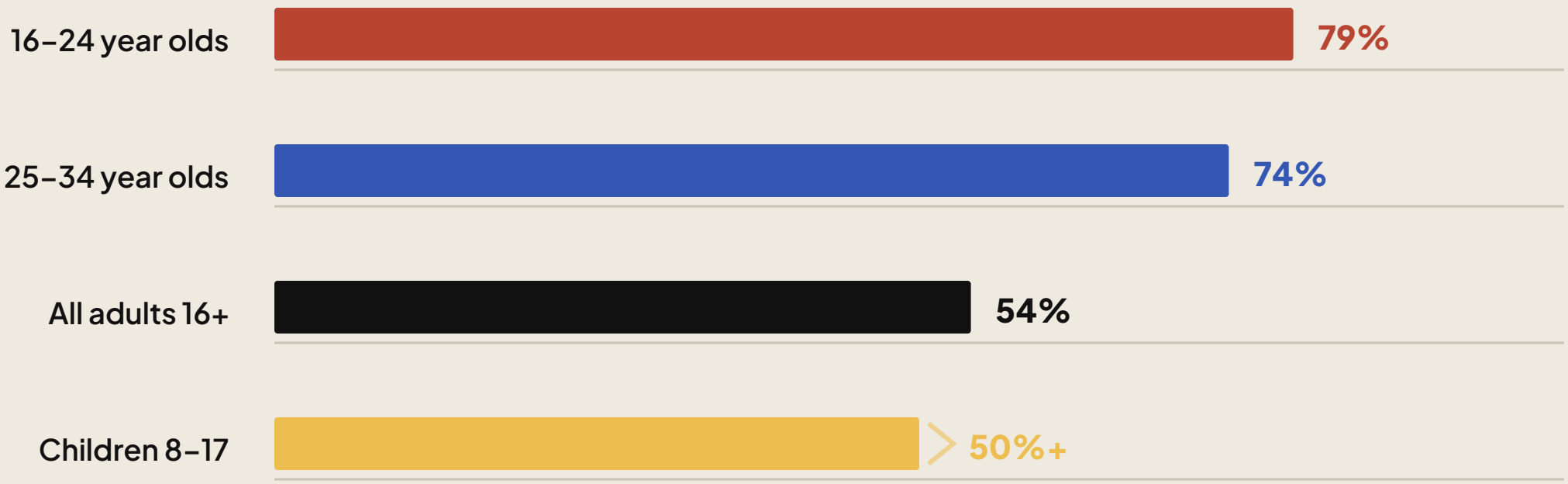


“Innovator” implies appetite. “Laggard” implies resistance. Neither fits. Children didn’t innovate — they were born into it. Later life isn’t resisting — it’s running a payback calculation, and getting the right answer.

Rogers answers who adopts next. This answers who had a choice.

Use falls with age.

Ofcom, April 2026. The gap is not subtle — and the oldest group has no comparable figure at all.



Ofcom's report text gives no AI-use figure for over-65s. What it does publish:

68% of over-55s would trust an AI-written news story less, against 47% of 25–44s.

66% of adults with no home internet at all are aged 75+; a further 17% are 65–74.

AI adoption tracks breadth of digital engagement more closely than age alone.

Ofcom, Adults' Media Use and Attitudes 2026 — 7,533 UK adults, fieldwork Sept–Nov 2025.

Children's Online Experiences 2026 is a separate survey and not directly comparable.

An over-65 use figure may exist in the accompanying data tables. I have not verified it.

Childhood

Position: Native.

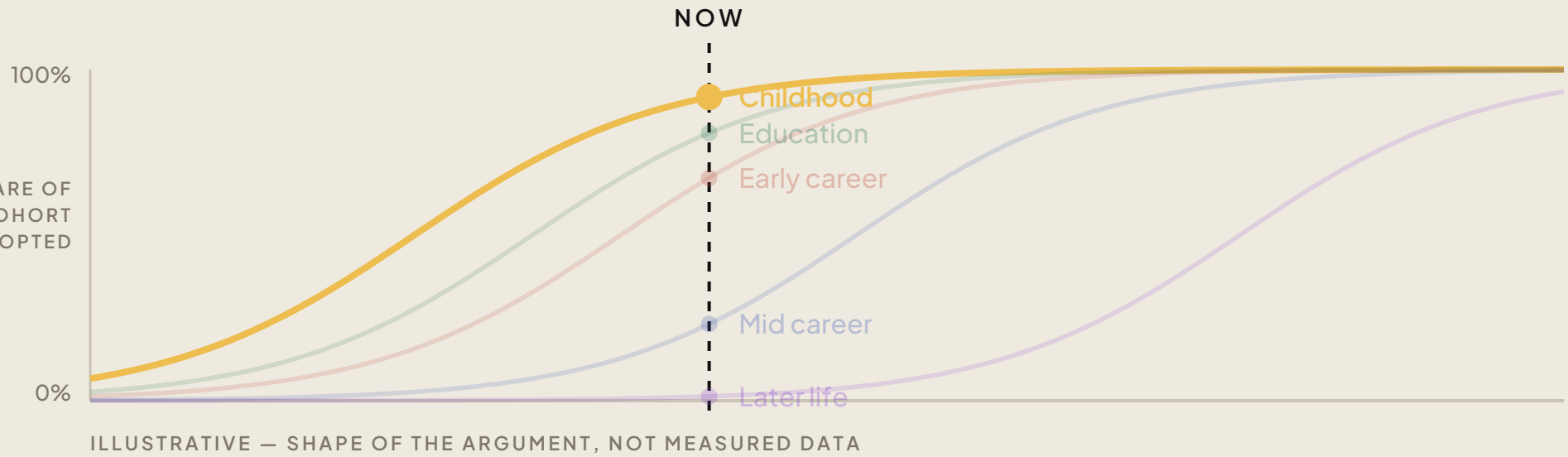
No adoption decision exists. This is simply what tools are.

Whether growing up with a confident answering machine changes how judgement forms, I don't know. It may be what every generation says about the last new thing.

WHAT FORMS HERE

Tolerance for not knowing.

At risk: the pause before the answer arrives.



ILLUSTRATIVE — SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT, NOT MEASURED DATA

EVIDENCE

Ofcom, Children's Online Experiences, May 2026 — more than half of UK 8–17s use AI tools; some teenagers for learning, creativity and companionship. Separately, Ofcom's adults report finds AI use tracks existing digital engagement, not age alone.

Education

Position: Interrupted.

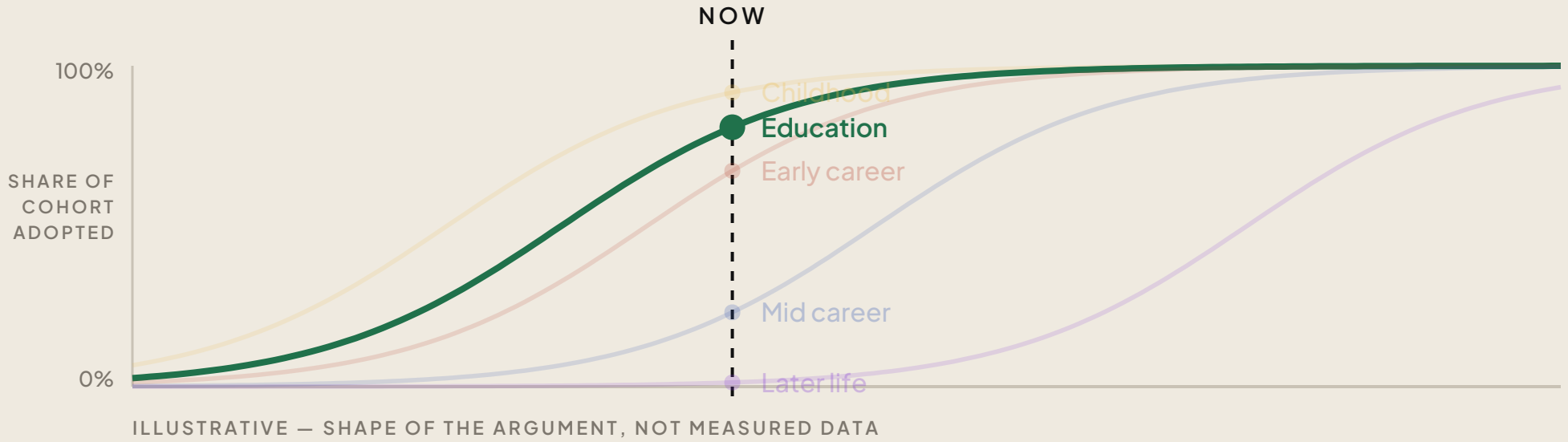
The tool arrived mid-course for anyone who started a degree before 2023.

The skill being assessed and the skill being displaced are frequently the same one. Write an essay to demonstrate you can think.

WHAT FORMS HERE

Holding a position you might lose.

At risk: producing the artefact without the thinking.



ILLUSTRATIVE — SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT, NOT MEASURED DATA

EVIDENCE

JCQ, AI Use in Assessments (rev. 2, April 2025) — students must name the tool, date the output, retain the prompt in non-editable form and explain how it was used.
Ofqual's chief regulator, reported July 2026: coursework to face far greater scrutiny.

Early career

US data · most confident, least happy

Position: Accelerated.

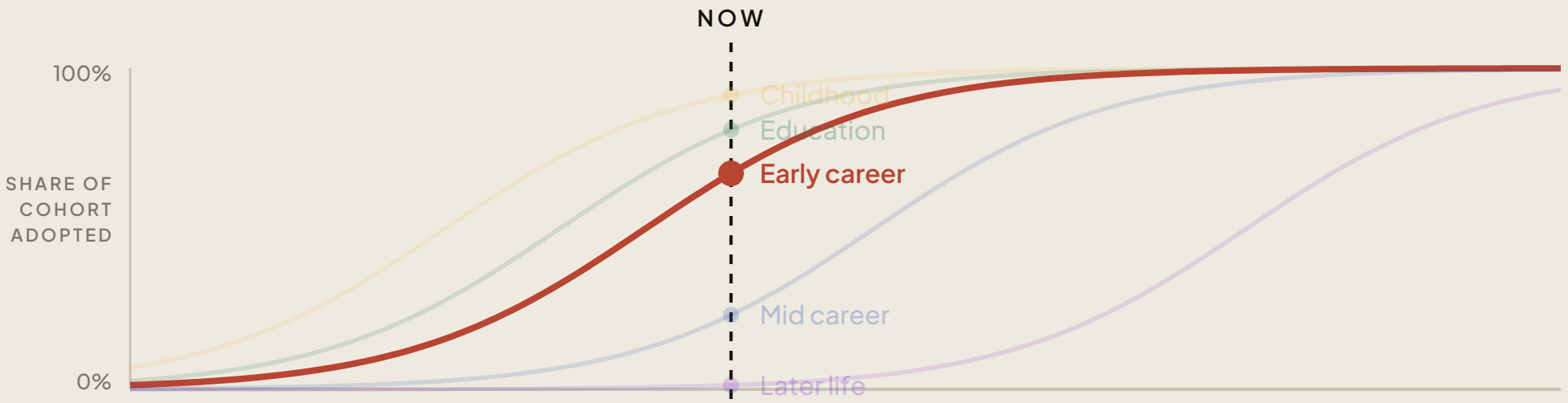
The clearest evidence is American and narrow: one payroll dataset, AI-exposed occupations. It points one way, and survives the obvious objections.

Entry-level work was never only output. It was where judgement got built — badly, slowly, under supervision.

WHAT FORMS HERE

Judgement, under supervision.

At risk: the supervised hours themselves.



ILLUSTRATIVE — SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT, NOT MEASURED DATA

EVIDENCE — US PAYROLL DATA

Brynjolfsson, Chandar & Chen, Canaries in the Coal Mine? Stanford Digital Economy Lab, rev. 13 Nov 2025. ADP administrative data: workers aged 22–25 in AI-exposed occupations saw a 16% relative employment decline; experienced workers remained stable.

COUNTER-EVIDENCE

Timing: other papers find hiring in AI-exposed occupations began falling after the Fed's 2022 rate shift but before ChatGPT launched. And GOV.UK, June 2026: in aggregate, UK entry-level hiring falls in step with all seniority — the gap shows by occupation, not level.

Mid career

Position: Mandated.

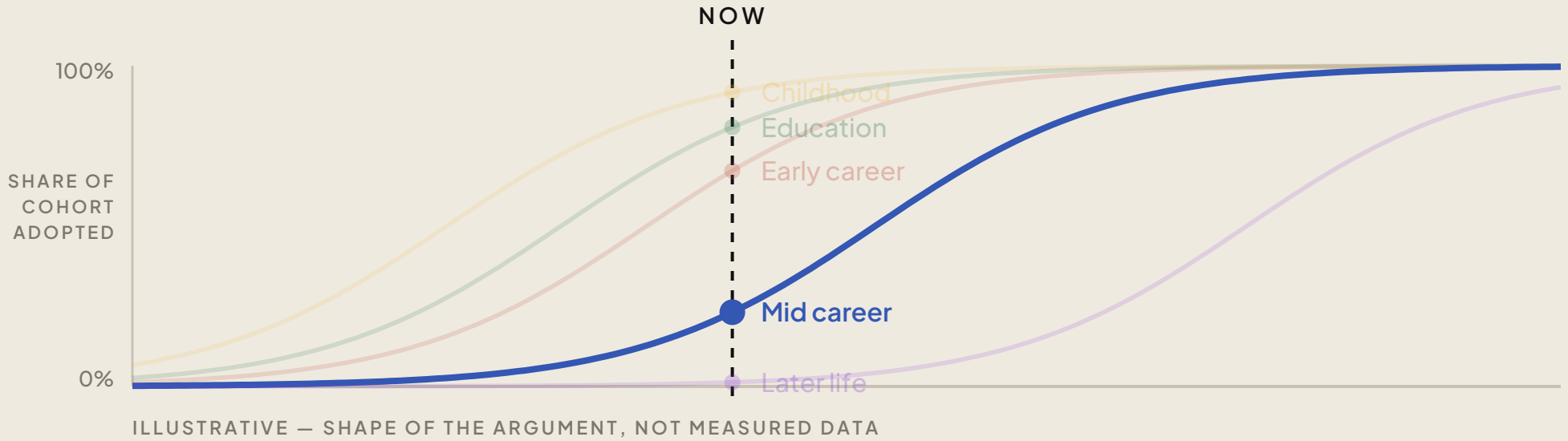
Adoption arrives as a calendar invite.

Mandated use, unredesigned work. Deloitte's 2026 survey found access to AI tools expanded 50% in a year, yet under 60% of those with access use them — and 84% of organisations have not restructured jobs around AI.

WHAT FORMS HERE

Deciding on incomplete information.

At risk: verification skill, if delegation goes unchecked.



ILLUSTRATIVE — SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT, NOT MEASURED DATA

EVIDENCE

Deloitte, State of AI in the Enterprise 2026 — survey of 3,200+ business and IT leaders.
Reported policy changes: Google factors AI use into engineer performance reviews;
Meta makes AI-driven impact a core expectation from 2026; Accenture ties it to promotion.

Later life

Position: Selective — and rationally so.

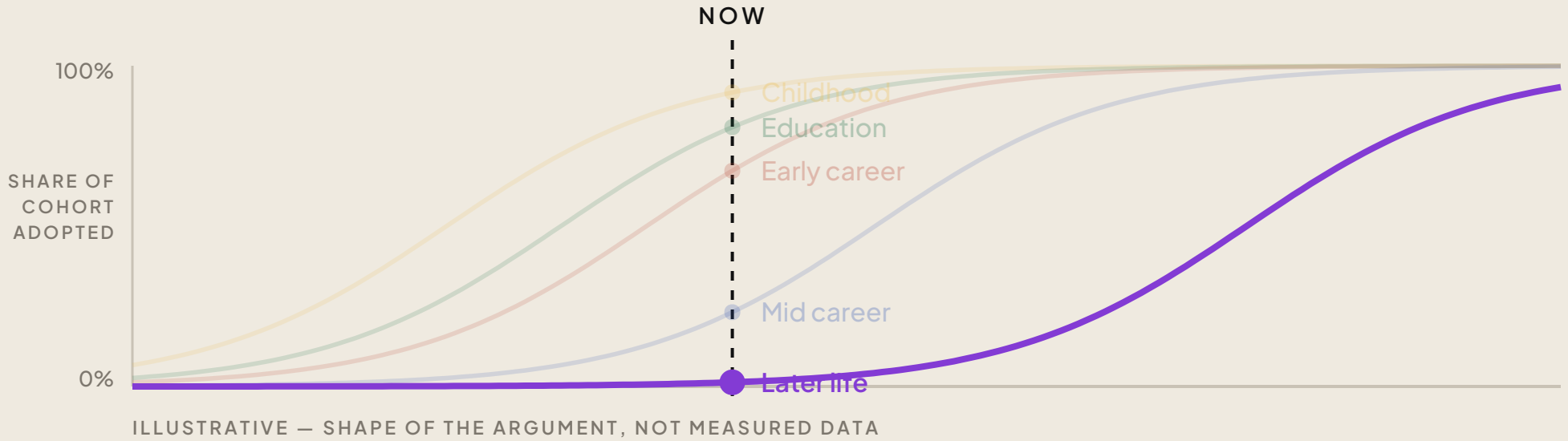
Shortest payback period on relearning anything. Declining is a calculation, not a failure to keep up.

The risk isn't being left behind. It's that services get redesigned around the people who did adopt.

WHAT FORMS HERE

Perspective — knowing what to ignore.

At risk: being designed out of the service.



ILLUSTRATIVE — SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT, NOT MEASURED DATA

EVIDENCE

Age UK, May 2026 — 4.3m people aged 65+ do not use a smartphone.
Centre for Ageing Better — 3.5m aged 65+ don't use the internet at home; 3m lack the foundation skills to use it successfully.

This is a claim.
Here's what disproves it.

1. If graduate hiring in professional services recovers to pre-2023 levels by 2027, the entry-rung argument is wrong.
2. If later-life adoption tracks earlier technology cycles rather than lagging further, position isn't assigned by life stage — it's the normal curve and I've overread it.
3. If cohorts who adopted early show no difference in verification or debugging ability against those who adopted late, the formation argument is wrong.

MY PREDICTION

By December 2027, the GOV.UK entry-level hiring snapshot will show entry-level hiring declining at least five percentage points faster than all-seniority hiring.

Currently false — the two lines track each other. That's what makes it a forecast.

SUPPORTING INDICATOR

By Dec 2027, at least three of the UK's ten largest professional services firms will have publicly restructured graduate intake — fewer hires, longer programmes, apprenticeships.

UK vacancies fell 43% between May 2022 and May 2025. Interest rates, employer NI changes and the post-pandemic correction all land in the same window.

Observable, inferred, and not yet claimable — in that order.

Each stage teaches something different.

Life stage matters because each stage teaches different things. AI doesn't just change who uses technology — it changes where emotional and technical skills are formed.

Childhood	Education	Early career	Mid career	Later life
Curiosity	**Argument**	**Judgement**	**Decision**	**Perspective**

Five stages, five things formed.
Change where the hours go, and you change what forms.

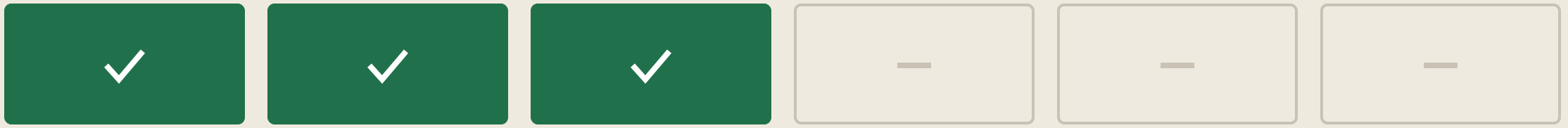
Those five words are my characterisations, not findings.
What follows is the only direct evidence I have found.

One study has looked directly at this.

A randomised experiment on developers learning an unfamiliar library found AI use impaired conceptual understanding, code reading and debugging — without significant efficiency gains on average.

Participants who fully delegated gained productivity, and lost the learning.

SIX INTERACTION PATTERNS EMERGED



Three involve cognitive engagement and preserve learning, even with AI assistance.
Three don't. The mode of use decides the outcome — not whether AI was used.

AND THE MECHANISM ISN'T NEW

Deliberate practice (Ericsson, 1993) · Scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) · Cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989). All predate AI. What has changed is not how expertise forms, but who gets the hours in which it forms.

SOURCE

Shen, J. H. & Tamkin, A. — How AI Impacts Skill Formation, arXiv:2601.20245, 2026.
Conducted as part of the Anthropic Fellows Program.
Randomised experiment on one programming task — a proxy. Nobody has measured judgement formation directly.

The same five positions, thirty years earlier.

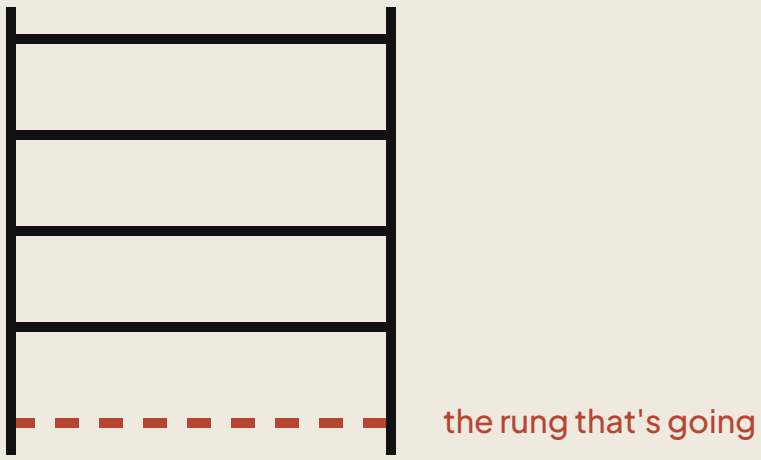
The web, roughly 1995–2005. Nobody called it adoption at the time. It arrived, and it found people wherever they were standing.

POSITION	HOW IT ARRIVED	WHAT CHANGED IN FORMATION
Native	Born after the web — it was always there.	Search replaced recall
Interrupted	At university when it arrived mid-degree.	Sourcing replaced the library
Accelerated	Clerical work, as typing pools closed.	Office judgement lost its classroom
Mandated	Sent on a company IT course, required.	Delegation without verification
Selective	Declined — then the branch closed.	Perspective, designed out

Every arrival moves where a skill is formed. The position you held decided which move you experienced as loss.

Illustrative, not evidence. And Rogers already distinguished optional decisions from authority decisions — what he didn't do was map decision type onto life stage.

If entry-level work was where judgement got built, and that work is going —



judgement still gets built —
but only one way of working builds it.

If this framing is right, organisations shouldn't just teach AI.
They need to redesign how judgement is developed.

Every generation inherits different tools.
This generation may inherit a different way of learning.

That's the question worth arguing about.

Theo Tagulao · Mindful Studio