

## **GBA CRYSTAL BALL WORKSHOP JUNE 2027 FRAMING STATEMENT**

### **Human-Led, Future-Ready**

#### *Transforming Geoprofessional Skills and Business Practices for Tomorrow's World*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Across the geoprofessions, approaches to change reflect a wide spectrum of perspectives and experiences, with one commonality. When encountering or pursuing change, most practitioners and firms appropriately exercise caution, grounded in professional responsibility, standards of care, licensing requirements, and long-standing client expectations. This measured approach—attentive to risk and skeptical of passing trends—has historically been a strength of the profession and a cornerstone of public trust.

Over the past century, this posture has served the geoprofessions and our clientele well. By adhering to strong technical foundations and professional rigor, we have successfully fulfilled a critical societal role, providing technical expertise that captures opportunities and solves challenges at the intersection of human enterprise and the earth's systems. In doing so, geoprofessionals have made communities safer, more resilient, and more prosperous, responsibly understanding and “engineering” our relationship with the natural world.

However, the pace, scale, and interconnectedness of changes in the world around us now are such that some existing practices may hinder, rather than enable, business success and the ability to fulfill our critical role. Shifts in education, workforce demographics, culture, economics, environmental pressures, and technology are no longer peripheral. Advances in automation and artificial intelligence are rapidly compressing timelines and functions, creating a threat to certain task-oriented positions (jobs), even as the need for human-led professional judgment, context, ethical reasoning, and insight grows.

The 2027 GBA Crystal Ball Workshop will focus on *Transforming Geoprofessional Skills and Business Practices for Tomorrow's World*, to help the profession convert these changes into advantages. Two of the most consequential challenges facing geoprofessionals over the next five to ten years are:

1. Sustaining, strengthening, and leveraging human dimension, judgment, leadership, creativity, empathy, and accountability, in an increasingly automated and data-driven environment; and
2. Evolving business practices, metrics, and assumptions, including discerning which long-standing fundamentals remain essential, and which legacy approaches may limit innovation, growth, and relevance.

To address these challenges, the workshop will explore:

- **Essential skills in an automated world:** the interplay of humanities-based thinking, interpersonal effectiveness, creativity, digital fluency, stewardship, and leadership.
- **Transformative business practices:** what to preserve, adapt, or retire for geoprofessionals and their firms to excel through the remainder of this decade and beyond.

## **EXTERNAL FORCES OF CHANGE**

The geoprofessions are being shaped by a convergence of external forces that are accelerating change and increasing complexity across nearly every dimension of practice. Dramatic advances in automation, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and sensing technologies are rapidly altering how technical work is performed, reducing barriers to entry for some services while increasing expectations for speed, integration, and insight ([2025 GBA CBW](#)). These technologies do not eliminate the need for professional skill, judgment, and control, but fundamentally redefine where and how we spend our time to add the greatest value in geoprofessional practice.

At the same time, demographic and cultural shifts are reshaping the workforce and client relationships. Multiple generations still work side by side, but now they bring differing talents and expectations about purpose, leadership, flexibility, feedback, and career pathways. Clients increasingly expect not just technical accuracy, but clarity, empathy, transparency, and alignment with broader objectives and values. Trust is earned not only through credentials, but also through mastery of data, communication, responsiveness, efficiency, control, and demonstrated understanding of stakeholder concerns.

Economic and political volatility, climate risks, and infrastructure investment pressures further intensify the business environment in which geoprofessionals operate. Projects are more interdisciplinary, publicly visible, and constrained by global uncertainties than in the past. In this context, the ability to frame problems, integrate diverse perspectives, navigate ambiguity, and communicate risk effectively are as critical as technical proficiency.

Together, these external forces indicate that future success in the geoprofessions will depend less on incremental improvements to existing models and more on deliberate transformative adaptation, rethinking how expertise is developed, delivered, and valued in a rapidly changing world.

## **INTERNAL CHOICES TO CHANGE**

While external forces create the conditions for change, the most consequential determinants of future success will be the associated internal choices made by geoprofessional leaders, organizations, and firms. These choices center on what we choose to preserve, what we choose to evolve, and what we are willing to leave behind.

One critical internal choice is how we define and develop professional skill and excellence. Historically, advancement in the geoprofessions has been largely driven by technical mastery, years of experience, and ability to develop business. These remain important, but may no longer be sufficient on their own. Trends increasingly call on professionals to demonstrate strong capabilities in leadership, collaboration, reasoning, empathy, a wide array of communication, systems thinking, agility, and adaptability at much earlier stages in our careers. These human-centered capabilities enable professionals to translate technical knowledge into meaningful outcomes, build trust across disciplines/partnerships, and lead effectively in complex, interconnected, yet uncertain business environments.

Other important choices involve how business models must evolve while maintaining core fundamentals required for healthy firms. Financial discipline, risk management, quality control, mentorship, and client service remain indispensable. At the same time, long-standing reliance on time-based billing, hierarchical structures, and narrowly defined roles may not fully align with emerging technological

efficiencies, workforce dynamics, and client expectations. Exploring models that emphasize outcomes, performance, strategy, collaboration, long-term relationships and overall value derived from expertise will require experimentation, cultural openness, and thoughtful leadership.

## **CBW OBJECTIVE**

GBA will use the 2027 Crystal Ball Workshop to explore how skill sets and business practices can evolve to sustain and expand geoprofessional success under accelerating change. Areas of discussion will include:

- Evaluating which external forces are most likely to influence future skill requirements and business models
- Defining essential technical, human, and integrative skill sets for future geoprofessionals
- Enhancing and sustaining human dignity, effectiveness, agency, and leadership within increasingly automated organizations
- Identifying results- and value-based alternatives to, and evolutions of, traditional time-based business models

Subject matter experts (SMEs) will share perspectives and engage participants in facilitated discussions and breakout sessions to develop and prioritize implications and recommendations. Participants will include representatives from GBA member firms, partner organizations, and other interested stakeholders.

The CBW will provide GBA, its members, and partners with:

- Key findings and synthesized insights
- Practical recommendations for action related to evolving skill sets and business practices
- Business briefs summarizing results
- Articles for industry publications
- A framework to inform future conferences, presentations, and committee work

## **CONCLUSION**

The 2027 GBA Crystal Ball Workshop will clarify the dynamic interplay between geoprofessional skill sets and business practices amid profound technological, societal, and environmental change. It will help geoprofessionals position themselves to thrive in a technology-augmented future that remains firmly and deliberately human-led with business models that capture our greater value.

*Note: Examples of information resources related to the CBW topic are provided in Attachment A.*

## **ATTACHMENT A POTENTIAL REFERENCES & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ANCHORS**

- World Economic Forum. *Future of Jobs Report* (most recent edition) – human capabilities, skills shifts, and automation

<https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>

[https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_Report\\_2025.pdf](https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf)

- MIT Sloan Management Review – research on human-centered leadership and technology-enabled work

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/>

<https://mitsloan.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2022-05/MITSloan-FutureOfWork.pdf>

- McKinsey & Company - Professional services transformation and value-based business models

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-business-transformation>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/a-new-operating-model-for-a-new-world>

<https://www.fnondon.com/articles/ai-will-overhaul-consulting-fees-mckinsey-says-8385211d>

[https://www.businessinsider.com/consulting-ai-mckinsey-bcg-deloitte-pwc-kpmg-chatbots-ai-tools-2025-4?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.businessinsider.com/consulting-ai-mckinsey-bcg-deloitte-pwc-kpmg-chatbots-ai-tools-2025-4?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/a-new-operating-model-for-a-new-world>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/a-new-operating-model-for-people-management-more-personal-more-tech-more-human>

- Various Other Articles

<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/articles/3-soft-skills-ai-era-104901615.html>

<https://hbr.org/2025/08/soft-skills-matter-now-more-than-ever-according-to-new-research>

<https://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/equipping-for-tomorrow-unlocking-new-skills-for-the-future-of-work-in-2033/>

[The Vanishing Sense of “I Did This” | Psychology Today](#)

- [Daniel Pink, \*Drive\*](#) – motivation, autonomy, mastery, and purpose in professional work
- [Edgar Schein, \*Organizational Culture and Leadership\*](#) – culture, trust, and professional identity