



QUARTERLY INSIGHTS – Q3 2026

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The Big Picture

“LOST TIME IS NEVER FOUND AGAIN.” - Benjamin Franklin

We spend an extraordinary amount of our lives thinking about capital. Mostly money, but financial capital more generally. How much we earn. How much we save. How much our house is worth. How much our investments are worth. Whether we have enough. Whether we will have enough.

On the other hand, we spend very little time thinking about another aspect of capital: human capital. And in particular, one aspect of human capital that is considerably more valuable: *time*.

One billion seconds is approximately 31 years and eight months. Which means there is a reasonable chance that many people reading this letter are in fact, “Time Billionaires”.

A Time Billionaire has more than one billion seconds left to live. Some may have two billion. A fortunate few could have considerably more.

Suddenly, a billion might not sound quite as unimaginable. Nor does it sound insignificant.

A billion seconds represents almost 280,000 hours. The question is: what are you going to do with it?

That is what this quarterly letter is about. Not interest rates or tariffs. Not government deficits and why we like gold. Not whether the Federal Reserve will again hike rates by 25 basis points at its next meeting despite a weakening labour market.

Instead, I want to think about something bigger: How do we allocate our time? And specifically, whether Artificial Intelligence is about to provide humanity with one of the greatest dividends technological progress has ever delivered: *more time*.

Life Expectancy

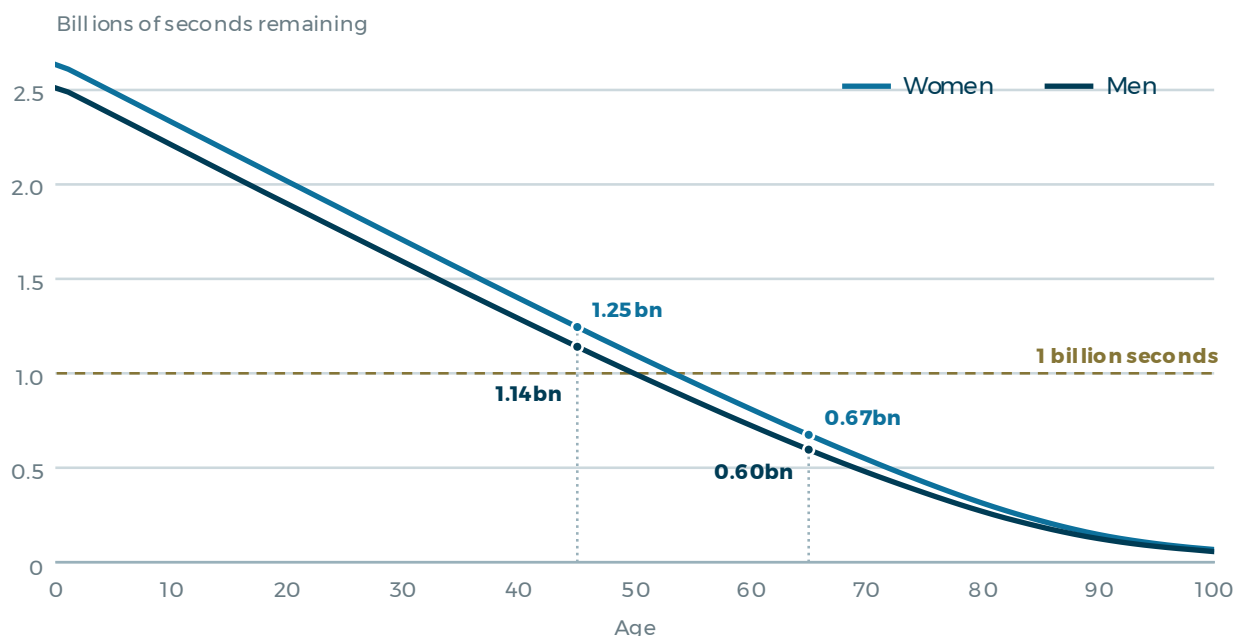
Life expectancy can be a wonderfully misleading statistic. In the UK, period life expectancy at birth is currently around 79 years for men and 83 years for women, according to the United Kingdom's [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#). ([Globally, women live 5 years longer than men](#), on average. But male readers should not fret, that's just an average.)

However, if you have already survived childhood, adolescence, your twenties, thirties and beyond, your expected age at death changes.

A 45-year-old British man, for example, is statistically expected to live another 36 years, or 1.14 billion seconds. A 45 year of female can expect to live another 39.5 years, or around 1.25 billion seconds. That is, life expectancy is conditional upon having survived everything that came before.

EXHIBIT 1: HOW MANY BILLIONS OF SECONDS DO YOU STATISTICALLY HAVE LEFT?

The chart below shows the expected remaining life for men and women, converted into billions of seconds, at any given age.



Source: ONS, Shard Capital, September 2026

If you are male and have made it to 65, you are expected to live another 600 million seconds, that is almost 19 years!

And this does not incorporate future improvements in healthcare and longevity. Girls born in the UK in 2024 can expect to live to age 90.2 years on average, and boys to age 86.9 years based on [projections of cohort life expectancy](#) if we include these expected improvements.

But then, there is another possibility. What if those estimates themselves prove too conservative?

The First AI Dividend: More Time

The popular debate about AI tends to revolve around output. How much more productive will we become? How much faster can an accountant analyse a set of financial statements? How much quicker can a programmer write code? How many customer enquiries can one employee process? How much cheaper will legal, financial, medical or administrative services become?

These are important questions and early evidence is remarkable.

A study involving more than 5,000 customer-support workers found that access to generative AI increased productivity by around 14% on average, with substantially larger improvements amongst less-experienced workers. Another experiment involving Boston Consulting Group consultants found that workers using generative AI completed suitable tasks more than 25% faster while also improving the quality of their work.

We may therefore become considerably more productive. Perhaps significantly more productive.

But the question we are asking is misleading. More productive could mean we produce more. But it could also mean we produce the same with less input. The most tangible dividend from AI will ultimately be something else. **Time.**

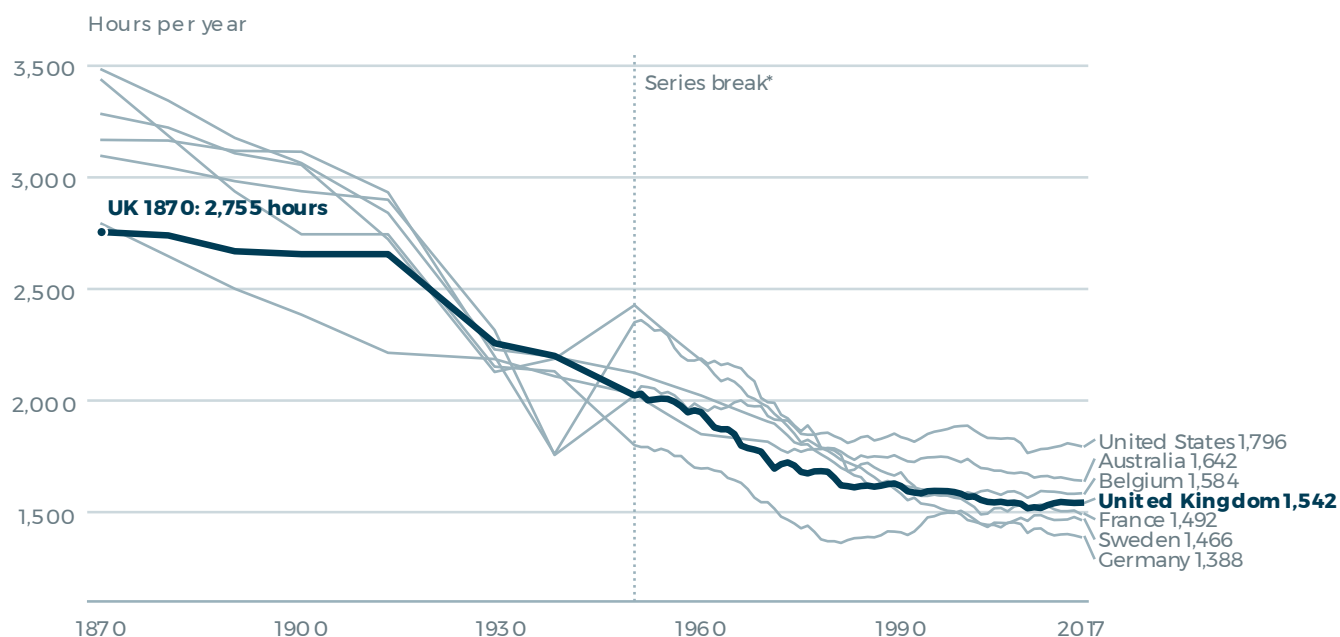
A task that once took four hours might take three. Three hours might become one. Something requiring five people might eventually require two. And an entire category of administrative work may simply disappear. This is not unprecedented.

Indeed, one of the least appreciated achievements of capitalism and technological progress is that we have already been buying ourselves time for generations.

In the mid-19th century, the average worker in many industrialising countries worked somewhere upward of 3,000 hours per year. Today, that number is generally closer to 1,500 hours in wealthy economies. Working hours have roughly halved. We work fewer hours each day, fewer days each week and fewer weeks each year.

Think about what happened to those missing hours. Some became weekends. Some became holidays. Some became retirement. Some became education. Others became football matches, family dinners, Netflix, holidays in Spain, long runs, excessively long lunches and undoubtedly far too much time staring at our phones. But they became ours.

EXHIBIT 2: TECHNOLOGY HAS ALREADY BOUGHT US HALF OUR WORKING LIVES



* Before 1950, the data comes only from full-time production workers (non-agricultural activities). Starting in 1950, estimates cover total hours worked in the economy.

** Due to differences in measurement, comparability between countries is limited.

Source: Huberman & Minns (2007); Penn World Table, via Our World in Data

Productivity did not merely allow humanity to grow the pie and produce more stuff. It allowed us to reclaim part of our lives. AI could represent the next great leap in that process.

IN FOCUS

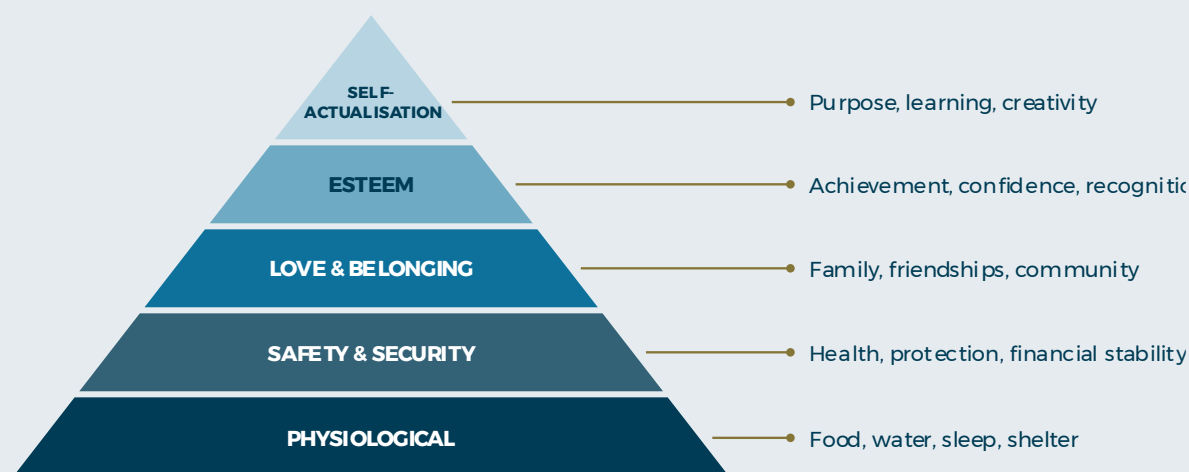
Moving up the pyramid

What progress really bought us

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the most recognisable ideas in psychology - and almost certainly too neat. Human beings do not move through life in a perfectly linear way. We can pursue purpose while feeling financially insecure or have material abundance and still feel unfulfilled.

Maslow's pyramid is not a scientific law. But as a visual metaphor for how we allocate time and attention, it is incredibly useful.

EXHIBIT 3: PROGRESS HAS MOVED HUMAN TIME UP THE PYRAMID



A conceptual framework for how human needs - and attention - can move from survival toward purpose.

For most of human history, the overwhelming majority of human effort was concentrated near the bottom of the pyramid. Survival was a full-time occupation. Food had to be produced, water collected, clothes washed by hand and heat created. Illness could remove a household's income overnight.

Technology progressively changed this. Agricultural mechanisation reduced the labour required to produce food. Industrialisation lowered the cost of goods. Electricity transformed the home. Cars and aircraft compressed distance. The washing machine liberated domestic labour. The internet made information and communication almost instantaneous.

Financial progress mattered also. Insurance pooled risk, pensions shifted income across time and social safety nets provided a degree of protection against catastrophe. None of these innovations eliminated human needs. What they did was reduce the time required to satisfy them.

Progress has moved human time up the pyramid.

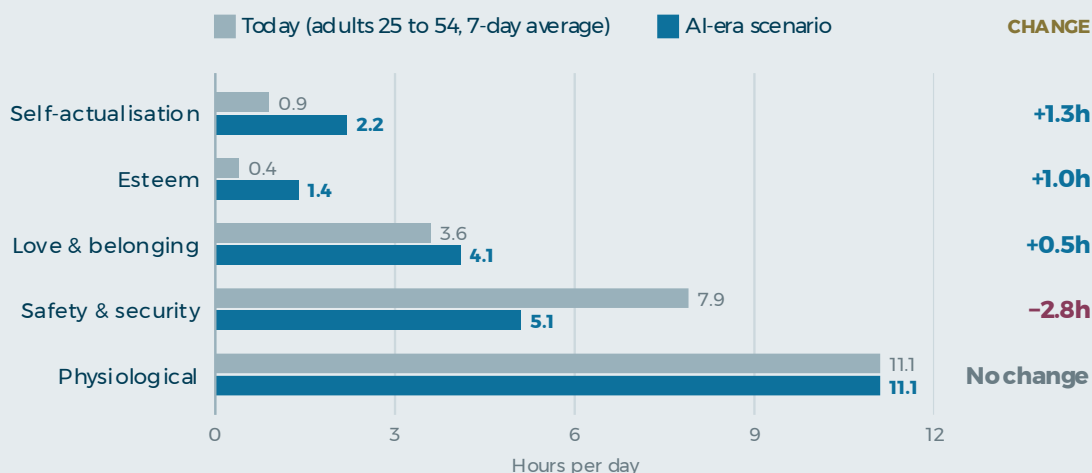
The less time required for survival and security, the more that becomes available for relationships, creativity and purpose.

IN FOCUS

The AI time dividend

Seen through Maslow's framework, the opportunity from Artificial Intelligence becomes easier to visualise. If AI reduces the time required for work, administration and economic security, those hours do not disappear. They become available for something else.

EXHIBIT 4: AI COULD RELEASE ALMOST THREE HOURS A DAY



Source: Shard Capital, ONS Time use in the UK: March 2024.

* The AI-era allocation is a scenario, not a forecast.

It is reasonable to assume that for the foreseeable future our physiological needs will remain unchanged at 11.1 hours per day. The major shift, however, might occur in Safety & Security: time devoted to earning a living and maintaining economic security. If we could reduce our time doing work by 25% and halve our commuting time, the need to spend time on Safety & Security could fall from 7.9 to 5.1 hours. The resulting 2.8 hours could be reallocated higher up the pyramid - toward relationships, esteem and self-actualisation.

The exact numbers are not the point. The direction is.

AI does not need to make us vastly richer in monetary terms to create extraordinary wealth. If it gives us more control over the same 24-hour day, it allows time to migrate from necessity toward relationships, health, learning, creativity and purpose.

There is no guarantee that productivity becomes leisure. The dividend could instead appear as more output, higher profits or higher expectations. That distribution question matters. But the opportunity is profound: progress should not only be measured by how much more we produce, but by whether it gives us greater freedom over how our finite lives are spent.

Perhaps the real promise of AI is not simply greater output - but more life lived further up the pyramid.

Allocating One Billion Seconds

Around one third of our time on earth is spent sleeping. Another meaningful proportion is spent maintaining our basic needs, our health, family and relationships. Perhaps somewhere around a quarter is spent working - the traditional 40-hour working week represents around 24% of the 168 hours available in seven days - add to that commuting time and other chores at home, and we easily spend north of 80% of our time on physiological needs and achieving safety and security.

Exact percentages are unimportant. The astonishing observation is how little remains and the significant uplift if we could retain just 10% of our time.

That is: 100,000,000 seconds of 1 billion seconds. More than 27,000 hours. More than 1,150 days.

If we were to incorporate the 50% for physiological needs which we are unlikely to remove, this time saving effectively adds up to more than six years to ourselves.

No commuting. No Teams meetings. No supermarket queues.

Just free time.

What could you do with 100 million seconds?

Almost anything. You could learn. Build. Write. Teach. Travel. Create a business. Study history. Understand quantum physics - or at least a respectable attempt. Learn an instrument. Become fluent in another language. Spend more time with your children. Become exceptionally knowledgeable about something that fascinates you. You do not need your entire life to become exceptional at something. You need a relatively small portion of it, allocated deliberately and consistently.

This is one of the great misunderstandings about opportunity. We often imagine extraordinary achievement requires extraordinary resources. Sometimes it merely requires time allocation.

And now Artificial Intelligence might give us considerably more time than we think.

What if AI gives us even more?

There is another dimension to the AI Time Dividend. What if AI does not merely give us more hours? What if it eventually extends life itself?

This requires considerably more humility. There is no evidence today that AI is about to make humans immortal, and anyone promising so should probably be avoided. But something genuinely interesting is happening at the intersection of AI, medicine and the science of ageing. AI is already being applied to biological target discovery, molecular design, biomarkers of ageing, drug screening and the overlap of genetics and personalised medicine. Researchers are explicitly studying how machine learning and generative AI can help identify mechanisms associated with ageing and accelerate the development of therapies targeting age-related diseases.

Ageing itself is increasingly understood not merely as the passage of time but as a collection of biological processes associated with cellular damage, inflammation, metabolic dysfunction and declining repair mechanisms.

Those processes are being studied. Measured. Modelled. And, increasingly, targeted. Whether this eventually allows us to live longer remains unknown. But extending health span - the number of years we remain healthy, capable and independent - is as important an objective, if not more.

Imagine the consequences.

AI could potentially give humanity time twice. First, by reducing the number of hours required in order to ensure safety and security. And then, by helping us remain healthy and independent for longer in order to enjoy more of our time on earth. Or Mars. Who knows.

But more time in a day, and perhaps more days in a lifetime. That is an extraordinary prize!

But who gets the prize?

There is, however, one problem. And it is a big one. Productivity does not automatically become leisure. Imagine AI makes an employee 25% more productive. What happens next? Do they leave the office at 3pm? Do they work four days rather than five? Does their salary increase by 25%?

Or does the company demand 25% more output for the same wage? Or might the business conclude that four employees can now accomplish what previously required five?

All plausible outcomes.

Throughout the history of free market capitalism, gains from technological progress have eventually translated into higher living standards and fewer working hours. But those gains have rarely been distributed evenly. This may become one of the defining political and economic questions of the AI age: **Who captures the AI time dividend?**

The owners of capital? Workers? Consumers? Governments? Or all four?

We spend an enormous amount of time discussing Wealth Inequality. Perhaps the next great social divide will be 'Time Inequality'. There will be people for whom AI provides extraordinary autonomy. They will own businesses, intellectual property and financial assets. They will use technology to automate administrative tasks, augment their abilities and reclaim enormous quantities of their time.

Their productivity will rise. Their wealth may rise. And their discretionary time could rise alongside it.

Others may experience something completely different. Greater surveillance. Higher output expectations. More precarious employment. Constant availability.

In a world in which technology has made every minute economically exploitable, one group increasingly owns its time; the other increasingly might need to buy it. That distinction could prove as economically important as the distinction between those who own capital and those who do not.

Technology creates opportunity. It does not determine how society distributes it. We do.

From Wealth to Time

This leads us back to investing. Why do we invest? The obvious answer is to make money. But that seems incomplete.

Money is simply stored optionality. It allows us to defer consumption. Protect ourselves against uncertainty. Help our families. Choose where we live. Choose where we work. Whether we work. And increasingly, allows us to choose how we allocate our time.

Perhaps this is what wealth really is. Not the number in a bank account. Not the value appearing on an investment statement. Not the house. Not the car. Not even the portfolio. Wealth is the ability to exercise greater control over your future time.

Financial independence means being able to say no. Capital creates optionality. Optionality creates freedom. And freedom gives us control over our time.

From that perspective, the objective of investing looks slightly different. Our job is not simply to maximise returns. It is to preserve and compound purchasing power so that our clients retain as much control as possible over the lives they wish to live. That requires us to protect capital against inflation. Against financial crises. Against economic regime changes. Against the unknown.

But it also means recognising the extraordinary opportunities created by human ingenuity. AI is one of them. Perhaps the greatest.

Time Billionaires

There is something wonderfully optimistic about knowing you might still have a billion seconds left. A billion opportunities to make tiny decisions. A billion moments during which something can change.

Humans possess a remarkable ability that we routinely underestimate. We can change our minds. We can change jobs. Learn a new skill. Start something. Stop something. Repair a relationship. Build one. Move somewhere. Take a risk. Say no. Say yes. Allocate our time tomorrow differently from yesterday.

Of course, every decision has consequences. Some enormous. Most probably small. But the accumulation of those decisions ultimately becomes a life.

Artificial Intelligence will undoubtedly change economies. It will change the structure of labour markets, impact productivity, corporate profits, inflation, capex and likely capital markets. We will continue writing about all of these things, but perhaps we are overlooking AI's greatest potential contribution.

Technology has already helped cut working hours roughly in half over the past century and a half. The next phase may go considerably further. And if advances in medicine and ageing science eventually increase healthy longevity as well, then the 'Time Dividend' becomes greater still.

The question is what we do with it, because having 100 million discretionary seconds is not the same as using them well. And being a 'Time Billionaire' does not make time infinite. Quite the opposite. It reminds us that it is finite.

We should perhaps reconsider what it actually means to be rich. The richest people in the AI age may not be those with the most money, but those with the greatest freedom over their time.

And unlike money, time cannot be borrowed from tomorrow. Once spent, it is gone.

Choose wisely.

CONTACT US

For further information on any of our services, or if you would like to arrange a meeting with an investment manager to see how we can work with you, please get in touch.

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