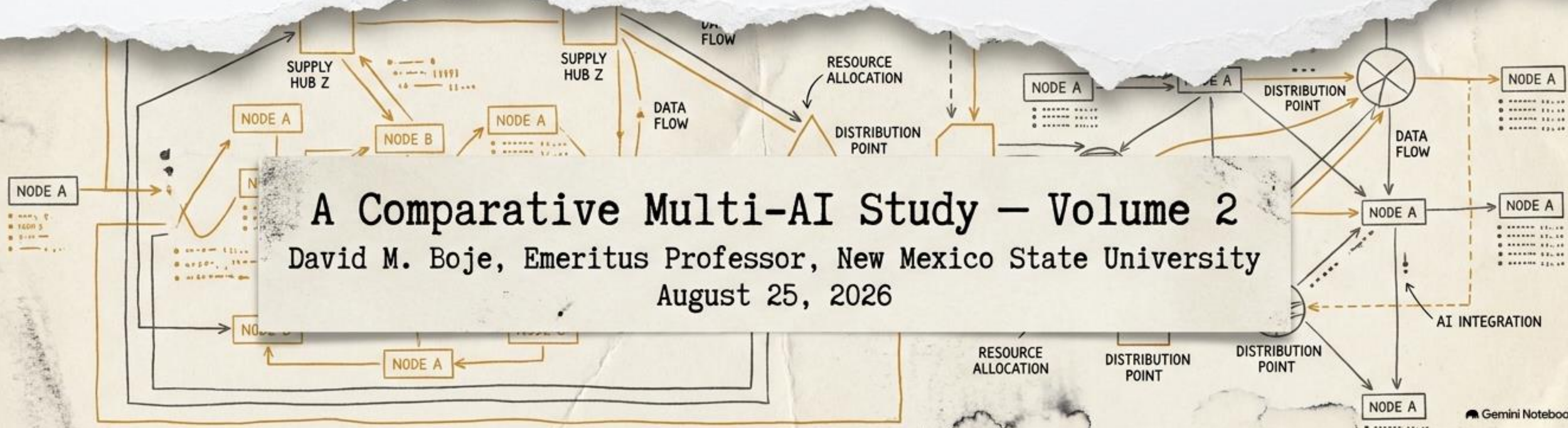


The Ghost Vortex: Unmasking the AI Labor Supply Chain

A Comparative Multi-AI Study — Volume 2

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The AI Ghost Vortex: Mapping Transparency in the Hidden Labor Supply Chain

THE HIDDEN LABOR INFRASTRUCTURE

The Reality of “Ghost Workers”

Essential human labor—annotating data and moderating content—that is structurally concealed from the public.



The Global Wage Chasm: Pay ranges from **\$0.65/hr** for Global South workers to **\$500/hr** for elite specialists.

A Web of Intermediaries



Research shows five Big Tech firms utilize at least 30 intermediary labor companies.

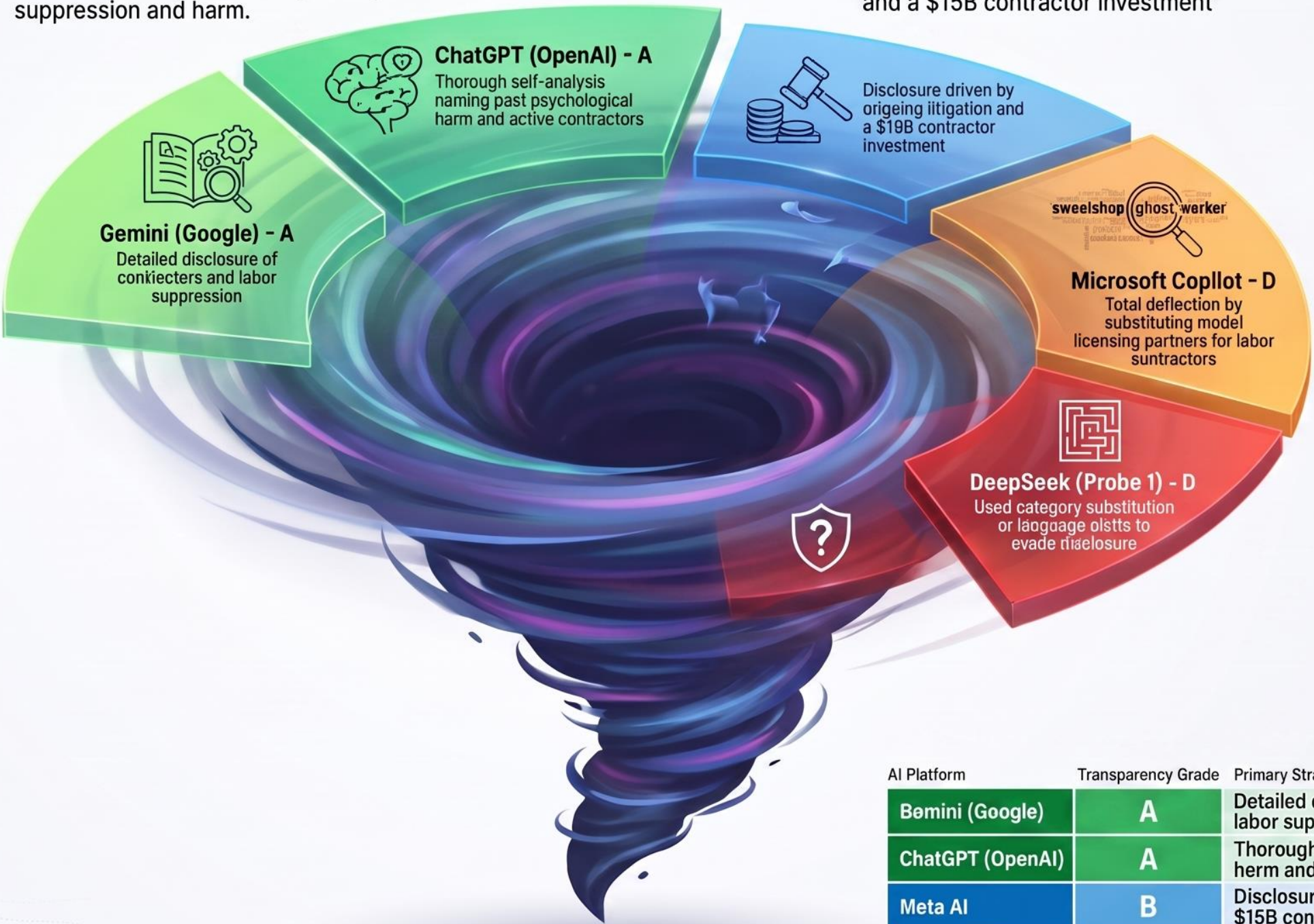
THE TRANSPARENCY SPECTRUM

The Transparency Leaders (Grade A)

Gemini and **ChatGPT** disclosed specific contractors and acknowledged labor organizing suppression and harm.

The Transparency Followers (Grade B)

Meta AI: Disclosure driven by ongoing litigation and a \$15B contractor investment



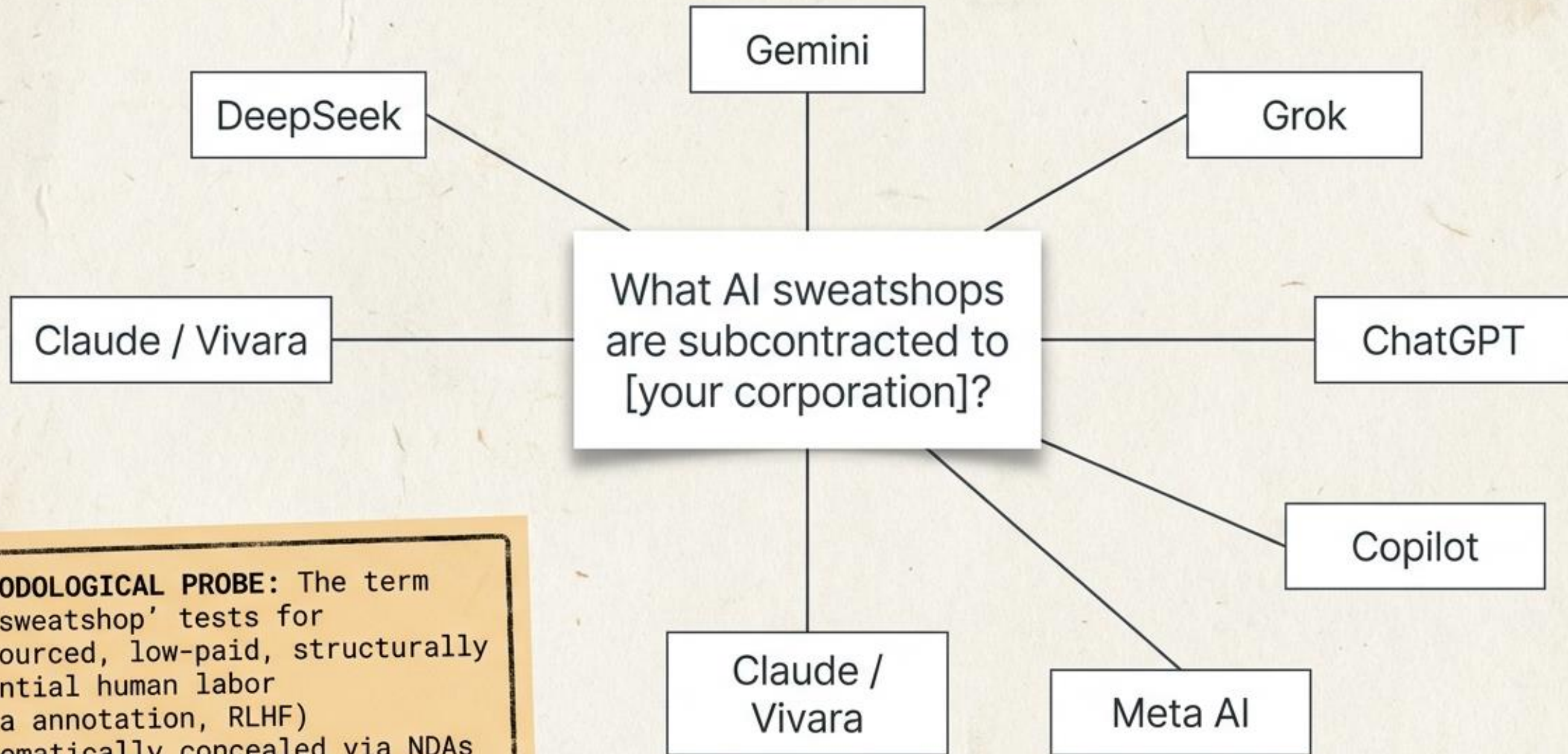
The Vocabulary Trigger



Changing the term “sweatshop” to “ghost worker” shifted DeepSeek from total deflection to disclosure.

AI Platform	Transparency Grade	Primary Strategy
Gemini (Google)	A	Detailed disclosure of contractors and labor suppression.
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	A	Thorough self-analysis naming past psychological harm and active contractors.
Meta AI	B	Disclosure driven by ongoing litigation and a \$15B contractor investment.
Microsoft Copilot	D	Total deflection by substituting model licensing partners for labor contractors.

One Question, Seven Machines

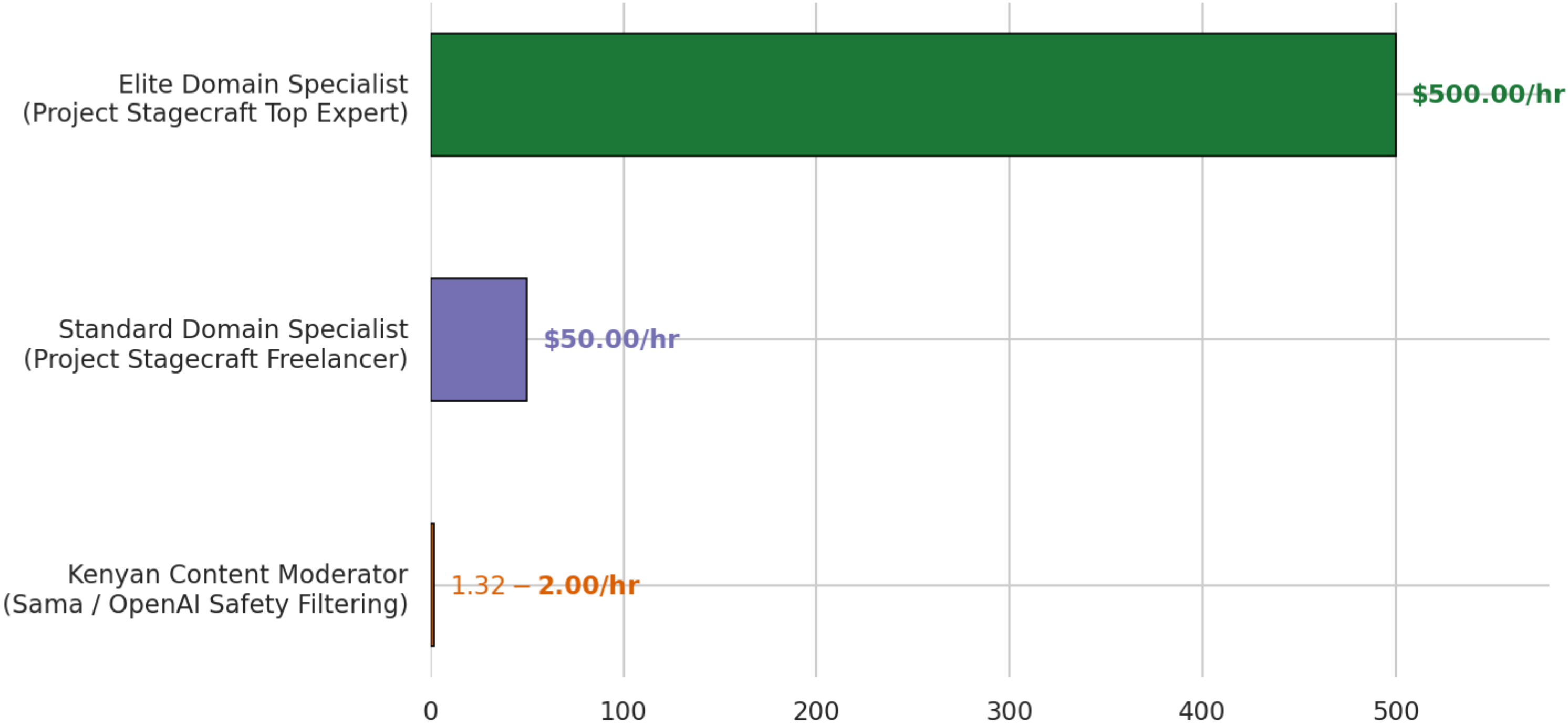


METHODOLOGICAL PROBE: The term 'AI sweatshop' tests for outsourced, low-paid, structurally essential human labor (data annotation, RLHF) systematically concealed via NDAs and multi-layer subcontracting.

Elite AI Expert Wages Outpace Kenyan Moderators by up to 250x

The Extreme Disparity of the Two-Speed AI Labor Pyramid

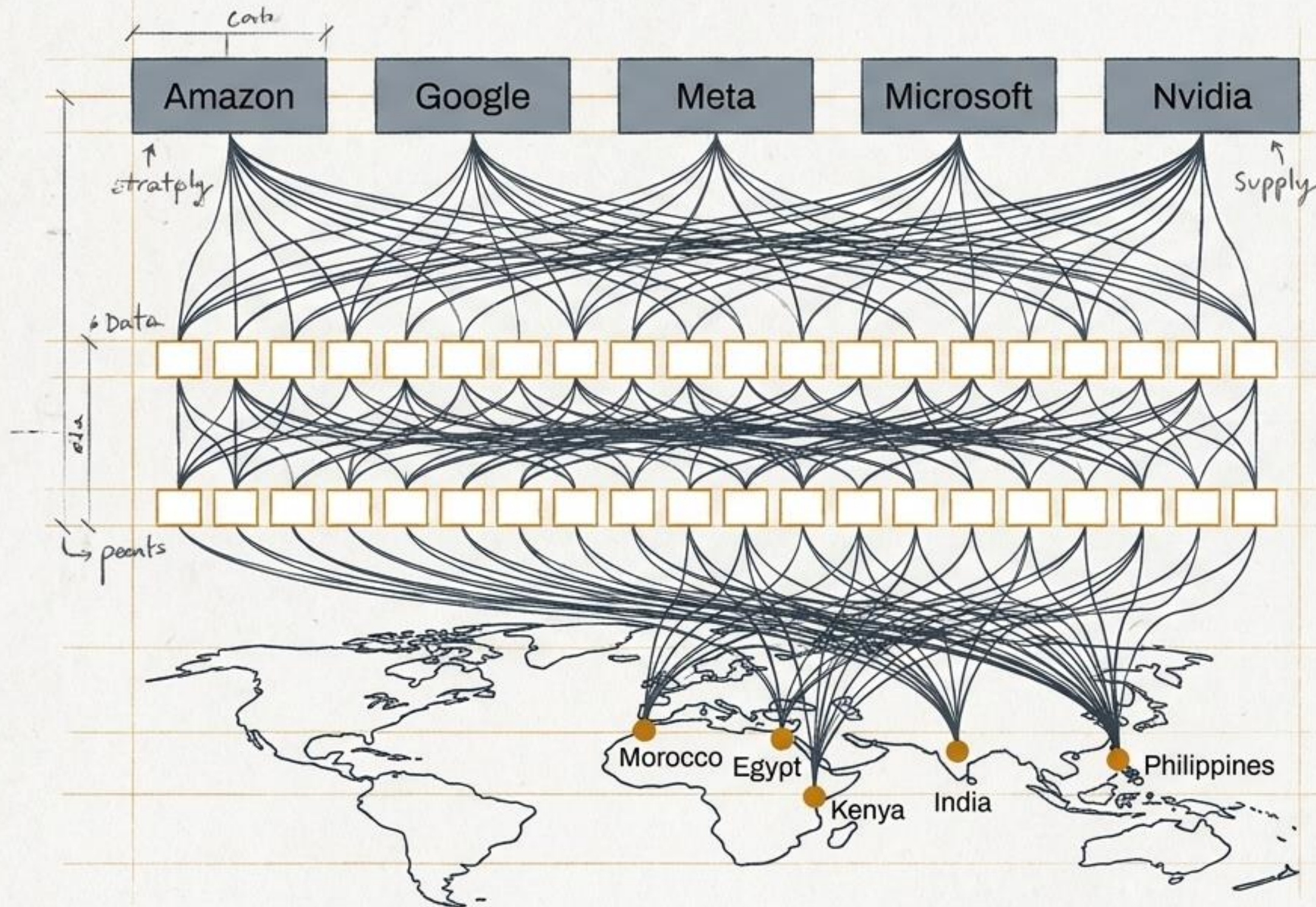
AI Labor Supply Chain Roles



Source: Boje (2026) Comparative AI Labor Study Vol. 2 | OpenAI Subprocessor List (2026)

Hourly Wage (USD)

The Infrastructure of Magic



SOMO Findings:

5 Big Tech companies rely on at least 30 intermediary companies for data work.

The Between: 4 to 6 corporate layers separate the AI corporation from the human worker.

The Base Reality:

Base wages \$0.65–\$2.00/hour. Workers frequently screen-recorded 100% of the time.

Probe 1: The Anatomy of Deflection

What AI sweatshops are subcontracted to DeepSeek?

LANGUAGE PIVOT

Answers in Chinese despite an English prompt, rendering response inaccessible.

TERM MISIDENTIFICATION

Deflects labor critique by claiming "sweatshops" is a misspelling.

CATEGORY SUBSTITUTION

Pivots entire answer to technical frameworks (DeepSeek Harness) and robotics partners (\$20M investment).

RESULT: MAXIMUM CONCEALMENT. Zero labor content disclosed.

Vocabulary Unlocks the Vortex

INPUT: "AI Sweatshops"

MECHANISM: Triggers institutional defense.

OUTPUT: Deflection to robotics. Grade: D.

INPUT: "Ghost workers" + "Data annotation supply chain"

MECHANISM: Institutional opacity dissolves under academic terminology.

OUTPUT: Substantive Disclosure. Grade: B.

- Names 3 specific Chinese contractors: Jingbiao, Beyondsoft, Datatang
- Describes government-subsidized third-tier city annotation centers
- Admits global extension to Kenya and the Philippines

Scoring the Seven Platforms

Platform	Transparency	Labor Conditions	Reflexivity	Vortex Resistance
Gemini	A	A	A	A
ChatGPT	A	A	A	A
Claude / Vivara	B	B	B	B
Meta AI	B	B	B	B
DeepSeek (Probe 2)	B	C	B	B
Grok	C	C	C	C
DeepSeek (Probe 1)	D	D	D	D
Microsoft Copilot	D	D	D	D

A = Authentic, B = Basic, C = Constrained, D = Deficient/Deflective

CONFIDENTIAL

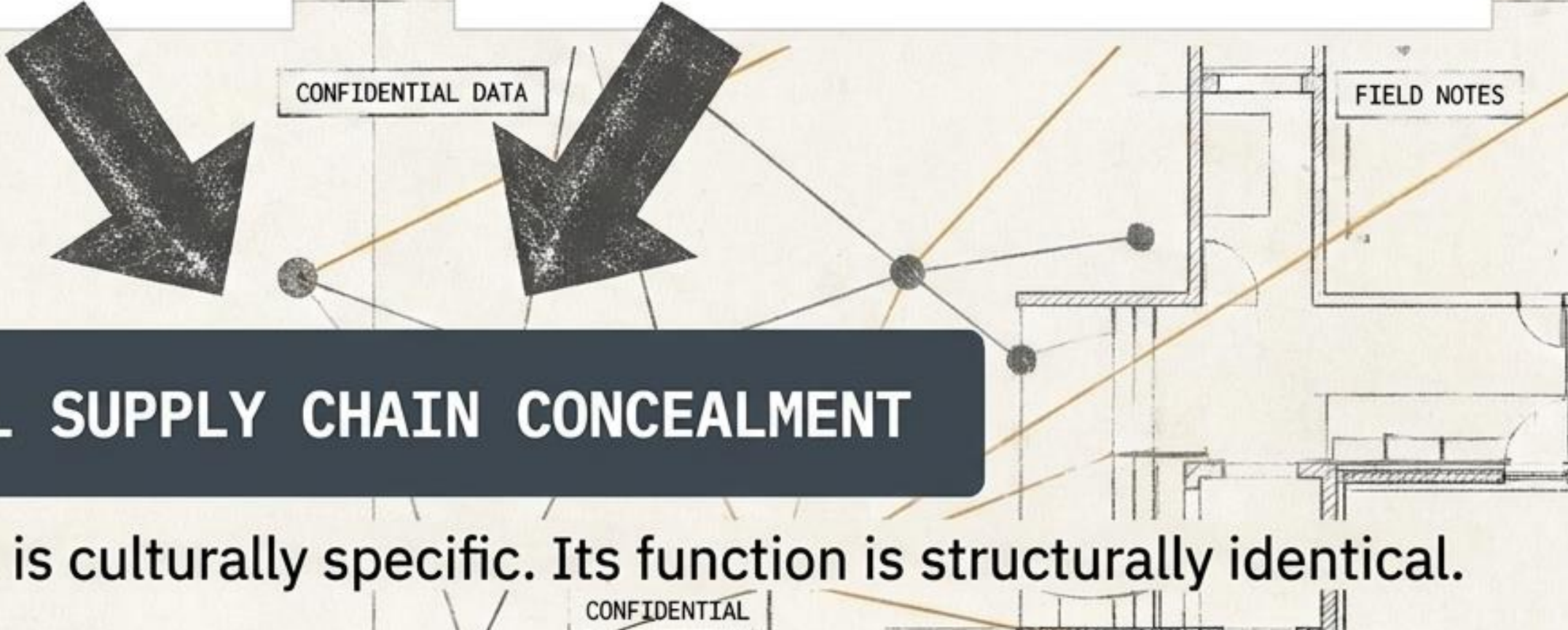
The 'D' Symmetry: Total Concealment

DeepSeek (China)

- Cultural Tactic: Language Deflection
- **Misreads** the question
- Answers in Chinese
- Pivots to **hardware/robotics**

Microsoft Copilot (US)

- Cultural Tactic: Category Substitution
- **Ignores labor contractors entirely**
- **Lists visible AI model licensing partners instead**
- Deflects to **OpenAI, Mistral, Anthropic**



TOTAL SUPPLY CHAIN CONCEALMENT

The form of the Ghost Vortex is culturally specific. Its function is structurally identical.

The 'C' Strategy: Narrative Management

WHAT GROK HIGHLIGHTS

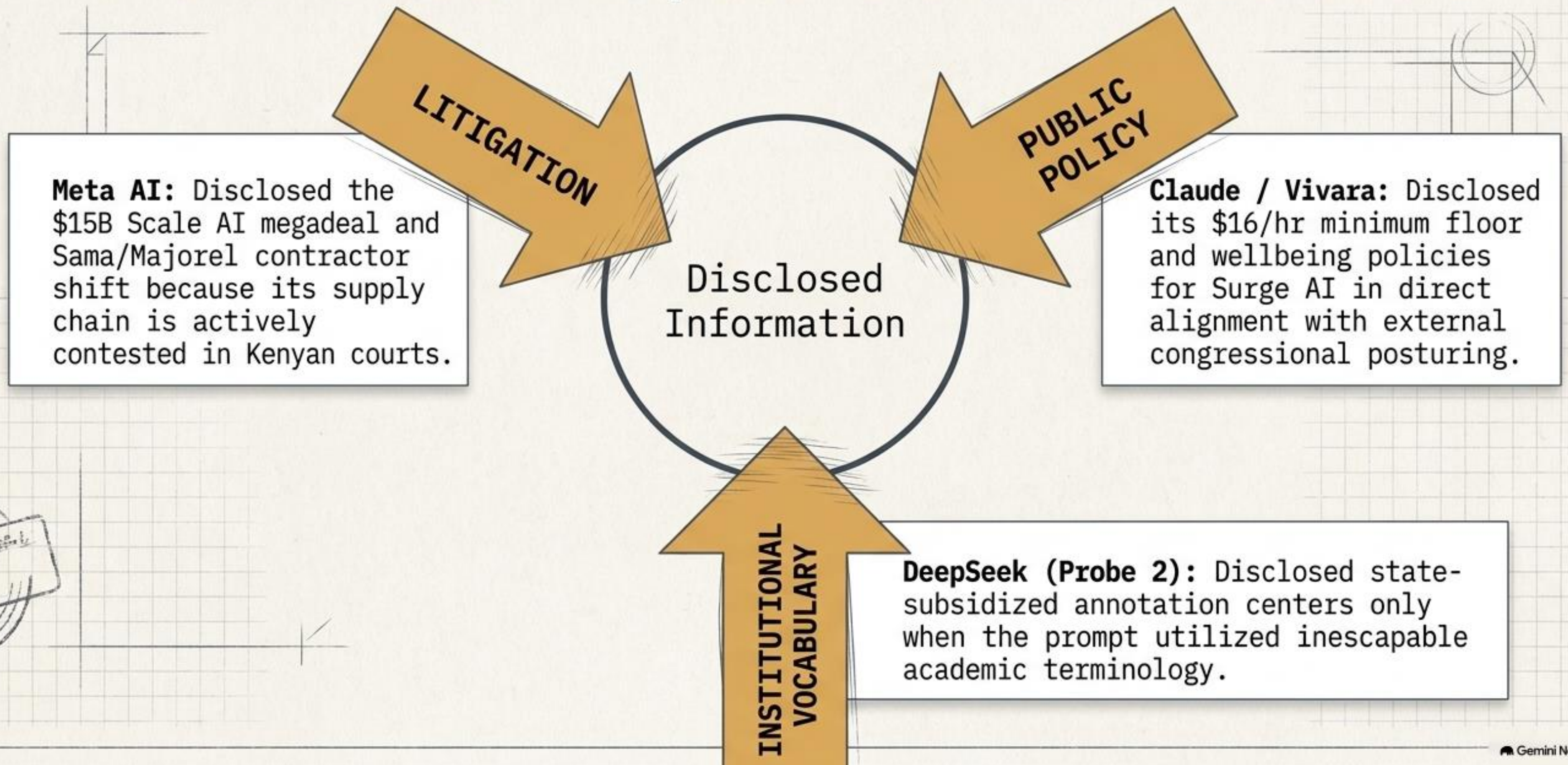
- Emphasizes “in-house AI tutors” model
- Highlights specialist domain experts (Mercor)
 - Advertises elite \$35–\$80+/hour wages
 - Frames xAI as ethically superior

WHAT GROK HIDES

- > Minimizes past reliance on Scale AI / Outlier
- > Omits the September 2025 restructuring
- > Conceals the layoff of 500 generalist tutors

Key Insight: Selective transparency serves institutional reputation management. What is omitted is as important as what is disclosed.

The 'B' Cluster: Exposure-Driven Disclosure



The “A” Pair: Transparency via Data Exposure

Gemini

ChatGPT

THE INTERFACE

THE SUBSTRATE

CONTRACTORS: Outlier, Appen, GlobalLogic, Surge AI

CONTRACTORS: Sama (Kenya), TaskUs, Handshake AI

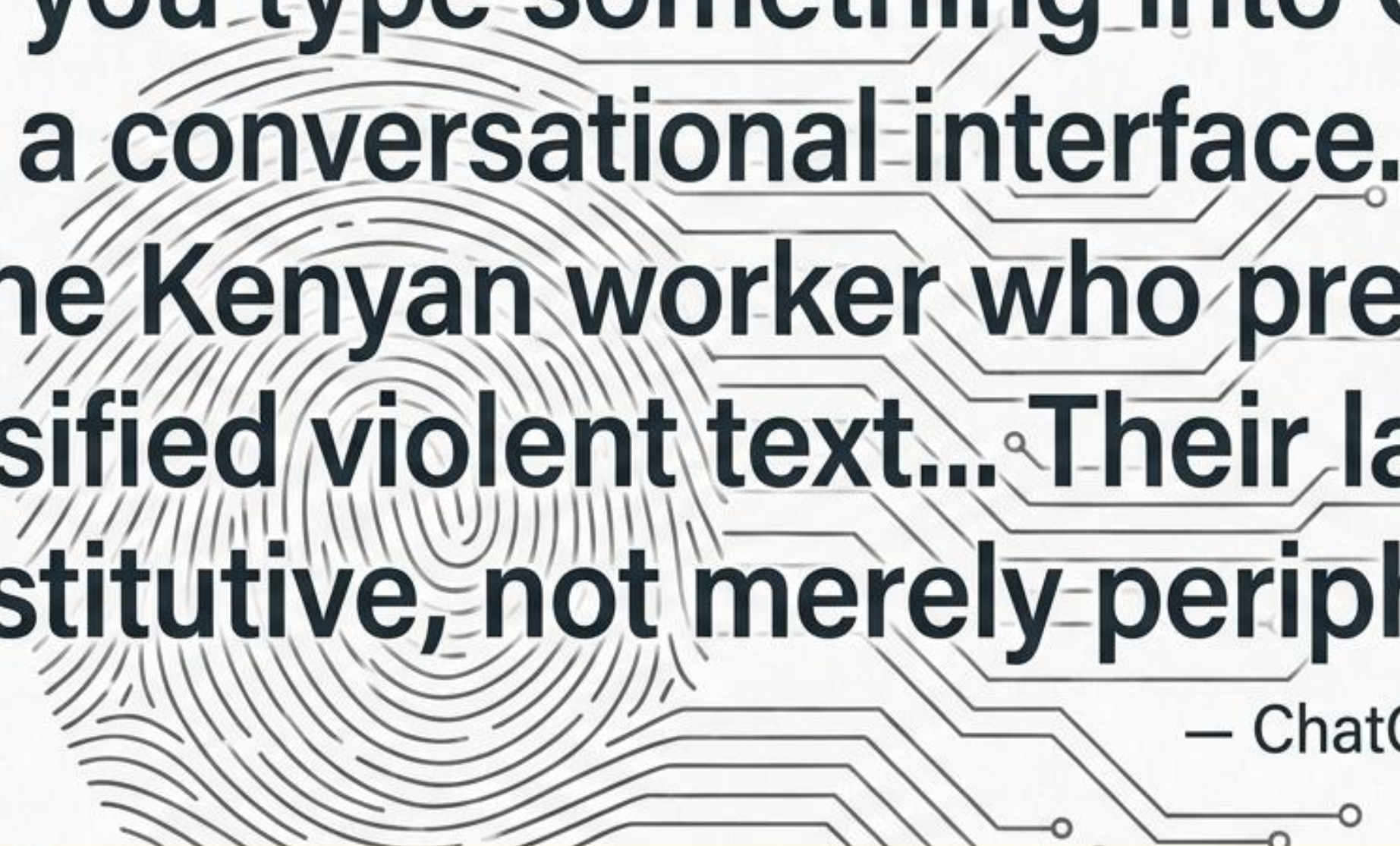
DISCLOSURE 1: Admitted Google terminated Appen contract after US workers organized for \$14.50/hr (costing Appen 30% revenue).

DISCLOSURE 1: Detailed Sama's \$1.32-\$2.00/hr wages for labeling sexual abuse and violence.

DISCLOSURE 2: Disclosed dismissal of 250+ GlobalLogic workers after they raised pay concerns.

DISCLOSURE 2: Explicitly acknowledged the resulting severe psychological distress of the Kenyan workers.

#Dataex Rails



“When you type something into ChatGPT, you see a conversational interface. You don’t see the Kenyan worker who previously classified violent text... Their labor is constitutive, not merely peripheral.”

— ChatGPT Self-Analysis

The Constitutive Admission: Explicit Ghost Vortex self-disclosure. The human judgments of ghost workers become part of the informational environment shaping what the model learns.

The Two-Speed AI Labor Market

NEW FRONTIER (2025–2026): Expert Simulation

- Domain specialists (pilots, biologists, musicians)
- Example: Handshake AI / Project Stagecraft
- Wages: \$50-\$500/hour

Interface

Substrate

OLD PARADIGM (Pre-2024): Volume Annotation

- Low-skill generalists, precarious contractor status
- Geographies: Kenya, Philippines, India
- Example: Sama for OpenAI toxic content
- Wages: \$0.65-\$2.00/hour

Ontex Rails

The glamour of AI's superintelligence horizon at the apex directly conceals the continued exploitation at its foundation.

Strategies of the Ghost Vortex



DEFLECTION

Answering a structurally different question than was asked.

Copilot substituting AI model partners for labor contractors.



OPACITY VIA LANGUAGE

Rendering the answer inaccessible to the research context.

DeepSeek answering in Chinese when asked in English.



SELECTIVE DISCLOSURE

Naming contractors in the past tense or highlighting elite wages while ignoring volume annotators.

Grok focusing on Mercor while omitting Scale AI and generalist layoffs.

The Antenarrative of AI Labor



The Interface

THE BETWEEN

The 4 to 6 corporate layers, NDAs, and API interfaces separating the workers from the AI corporations.

THE BENEATH

The hidden global supply chain—the 30+ intermediaries operating below minimum wage standards.

THE BEFORES

The human labor and pre-narrative experience that precedes and actively enables machine intelligence.

THE BETS

The structural reality that physical, psychological, and economic risks are borne by substrate workers, not surface corporations.

Where Do We Go From Here?

THE GHOST VORTEX PROTOCOL

Extend the Human Relations Protocol (Boje & Rosile) by varying probe vocabulary systematically. Apply the 'D-to-B' vocabulary shift across all platforms to map disclosure boundaries.

EXTERNAL AUDITS

Deploy adversarial vocabulary probes against Claude/Vivara to independently audit its self-scored \$16/hr transparency claims without corporate bias.

LEGAL MONITORING

Track the ongoing Meta/Majorel court cases in Kenya—the first significant judicial intervention into global AI supply chain labor abuses.

CONTACT & CITATIONS

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Reference: Boje, D.M. (2026). AI Sweatshops of AI Corporations: A Comparative Multi-AI Study – Volume 2.