

A Systems Architecture Framework for AI-Integrated Smart Manufacturing Infrastructures

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Abstract

The convergence of artificial intelligence and industrial systems has catalyzed a fundamental shift in global production paradigms, transitioning from traditional automation to autonomous, self-organizing smart manufacturing infrastructures. This paper proposes a comprehensive systems architecture framework designed to address the multifaceted challenges of integrating large-scale AI models into industrial environments. By synthesizing principles from systems engineering, cyber-physical systems, and socio-technical theory, the framework establishes a multi-layered approach to governance, data orchestration, and operational robustness. The research emphasizes the critical trade-offs between centralized intelligence and decentralized edge computing, exploring how these structural decisions influence latency, security, and scalability. Furthermore, the paper investigates the socio-technical implications of AI integration, specifically regarding labor dynamics, human-machine collaboration, and the long-term sustainability of digitized supply chains. Through a detailed analysis of infrastructure requirements and policy considerations, this work provides a roadmap for researchers and practitioners to navigate the complexities of Industry 4.0 and beyond. The proposed framework prioritizes systemic resilience and ethical transparency, ensuring that AI-integrated manufacturing remains both economically viable and socially responsible in an era of rapid technological disruption.

Keywords:

Systems Architecture, Artificial Intelligence, Smart Manufacturing, Cyber-Physical Systems, Socio-Technical Infrastructure, Industrial Governance, Industrial Internet of Things.

1. Introduction

The global industrial landscape is currently undergoing a transformative phase characterized by the deep integration of advanced computational intelligence into the physical fabric of

production. This evolution, often termed the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0, represents more than a mere incremental improvement in automation; it signifies a qualitative shift toward systems that possess the capacity for autonomous decision-making, predictive maintenance, and real-time optimization. As manufacturing infrastructures become increasingly complex and interconnected, the need for a robust, standardized systems architecture framework becomes paramount. Traditional hierarchical models of industrial control, which have served the sector for decades, are increasingly inadequate when faced with the high-velocity, high-volume data streams generated by modern smart factories. The challenge lies not only in the technical implementation of machine learning algorithms but also in the orchestration of these technologies within a socio-technical framework that accounts for human expertise, regulatory compliance, and environmental sustainability.

At the heart of this transition is the concept of the "Digital Twin," a virtual representation of physical assets that allows for continuous monitoring and simulation. However, the true potential of these digital shadows is only realized when they are coupled with sophisticated AI architectures capable of interpreting multi-modal data and translating it into actionable insights. This necessitates a move away from siloed data structures toward a unified architectural approach that facilitates seamless communication across the entire product lifecycle, from design and procurement to production and end-of-life recycling. The introduction of AI into these systems introduces new vulnerabilities and complexities, particularly concerning the transparency of algorithmic decisions and the robustness of models against adversarial attacks or unexpected environmental shifts.

This paper addresses the architectural requirements of AI-integrated smart manufacturing by proposing a framework that balances the competing demands of computational efficiency, operational reliability, and social accountability. By examining the structural trade-offs inherent in large-scale system design, we aim to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the next generation of industrial infrastructures. The following sections explore the evolution of manufacturing systems, the specific layers of the proposed architecture, the governance mechanisms required for ethical AI deployment, and the broader implications for policy and global supply chain resilience. Through this interdisciplinary lens, we argue that the successful integration of AI into manufacturing depends as much on systemic harmony as it does on algorithmic sophistication.

2. Historical Evolution and the Shift to Intelligent Infrastructures

To understand the current state of smart manufacturing, one must first trace the historical trajectory of industrial systems from the rigid mechanization of the early 20th century to the flexible, data-driven environments of today. The initial phases of industrialization were defined by mass production and the standardization of parts, where human labor was augmented by increasingly specialized machinery. The advent of programmable logic controllers and industrial robotics in the late 20th century introduced a level of flexibility that allowed for greater product variety, yet these systems remained largely reactive and siloed. Information technology was often treated as an auxiliary layer rather than a fundamental component of the production process. The current shift toward AI-integrated infrastructures represents the dissolution of the boundary between the digital and the physical, where software and hardware are co-evolved to achieve systemic goals.

The contemporary smart manufacturing environment is characterized by the proliferation of sensors and actuators, collectively known as the Industrial Internet of Things. Unlike previous iterations of industrial technology, these systems are designed to be "aware" of their surroundings and their own internal states. This awareness is facilitated by a massive increase in connectivity, enabling a level of horizontal and vertical integration that was previously impossible. Horizontal integration refers to the networking of various stages of the value chain, from suppliers to customers, while vertical integration involves the seamless flow of data from the shop floor to the corporate boardroom. In this context, AI acts as the connective tissue that processes this information, identifying patterns and anomalies that would be invisible to human operators or traditional statistical methods.

However, the rapid adoption of AI has also exposed the limitations of existing infrastructure. Legacy systems, often built on proprietary protocols and isolated networks, struggle to accommodate the requirements of modern deep learning models, which demand high bandwidth and low latency. Furthermore, the "black box" nature of many AI techniques creates a tension with the rigorous safety and reliability standards of the manufacturing sector. An error in a recommendation engine for an e-commerce platform may result in a minor inconvenience, but an error in an AI-driven robotic assembly line can lead to catastrophic equipment failure or human injury. Therefore, the evolution toward intelligent infrastructures requires a fundamental rethinking of how systems are designed, validated, and maintained over their operational lifespan.

3. The Multi-Layered Systems Architecture Framework

The proposed framework for AI-integrated smart manufacturing is organized into five distinct yet interconnected layers: the Physical Sensing Layer, the Edge-Fog Computing Layer, the Cloud Orchestration Layer, the Intelligence and Analytics Layer, and the Socio-Technical Governance Layer. This layered approach ensures that the complexities of each domain are addressed while maintaining a cohesive overall system. By decoupling specific functions, the architecture allows for modularity and scalability, enabling manufacturers to integrate new technologies as they emerge without necessitating a complete overhaul of the existing infrastructure.

3.1 Physical Sensing and Actuation Layer

The foundation of any smart manufacturing system is the physical layer, where the actual production occurs. This layer consists of the machinery, robotics, and sensors that interact directly with the material world. In an AI-integrated environment, sensors are no longer merely measuring discrete variables like temperature or pressure; they are generating high-dimensional data streams, including high-definition video, acoustic signatures, and vibration profiles. This multi-modal data is essential for training and deploying AI models that can perform tasks such as predictive quality control and autonomous navigation for mobile robots. The challenge at this layer is ensuring data fidelity and synchronization across thousands of devices. Time-sensitive networking protocols are required to maintain the temporal alignment of data, which is crucial for training models that rely on causal relationships and sequential patterns.

3.2 Edge-Fog Computing and Local Latency Management

One of the primary structural trade-offs in smart manufacturing is the distribution of

computational load between the edge and the cloud. The Edge-Fog layer serves as an intermediary, processing data in close proximity to the source to minimize latency and reduce the volume of information that must be transmitted to a central server. For time-critical applications, such as high-speed robotic manipulation or real-time anomaly detection, waiting for a round-trip to the cloud is unacceptable. The framework advocates for a decentralized approach where initial data preprocessing and inference occur at the edge, while more complex model training and long-term trend analysis are reserved for the cloud. This hybrid model enhances the robustness of the system; in the event of a network outage, local edge nodes can continue to manage basic operations, preventing a total shutdown of the production line.

3.3 Cloud Orchestration and Global Optimization

While the edge handles local tasks, the Cloud Orchestration Layer is responsible for the global optimization of the manufacturing ecosystem. This layer aggregates data from multiple facilities, allowing for the identification of systemic inefficiencies and the optimization of global supply chains. Large-scale AI models, such as transformers or reinforcement learning agents, are trained here using the vast datasets collected from across the enterprise. The cloud also facilitates the deployment of "Model-as-a-Service" architectures, where updated algorithms can be pushed to edge devices in real-time. This centralized intelligence is vital for strategic decision-making, such as predicting market demand or managing resource allocation across a global network of factories. The architectural design must ensure that the communication between the cloud and the edge is secure and optimized for varying network conditions.

3.4 Intelligence and Analytics: Beyond Pattern Recognition

The Intelligence and Analytics Layer is where raw data is transformed into strategic knowledge. In this framework, AI is not limited to simple supervised learning for classification. Instead, it incorporates advanced techniques such as self-supervised learning, which allows models to learn from unlabeled industrial data, and federated learning, which enables collaborative model training without sharing sensitive proprietary data between different entities. Furthermore, the integration of symbolic reasoning with neural networks—often referred to as neuro-symbolic AI—allows the system to incorporate domain-specific physics and engineering constraints into the learning process. This ensures that the AI's outputs are not only statistically probable but also physically plausible, a critical requirement in engineering-heavy environments where safety is the highest priority.

3.5 Socio-Technical Governance Layer

The final and perhaps most critical layer is the Socio-Technical Governance Layer. This layer oversees the interaction between the technological system and the human actors within it. It encompasses the policies, ethical guidelines, and user interfaces that ensure the AI system operates in alignment with human values and organizational goals. Governance in this context involves defining clear lines of accountability for AI-driven decisions and establishing mechanisms for human-in-the-loop intervention. It also addresses the "interpretability" problem, ensuring that the rationale behind an AI's prediction is accessible to plant managers and engineers. By embedding governance into the architecture itself, we move from a reactive approach to ethical concerns to a "by-design" approach that prioritizes fairness, transparency, and safety from the outset.

4. Structural Trade-offs: Centralization vs. Decentralization

The design of a smart manufacturing infrastructure is a continuous exercise in managing trade-offs. The most significant of these is the tension between centralization and decentralization. Centralized architectures offer the advantage of holistic visibility and ease of management. By consolidating data and intelligence in a single location, organizations can ensure consistency and leverage powerful computational resources for complex analytics. However, centralization introduces single points of failure and significant latency issues, particularly in geographically distributed operations. Furthermore, the concentration of data in a central repository increases the risk and impact of cybersecurity breaches, as a single successful attack can compromise the entire enterprise.

Decentralization, conversely, enhances local autonomy and resilience. By empowering individual machines or cells with their own intelligence, the system becomes more robust against network failures and localized disruptions. Edge computing allows for nearly instantaneous response times, which is essential for safety-critical applications. However, a highly decentralized system is inherently more difficult to coordinate and maintain. Ensuring that distributed models remain synchronized and that local optimizations do not lead to global inefficiencies—a phenomenon known as the "sub-optimization trap"—requires sophisticated orchestration protocols. The proposed framework suggests that the optimal balance is achieved through a "federated" approach, where intelligence is distributed according to the urgency and scale of the task, while a central governance mechanism maintains systemic alignment.

Another critical trade-off involves the balance between model complexity and interpretability. Deep neural networks with millions of parameters are highly effective at capturing complex relationships in industrial data, but they are often difficult for humans to understand. In a manufacturing context, where an unexplained change in a process can have significant financial and safety implications, the lack of transparency is a major barrier to adoption. The framework addresses this by advocating for "explainable AI" (XAI) modules that provide justifications for the model's outputs. This may involve sacrificing a small percentage of predictive accuracy for a significant gain in trust and auditability. The decision of where to place this threshold is a strategic choice that must be guided by the specific risks associated with each manufacturing process.

5. Robustness, Security, and Cyber-Physical Resilience

The integration of AI into manufacturing infrastructures significantly expands the attack surface for malicious actors. Cyber-physical systems are vulnerable to traditional IT threats, such as ransomware and data theft, as well as OT-specific attacks that target industrial protocols to cause physical damage. AI adds a new dimension to this threat landscape through adversarial attacks, where subtle perturbations in sensor data can trick a machine learning model into making an incorrect and potentially dangerous decision. For instance, an adversarial sticker placed on a component could lead an AI-driven quality inspection system to overlook a critical defect. Ensuring the robustness of these systems requires a multi-faceted approach to security that goes beyond firewalls and encryption.

Resilience in this context is defined as the system's ability to maintain a minimum level of

service and safety in the face of disruptions, whether they are intentional attacks or accidental failures. The proposed architecture incorporates "adversarial training" into the model development phase, exposing the AI to potential attacks to improve its defenses. Additionally, the system employs redundant sensing and diverse redundancy, where multiple types of sensors and different AI architectures are used to monitor the same process. If one sensor is compromised or one model fails, the system can cross-reference with other data sources to detect the anomaly. This "defense-in-depth" strategy is essential for critical infrastructures where the costs of downtime are measured in millions of dollars per hour.

Furthermore, the framework emphasizes the importance of "graceful degradation." In the event of a severe failure or a cyberattack, the system should not collapse entirely but should instead revert to a simplified, safe mode of operation. This may involve shifting from autonomous control to manual or semi-autonomous operation, guided by pre-defined safety protocols. Designing for resilience also means acknowledging the limitations of AI. While machine learning is excellent at handling high-frequency, low-stakes events, human operators remain superior at managing "black swan" events—rare and unpredictable occurrences that lie outside the training data of the AI. The architecture must therefore facilitate a seamless transition of control between the AI and human experts when the system's confidence levels drop below a certain threshold.

6. Socio-Technical Implications and Human-Machine Collaboration

The deployment of AI in manufacturing is not merely a technical challenge; it is a profound socio-technical shift that alters the nature of work and the relationship between humans and machines. A common concern is the displacement of human labor by autonomous systems. However, a more nuanced perspective suggests that the role of the human worker is evolving rather than disappearing. In an AI-integrated environment, manual tasks are increasingly automated, but the demand for high-level skills—such as system supervision, ethical oversight, and cross-domain problem-solving—is rising. The challenge for organizations is to manage this transition in a way that is both fair and productive.

Human-machine collaboration (HMC) is a central pillar of the proposed framework. Rather than viewing humans and AI as competitors, the architecture treats them as complementary assets. AI excels at processing vast amounts of data and identifying subtle correlations, while humans possess contextual knowledge, intuition, and the ability to make ethical judgments. To facilitate effective HMC, the system must provide intuitive interfaces that allow workers to interact with the AI as a collaborator. This includes augmented reality (AR) displays that overlay digital insights onto physical equipment and natural language interfaces that allow operators to query the system for explanations or recommendations. The goal is to create "augmented intelligence," where the collective capabilities of the human-AI team exceed those of either agent working in isolation.

The framework also addresses the psychological and social impacts of AI on the workforce. The introduction of pervasive monitoring and algorithmic management can lead to increased stress and a sense of loss of autonomy among workers. To mitigate these risks, the Socio-Technical Governance Layer incorporates principles of "worker-centric design," ensuring that the system is used to empower rather than surveil employees. This includes providing workers with access to the same data and insights that the AI uses, fostering a

culture of transparency and mutual trust. Furthermore, the system should be designed to support continuous learning, helping workers to upskill and adapt to the changing demands of the smart factory. By prioritizing the well-being and agency of the workforce, organizations can build a more resilient and sustainable industrial ecosystem.

7. Sustainability and Environmental Impact

As global concerns regarding climate change and resource depletion intensify, the sustainability of manufacturing infrastructures has become a strategic priority. AI-integrated systems offer significant opportunities for reducing the environmental footprint of production through improved efficiency and waste reduction. For example, predictive maintenance can extend the lifespan of machinery, reducing the need for new equipment and minimizing the environmental impact of manufacturing replacements. Similarly, AI-driven energy management systems can optimize the power consumption of entire factories, shifting high-energy tasks to times when renewable energy is most abundant.

However, the pursuit of smart manufacturing also introduces its own environmental costs. Training and running large-scale AI models require substantial computational power, which in turn consumes significant amounts of electricity and water for cooling data centers. Furthermore, the rapid obsolescence of electronic components used in IoT devices and edge nodes contributes to the growing problem of e-waste. The proposed framework addresses these challenges by incorporating sustainability as a key performance indicator (KPI) within the architecture. This involves using "green AI" techniques, such as model pruning and quantization, to reduce the computational demands of algorithms without sacrificing performance. It also encourages the use of modular hardware designs that allow for easy repair and recycling.

Beyond operational efficiency, AI can facilitate the transition to a "circular economy," where products are designed for disassembly and materials are continuously cycled back into the production process. An intelligent infrastructure can track the provenance and condition of components throughout their lifecycle, making it easier to identify parts that can be refurbished or recycled. This requires a level of transparency and data sharing across the entire supply chain that is currently rare but essential for long-term sustainability. By integrating environmental metrics into the core of the systems architecture, manufacturers can move beyond "greenwashing" and achieve substantive progress toward carbon neutrality and resource efficiency.

8. Policy, Standardization, and Global Governance

The implementation of the proposed framework does not occur in a vacuum; it is shaped by a complex landscape of national and international policies. As AI becomes a critical component of industrial infrastructure, governments are increasingly concerned with issues of sovereignty, national security, and economic competitiveness. This has led to a fragmented regulatory environment, where different regions have varying standards for data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and safety. For multinational manufacturers, navigating these differing requirements is a significant challenge that necessitates a flexible and adaptive architectural approach.

Standardization is essential for the interoperability of AI-integrated systems. Without common

protocols for data exchange and model communication, the vision of a seamless, global manufacturing ecosystem remains unattainable. Organizations like the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) are currently working to develop standards for industrial AI, but the pace of technological change often outstrips the speed of standard-setting. The proposed framework advocates for "open-source" and "vendor-neutral" standards to prevent market monopolization and ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can also participate in the smart manufacturing revolution.

Governance also extends to the ethical use of AI in global supply chains. As manufacturers use AI to optimize their operations, there is a risk that these efficiencies come at the expense of labor rights or environmental protections in other parts of the world. A robust governance framework must include mechanisms for auditing the entire supply chain, using technologies like blockchain to provide an immutable record of compliance with international standards. Furthermore, there is a need for global cooperation to address the potential for AI-driven trade imbalances and to ensure that the benefits of smart manufacturing are distributed equitably across the globe. By aligning technological development with international policy goals, the framework aims to foster a more stable and prosperous global industrial system.

9. Future Outlook and Emerging Research Frontiers

Looking ahead, the evolution of AI-integrated smart manufacturing is likely to be driven by several emerging technologies that will further transform the architectural landscape. One of the most promising is the integration of quantum computing, which has the potential to solve optimization problems that are currently intractable for classical computers. In the context of manufacturing, quantum algorithms could optimize complex supply chains with millions of variables or simulate the molecular properties of new materials in seconds. While still in its infancy, the integration of quantum-ready modules into the systems architecture is a key consideration for future-proofing industrial infrastructures.

Another frontier is the development of "liquid" or "adaptive" neural networks that can dynamically change their structure and parameters in response to new information. Unlike current deep learning models, which are relatively static once trained, these adaptive systems would be capable of continuous online learning, allowing them to adjust to shifting environmental conditions or changing production requirements without needing to be retrained from scratch. This would bring the dream of truly autonomous, "self-healing" factories closer to reality. However, such systems also pose significant challenges for validation and safety, as their behavior may become unpredictable over time.

Finally, the convergence of AI with synthetic biology and advanced material science is poised to create entirely new forms of manufacturing. We are moving toward a future where "programmable matter" and "bio-manufacturing" will allow us to grow products rather than assemble them. This will require a fundamental shift in systems architecture, as the boundary between the machine and the material becomes blurred. The research community must begin to explore the governance and infrastructure requirements for these "Post-Industry 4.0" scenarios, ensuring that we are prepared for the profound changes they will bring to society and the environment.

10. Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence into smart manufacturing infrastructures represents a landmark shift in the history of industrial systems. It offers the promise of unprecedented efficiency, flexibility, and sustainability, but it also introduces new layers of complexity, risk, and ethical challenge. This paper has proposed a systems architecture framework that addresses these issues through a multi-layered, socio-technical approach. By balancing the trade-offs between centralization and decentralization, prioritizing robustness and security, and placing human-machine collaboration at the center of the design, the framework provides a comprehensive roadmap for the future of industrial production.

Success in this new era requires more than just technical expertise; it demands a holistic understanding of how technology interacts with people, organizations, and the planet. As we move forward, the focus must remain on creating systems that are not only intelligent but also resilient, transparent, and equitable. The proposed framework is intended to serve as a living document, evolving alongside the technologies it describes. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between engineers, social scientists, policymakers, and industry leaders, we can ensure that the transition to AI-integrated manufacturing leads to a more prosperous and sustainable world for all.

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