The literature on industrial development provides significant insights into the role of industry development that creates jobs, improves productive capacity, and strengthens nation’s economic and social development. We draw on this literature to confront the structural unemployment inflicted by global trade and technological change in the developed world using the United States as a case study. In the context that a number of developed countries are struggling with persistent inequality across social classes and geographical regions, structural unemployment aggravates the distress caused by economic and social declines of the working class. Using mixed methods research, this research project assesses the cause of these phenomena and addresses them through economic and policy analyses. What are the ways in which American government could revitalize the American society by providing high-quality employment, inclusive growth and sustainable development? We construct a composite indicator, the Strategic Employment Index (SEI). SEI includes variables that characterize industries that have created high-quality employment – industries with employment growth that also provides full time, skilled, and adequately compensated jobs. The SEI ranks 22 industries enveloping the entire US economy from 2000 to 2016 (rank 1 is the best; rank 22 is the worst).

The SEI’s results suggest that during the 2000-2016 period, the best performing sectors generating high-quality employment in the US are (1) professional and technical services, (2) public administration, (3) finance and insurance, and (4) management. Generally, manufacturing industries are in the middle of the ranking implying that their ability to create skilled and stable jobs are lacking. In addition, there are no fundamental changes in the rankings over time with a few exceptions. Public administration collapsed in 2014 from rank 1 to rank 10. Industrial manufacturing declined over time from rank 6 (2000) to rank 10 (2010) and then rank 9 (2016). Health care and social assistance improved its performance from rank 11 (2000) to 5 (2014) and then 8 (2016). We provide more nuanced qualitative analyses to explain the rise and decline in those major sectors and the policy space that is available for the US government.