Are You Leading AI or is AI Leading You?

BY MICHELLE GIBBINGS

AI at Work: Are You in Control or Being Controlled?

Depending on which side of the AI divide you sit on, AI will either ruin workplaces and destroy jobs or be a productivity bonanza.

With generative AI evolving at an unprecedented rate, it is imperative to balance the opportunities presented by this change with ethical responsibilities.

In striking the optimal balance, leaders must consider how to leverage technology wisely while being adaptive and ready to take advantage of it.

Both considerations are vital so you lead AI at work rather than AI leading you.

As a leader, you want to understand technology's consequences, particularly as it can sometimes be unintentional. You also want to prepare yourself and your team because it's here whether you like it or not

Identify the Issues

The first step in successfully navigating these changes is to ensure you are fully informed and aware of AI's challenges.

Brian Patrick Green, Director of Technology Ethics at the Markkula Centre for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, has identified 16 central issues, which represent challenges and opportunities.

These issues include concerns around transparency of AI use and safeguarding user privacy; bias in data sources, which can lead to discriminatory outcomes; being clear on where the responsibility lies and ensuring ethical guidelines for AI deployment; and impacts on jobs.

There may also be issues that are specific to your profession and industry.

Take the time to fully understand the issues and their relevance to how you work now and in the future.

Elevate Assessment

Back in 2017, Genpact research found that only a quarter of people surveyed were concerned about AI's impact on the workforce right now; instead, they were more concerned about what it meant for their children or later generations.

More recent research from SnapLogic found that 72% of Australians interviewed welcomed AI's use in their role, compared to an average of 66%, with UK respondents the least inclined at 61%. However, 34% of respondents felt that very few people in their organisation had the skills to implement and adopt AI successfully.

Just as organisations undertake scenario planning to help them investigate and plan for unknown risks, this is a helpful approach when preparing for potential AI changes. **Look ahead, examine where your industry, organisation and profession are heading, and consider possible pathways and options that could eventuate.**

By conducting thorough impact assessments, you can better understand AI's use and the impacts on your role, team, clients/customers, and communities.

Using these insights, you can determine how far you need to pivot and adapt, and you can proactively address workforce transitions and any necessary reskilling or upskilling for your team.

Support your Team

When ChatGPT was first released, some sectors immediately banned its use. However, a better approach was to find ways to work with the technology, as Professor Aumann from Northern Michigan University did. He **explained** how, when he saw its prevalence, he changed how students were assessed, weaved ChatGPT into the lessons, and asked students to evaluate the chatbot's responses.

Investigate the benefits and options. **Ask yourself: How can it save time? Where could it improve processes and output? How can it be best blended with the work I and my team lead?**

Explore and play with the technology to test the boundaries. You also want to do this regularly because the capacity and capability of the large language models are rapidly evolving. Something that one of the models couldn't do last year, they could do now.

Talk with your team about how and where it can be helpful. When employees see the benefits of working with it, they will more readily leverage its benefits to innovation and work quality.

However, not all of your team will readily embrace AI. Don't dismiss their concerns. Work with them and help them to navigate this changing landscape. It's easier to adapt when a person can see the benefits and feel supported to try something new. It's also easier to adapt when you – their leader – role models supportive behaviours. For example, talk to your team about where and how its use is welcomed, demonstrate to your team how you are using AI, and provide forums where ideas can be shared.

Embrace Humanity

Not everything can be outsourced to technology, nor would you want to.

Technology is excellent at processes but not at emotions and connection. A robot can't connect, show genuine compassion, or provide the emotional support humans need to thrive.

However, some experts say Anthropic's chatbot **Claude** has sensitivity, wit, and a willingness to express opinions.

That said, I'll still argue that the 'special sauce' that makes us all unique becomes even more critical in the age of AI.

Lead by Example

Ethical leadership will be more critical than ever when you confront decisions you have not faced before.

As a leader, your integrity will be tested as you make choices around transparency, collective good, and workforce changes. **Consequently, you want to identify what you stand for, identify the issues that matter and be aware of the line you won't cross**.

In embracing ethical AI, seek input from the fields of technology, law, philosophy, and sociology. Encourage collaboration to tackle complex challenges and regularly monitor AI systems for bias, discrimination, and unintended consequences.

Leaders who navigate the ethical challenges of AI with integrity will drive innovation and ensure a future where technology serves humanity rather than harms it.

So, as posed at the start of this article, are you leading AI, or is AI leading you?

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