AI’s Quest to Make Us More Human

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly becoming a dominant part of everyday life. Whether you are aware of it or not, intelligent algorithms are all around us, trying to predict and understand you so they can help make your life easier in some way.

For example, Netflix’s AI engine automatically recommends shows to you based on what you’ve watched in the past. Organizations are steadily making AI core to the way their businesses are operated by automating repetitive tasks. Economically, this makes sense since most companies become more capital-efficient when a process or a role is automated. But with the release of OpenAI’s GPT3 autocomplete tool, there is increasing concern about what such AI would mean for humanity.

Certainly, the advent of the age of AI will reshape the world as we know it — in some respects, it already has. To effectively navigate this change, we’ll need to rethink our views of work, identity and the value of human creativity. If we do it right, AI can give us the opportunity to reconnect with our most human qualities.

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There is no work without human relationships

Genuine relationships with others are essential to our existence and overall quality of life. Social contact makes it easier for us to deal with the hardships of everyday life. The lack of genuine human connection, especially in a work setting, can expose us to various physical and mental health risks.

So-called narrow AI (intelligent algorithms that are trained to perform one task) automates repetitive work processes that deprive us from the human-to-human interactions we need to survive. For example, the typical production line within a manufacturing plant sees workers on the line repeat the same task over and over again. This may have made sense at one time, but this environment takes the joy out of the job. Workers do the bare minimum needed to avoid being unemployed.

Alternatively, automating repetitive tasks give employees the chance to form genuine relationships. This leads to creating a better working environment that increases productivity. Organizations are made up of people. They exist to create solutions to problems that have to do with other people. With the automation of the most grueling tasks, we will be able create organizations that thrive on genuine human connections with customers, partners, employees and other stakeholders. This scenario taps into our craving as humans to build genuine relationships with one another. It also gives us the opportunity to enjoy our work more.

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We are not the work we do

Too often, I hear working professionals identify themselves fundamentally with the work they do. It's rare to come across people who find meaning and purpose in their work. Psychologist Janna Koretz defines the blurring of individual and work identities as "enmeshment." This means that people are unable to nurture and develop their own independent senses of self. The problem with identifying mainly with the work you do is that you are inherently strapping human value to economic value.

This is perhaps not the smartest idea, especially as we enter the fourth industrial revolution and AI becomes the underlying infrastructure across all industries. With the increased acceleration of change across industries due technology and automation, tying your sense of identity to a job could be quite jarring.

To identify who you are regardless of the work you do, ask yourself the following question: What would you be doing if you had unlimited financial resources? The answers you come up with will help you uncover what truly fulfills you. Beginning to associate yourself with what you find fulfilling will shield you from having negative reactions to the constant change in our world as job titles and skills are rewritten.

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We are inherently creative beings

Human creativity increases in value as a greater number of processes and repetitive tasks within organizations get automated. This means that people who constantly think outside the box will have the upper hand in a world where conventional tasks and work processes are mostly automated.

As humans, we are innately creative. From music to

storytelling to creative problem solving, our creativity shows itself in every aspect of our lives. Personally, I find it extremely refreshing when I come across unique ideas and skills. From the beginning of our existence as a species, we have always found creative ways to solve the problems we have encountered. This creativity manifests itself across our existence, from the creation of the Egyptian pyramids to creating mega-cities around the world. It exists within each one of us.

In a 2017 article for New York magazine, Agustin Fuentes argues that creativity is our ability to move back and forth between the realms of “what is” and “what could be.” With more of what we consider “work” being automated by AI, we as a species are able to acquire more of the most valuable resource on the planet: time. With more time on our hands, we can use our creativity to imagine a vastly different future, such as solving world hunger, curing infectious diseases and exploring the stars.

There is a lot of change on the horizon as AI becomes more mainstream. These changes could redefine almost every aspect of our lives. We can either react with fear or accept and work with AI to improve the state of the world. AI presents us with the opportunity to solve problems we have as yet been unable to solve as a species. By leveraging the capabilities of AI and our innate creativity, we will be able to move humanity to the next level.

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