Why Empathy and Strong Leadership Will Always Outpace AI

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Meet Artificial Intelligence: a fully functioning member of our society — and whether people are aware or not, we're all using it in our everyday lives. Here are some examples.

AI algorithms are integral to social media. They curate content, make friend suggestions and provide that "personalized experience" we often hear Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk raving about.

With nearly 240 million subscribers worldwide, Netflix, the world's number 1 streaming service, uses AI to suggest titles of programming to watch, which they say is tailored to enhance each user's unique experience.

According to Statista, nearly 7 billion smartphones are equipped with AI features.

If you use Alexa, she's already a guest in your home whose sole intent is to monitor everything from your musical tastes and grocery shopping lists to controlling the security system, your appliances and even your thermostat. "She" can be a personal assistant, scheduling appointments on your behalf and making suggestions to run your home more efficiently. Have you ever considered how and why Alexa was created?

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Why AI is so controversial

Using AI is met with a mix of emotions. Proponents of artificial intelligence love the increase in efficiency they get using AI platforms like ChatGPT because it automates routine tasks, allowing people to focus on the more complex nature of things, which can increase productivity. If time is money, many argue that AI saves its users both.

By contrast, those opposed to its use raise many concerns, including:

- The elimination of jobs as things become more automated
- Increased disparities between bootstrapped solopreneurs/startups and well-funded companies
- Theft of intellectual property
- Ethical dilemmas in healthcare, such as prioritizing help for those in higher income brackets
- Along with automation comes depersonalization and the "human element."

Pew research from 2023 indicates that 52% of Americans have concerns about AI's intrusion into daily life. Three-quarters of those surveyed by Gallup and Bentley University believe that AI will reduce jobs in an already highly competitive job market. Moreover, 79% don't believe companies will ethically use AI.

If artificial intelligence continues on its current trajectory, questions around obsolescence are legitimate. If AI can automate to the point of eliminating retail cashiers, humans in a manufacturing environment, customer service representatives, newscasters, bookkeepers, legal assistants, bank tellers, writers, editors and other creatives, is it a stretch to believe it can also replace CEOs and heads of government?

Given enough time and data, why not? Is it even possible for

leaders to continue being relevant with AI swirling around us? If you're on the fence, I suggest you see the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey.*

Leaving aside the realism, which forces people to go down a rabbit hole of "what ifs?" At its core, *2001* is about what happens when technology becomes sentient. Ultimately, the HAL 9000, the ship's onboard computer, learns from its humans how to put its own survival above all of humanity's. This is one of many concerns people who are opposed to AI have about its widespread use.

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Empathy-based leadership: For now, AI is no match

We already know that AI is very capable of intelligence gathering, allowing companies to be more agile in the face of anything. But can organizations keep up with how intelligent and adaptable AI is becoming?

As AI continues to evolve, business predictability isn't what it used to be. At first blush, it would seem that companies can predict and react to marketplace shifts better and quicker. However, if half of organizations rely on AI in their day-to-day operations, what works today may be irrelevant tomorrow, requiring leaders to be flexible and adaptable. Adaptability is crucial for staving off obsolescence in this dynamic landscape, as exemplified by the estimated 72% of CEOs who fear losing their jobs.

The first half of my career was spent working in war zones and post-conflict zones. I have worked with people following the worst days of their lives to thrive rather than crumble. Lost homes, limbs, families and communities ought to really level

people, but instead, despite losing so much, I watched as people rose to the occasion and counseled others to do the same. And these weren't one-off experiences, they were the norm.

These moments, which I go into at length in my book, *From War Zones to Boardrooms: Optimize the Moment When Strategic Planning Fails*, prepared me well for the work I do today as a strategic advisor to Fortune 100 organizations. In all that we encounter, from the significant to the seemingly inconsequential, it's crucial to acknowledge that it's about the people at every turn. When I'm consulting my clients, I remind them that empathy ought to be what guides them through every decision we all make. And so long as AI isn't capable of empathy, that's one leadership quality AI can't hold over humans.

I advise them to prioritize a culture that encourages innovation and not fear experimenting. AI offers new tools but also requires risk-taking, experimentation and learning from one's mistakes—something AI is not capable of yet.

Related: The Top 10 Jobs with the Lowest Risk of Being Replaced by AI

Whether it's navigating job displacement, new policies and procedures or the ethical concerns that come with AI, adaptability equips leaders with the tools to handle the unknown.

At the moment, artificial intelligence can handle tasks, sift through large data sets and process information at the speed of light. However, AI cannot replace decision-making or empathy. If you choose to use AI in your business, there are many ethical considerations. Attrition is expensive, and while it's less expensive to automate everything, AI makes mistakes. It's incapable of feeling, so it doesn't care if it costs you a great employee or a million-dollar contract. I advise my

clients to focus on longevity, not short-term gains that can be fleeting.

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