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Wanted: Business Leaders Who Can Bend Artificial Intelligence In New Directions

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AI: amplify, not replace GETTY

A [survey](#) out of Gartner found that 80% of executives think automation can be applied to *any* business decision. In addition, a third of organizations report they are applying AI across business

units with the intention of supporting decision-making across all relevant processes.

So, that means we're not going to need managers and executives anymore, right?

Hold that thought. Yes, the job roles and career trajectories of executives, managers, professionals, and those aspiring for these roles is shifting dramatically. But demand for insightful leaders who can also bend technology in new directions will be stronger than ever. "Managers and corporate leaders need to understand this and be prepared to either leverage AI or understand how AI can be used effectively in their organizations," says [Andy Thurai](#), principle analyst with Constellation Research. "Most of the decisions that affect organizations, their customers, and consumers will all be either decided by or aided by AI in the next few years. Trying to run a business without using AI against a competitor using AI at full force is like trying to compete against steroid-enhanced players in a level sports playing field."

The emphasis is on using technology to attain advantage — not replacing human decision-making. AI at the moment is "overhyped," but there will be a significant impact on "white-collar tasks which are repeatable, predictable, and do not involve very high stakes," says [Kon Leong](#), president, CEO, and co-founder of ZL Technologies. "At such levels of lower risk, AI will take the world by storm, and the lower rungs of white-collar jobs will be the first to be displaced or redefined." When it comes to tasks with higher stakes and bigger risks, however, "AI will only play a supplementary role, where the primary assessment is first done by skilled professionals," says Leong.

Any job that doesn't require human intelligence or creativity "can be potentially either fully or partially replaced by AI," says Thurai.

“Humans using AI will replace humans without AI pretty much in any area.”

“Computers have traditionally gone after tasks that necessitate calculation, are repetitive in nature, and are not creative,” says [Harry O’Halloran](#), vice president at Launch Consulting Group.

“While generative AI seemingly has changed the art of the possible in terms of what AI can do, it still necessitates leveraging information that already exists to as inputs. Therefore, generating novel and creative ideas is something that will be uniquely human for the foreseeable future.”

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Other skills still essential include communication and ability to influence, O’Halloran continues. “However, there are aspects of all of these skills that can be enhanced by generative AI — for example, ChatGPT can get the juices flowing by generating a starting place in which to iterate from.”

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It's natural to assume that demand will keep rising for jobs that involve building and maintaining AI solutions — such as machine learning engineers, data scientists, and ML/DevOps professionals. Expect to see “roles emerging in the management and strategy categories as well,” Thurai says. These will include “advisory roles such as how to use AI for an organization, or roles such as how to strategize your solutions that can infuse AI and be more appealing to your customers.”

While many aspects of white-collar work “are at the cusp of being disrupted,” it means developing a deeper understanding of how AI can amplify one's own capabilities, says O'Halloran. “Software engineers, for instance, can significantly enhance their abilities by leveraging generative AI to help them write software. Tomorrow's world will likely necessitate a software engineer to better understand the business and better align code produced to business outcomes. This means that technical capabilities alone will not be sufficient.”

Even as tasks get subsumed by AI, there is a positive side, he continues. “At the end of the day though, the more mundane a task is, the easier it is to be disrupted either by automation in general or by generative AI so from a positive perspective, it can uplift any individual out of the drudgery of those mundane tasks that each of us does on a day-to-day basis to focus on things that both energize us and add more value.”

No matter how developed AI gets over the coming months and years, “there are certain situations that will always call for the human touch,” says Leong. “The sharpest professionals and executives today are building their careers on skills that make them uniquely human, and thus unclonable by AI. Roles that require high-stakes decision making — especially decisions based on

incomplete or unquantifiable information, and those that carry an expectation of explainability — will not be easily supplanted by AI. As will having a holistic understanding of other humans, and affecting the wellbeing of other humans.”

There are so many advantages “to using AI in any field,” says Thurai. “There are also dangers in using AI. Careful decisions, ethicality, ownership, and accountability are needed by anyone who wants to use AI in their field.”

For the foreseeable future, “organizations will still need humans at the helm to steer the ship and make decisions in an uncertain world,” says O’Halloran. “Long story short, I am feeling positive about the future of management careers, but I also believe that these shorter cycles of disruption will necessitate a growth mindset and continuous learning to best understand what the next wave can potentially bring and how best to navigate that wave.”

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