Is AI a friend or foe to business?

You may be forgiven to think that in today's modern world, the reincarnation of the devil is likely to manifest itself through technology. Indeed, the treacherous power that technology bestows upon those who control it can be alarmingly dangerous. It gives access to terabytes of data, knowledge, and information (Big Data) that can be analysed by sophisticated algorithms (AI), and which can in turn be used to influence people's attitudes and behaviours. What more can the devil want? The Cambridge Analytica scandal is still fresh in our minds.

In the business world, some have also viewed technology as a thief. The adage that technology "robs jobs from our boys" has been a sine qua non in many people's psyches for centuries since the industrial revolution. The rise of artificial intelligence has shifted this sentiment from the unskilled worker to the more qualified professional.

This begs the question, will Artificial Intelligence (AI), render the utility of the human race redundant? Will humans become the victims of their own creation?

Will armies of business managers and leaders be dispensed as robots rule the financial world? When an eminent scientist like Prof. Stephen Hawking claimed in an interview with the BBC that "the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race", it does send shivers through your spine. Fortunately, however, we are very far away from reaching that stage. No matter how impressive the technology is, the fact remains that to this date, Artificial Intelligence cannot emulate the biological mind. For this reason, humans should not battle artificial intelligence in a quest for the survival of the fittest. Instead, they should embrace it to work collaboratively and exploit each other's strengths.

Artificial Intelligence brings unique, efficient capabilities

The starting point for creating the synergies between humans and technology is to understand what each form of intelligence can do. Artificial Intelligence is rational, unbiased, fast, consistent, and accurate. Several types of AI applications are readily available in the marketplace. Most of these can do either one of the following three things (i) learn, analyse and make decisions based on underlying data (Machine Learning), (ii) Listen to and respond to speech or read and write text (Natural Language Processing) or (iii) move, assemble, pick or sort objects (Robotics). In a way, artificial intelligence can become the very embodiment of the mind of an organisation if it is implemented in the right way.

It is recognised, however, that an organisation that is solely guided by the mind and the rational remains out of touch with its external environment. Indeed, AI solutions function well in closed systems where the stream of data is predictable and historical inferences can be made for the future. In practice, organisations operate in open living ecosystems which are exposed to the chaos, disruption, and several other factors that cannot be readily modelled into an algorithm.

Human intelligence helps differentiate an organisation

Human intelligence complements artificial intelligence by providing the heart and soul of the business. It exploits the unique human characteristics of intuition, creativity, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity. Humans generate value by (i) bringing about product and process innovations (ii) recognising new patterns in their external environment and creating new rules around such patterns and (iii) building and fostering strong relationships with

other humans. These characteristics are especially important since in today's highly competitive environment, organisations no longer differentiate themselves on the products and services they deliver but through the emotions and feelings that have been created as a result of their interaction with the customer.

Notwithstanding the clear synergies that may be created between men and machines, workers and employees at all levels cannot be blamed for feeling threatened at the prospect of being replaced by AI applications. Organisations and business leaders however should be mindful and desist from being allured at the prospect of making short-term gains by dispensing their loyal employees and replacing them with these new flashy tools. Instead, they should cultivate a new breed of skills that are essential in supporting the long-term development of these systems. Sometimes, the most obvious ones are the capabilities to develop and create new code to improve the algorithms to make better predictions and analysis of the underlying data.

Connect AI and human intelligence

The real game changer for exploiting the synergy between artificial intelligence and human intelligence is by connecting AI systems to human decision-making processes. Such connections should enable these systems to recognise tacit patterns on how decisions are made so that the same pattern could be used by the AI system to recommend solutions for similar problems exhibiting similar patterns in practice. Just as a qualified professional and/or skilled worker needs to be guided by an experienced senior to learn on the job, AI systems still need to learn how to think and connect the dots. Organisations that succeed in mastering this skill are the most likely to benefit from AI systems and generate true "Augmented Intelligence"

David Galea is a digital transformation expert and Director of Digital Leadership at _Centigo_.

He is also author of the book _Digital Made Simple: Practical Insights for Successful for Digital Programs_.

Article by DAVID GALEA