How to thrive in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI evokes different reactions from people. Dread. Excitement. Indifference. The genie is already out of the bottle. We cannot stop the rapid advancements in AI. We cannot slow it down. And even the most proactive regulators are just playing catch up because we cannot yet understand its impact. But however you feel about AI, one thing is undebatable: it has become part of us.

AI is a super-technology

People who are indifferent to the rise of AI, especially those who believe we are at the the peak of inflated expectations, may be underestimating its transformative potential. While it is true that technology hype cycles often lead to periods of disillusionment, the rapid advancements in AI suggest that this technology could be a true game-changer.

Historically, humans have created numerous technologies, many of which have been niche solutions to specific problems. However, a few groundbreaking technologies, such as fire and the wheel, have had a profound impact on human civilization. These "super-technologies" fundamentally altered the way humans lived and perceived themselves.

The invention of the control of fire was a super-technology that transformed humans from mere survivors to creators and innovators. It made cooking possible, enabling humans to digest more nutrients, which led to smaller teeth, smaller digestive systems, and larger brains. These biological changes, coupled with the technological advancements made possible by fire, allowed humans to inhabit colder habitats, develop complex languages, and establish sophisticated social structures. In essence, fire control reshaped humanity on a biological, cognitive, cultural, and social level.

AI is also a super-technology. It has been subtly yet profoundly reshaping our world for the past few decades. It is already embedded into our daily lives, powering recommendation systems (like Netflix and YouTube), virtual assistants (such as Siri and Alexa), image and speech recognition technologies, and natural language processing tools. However, OpenAI's ChatGPT that truly brought AI into the public consciousness, enabling people to interact with AI in a more direct and intuitive way.

AI will continue to shape humanity in profound ways. Augmented intelligence is enhancing our cognitive abilities, allowing us to process information more efficiently than ever before.. AI-powered social media algorithms are influencing our social circles and shaping our worldview. Moreover, as human-AI symbiosis evolve, we may redefine what it means to be human, potentially operating machines with our thoughts.

The impact of AI will be felt across every industry and aspect of human life. Given its far-reaching influence, it is imperative to understand and engage with AI thoughtfully.

Becoming homo silico

The impact of AI will be massive, both positive and negative. While AI offers immense potential for innovation and problem-solving, it also raises concerns about economic inequality, job displacements, and the ethical implications of advanced AI. These concerns understandably evoke fear.

The fear of AI, however, does not stem from its superhuman abilities. Non-AI technologies already exist that are faster, stronger, and more accurate than humans. Rather, what is unsettling about AI is its ability to reason, learn, and create–qualities once thought to be uniquely human. Moreover, it is unclear how most of advanced AI make decisions since they are neither explainable or interpretable.

As we embrace the age of AI, we must redefine our understanding of humanity. Humans are not merely biological beings but also technological ones. Our technologies, from stone tools to silicon chips, have shaped our evolution. Silicon chips, which power AI, have become progressively integrated with us. We first used them in tools, such as computers, that are physically separate from us. Then we used them to create tools like the smartphone, which essentially became appendages through which we process information and connect socially. The integration of silicon chips into our bodies is the next logical step. We have become Homo silico.

The transformation of humans into Homo silico is imminent and inevitable. Those who embrace this transformation will thrive in the AI era. By understanding and controlling AI, we can harness its power for the betterment of humanity. Ignoring or fearing AI, on the other hand, could lead to obsolescence. The future belongs to those who adapt and evolve.

Figure 1 Businesses with a clear and unique offering will get the most out AI, using it as enabler or enhancer.

Power serves purpose

AI is a powerful equalizer, democratizing access to knowledge and skills. Specialized skills are becoming less important than the ability to effectively utilize AI tools. This shift is reminiscent of our ancestors, who learned to control fire and knowledge as tools to enhance their lives.

While access to AI is becoming increasingly widespread, it is important to focus on the strategic application of AI to drive value. AI itself does not create value; it amplifies existing value propositions. To truly leverage AI's potential, businesses and individuals must have a clear understanding of their purpose and mission.

In this era of AI, purpose becomes the ultimate differentiator. Businesses that cannot provide their core value offering without AI are using AI as an enabler. Those who use AI to improve their processes are using it as an enhancer. Whether you're using AI to streamline operations, innovate products, or improve customer experiences, your core purpose will guide your AI strategy and ensure long-term success.

AI is not a solution looking for problems

To maximize the benefits of AI, it is crucial that we apply it strategically. We want to focus on areas where AI can truly add value and solve specific problems. Following are tips to help you get started:

Define and refine your mission: Critically examine your core value proposition. Is it unique, essential, and difficult to replicate? AI is less likely to disrupt your business model unless your core value can be completely provided by AI. People and businesses involved in telemarketing, data entry, or assembly lines may have to upskill to decision making roles, redefine their mission, or change careers entirely.

Outline business processes and tasks: Create detailed process maps to visualize the flow of work and identify potential bottlenecks in your business or job. Break down tasks into smaller components to determine which parts can be automated. Evaluate the quality and accessibility of your data, as AI models rely on high-quality data to function effectively. Identify the skills and knowledge that AI cannot easily replace. These are the areas where you should focus your development and investment.

Identify AI opportunities: Identify tasks that could be replaced or improved by AI. Tasks that are repetitive, rule-based, and time-consuming are good candidates for automation. Other tasks, such as providing data-driven insights or automating complex calculations, can be enhanced by AI. Lastly, consider how AI can be used to develop new products, services, or business models.

Experiment and evaluate: Start with small-scale experiments to test the feasibility and effectiveness of AI solutions. Use key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the impact of AI on productivity, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. It is important to evaluate the safety and biasness of the AI. Continuously refine your AI solutions based on feedback and performance data.

Conclusion

Businesses and individuals can harness the power of AI to drive growth, innovation, and success in the digital age by following these steps. Successful application of AI depends on several other factors including using it ethically and responsibly, complying with data privacy regulations, and investing in training to equip you and your workforce with the right skills. It may also help to partner with AI experts to leverage their knowledge and experience.