



A Glimpse into Our **AI FUTURE**

BY ANTONY COUSINS



Without the understanding that humans bring, the output of AI will always be flawed.

Imagine this: You wake up not at an arbitrary time set on your alarm but at the optimum time given your sleep cycles. Your coffee, just the way you like it, is waiting for you. Your voice assistant tells you the headlines relevant to you and informs you that your first meeting is delayed, giving you an extra 10 minutes to get ready. While your autonomous vehicle navigates you to the office, you're entertained and informed by memes, posts, and articles that have been carefully curated and time-limited to safeguard your mental wellness. When you arrive, facial recognition admits you immediately and the elevator takes you to your floor. At your desk, your AI executive assistant provides an overview of emails it already responded to overnight and actions for which it needs your approval. It suggests some thought leadership content relevant to your day and blocks the required time before your meeting. Your deep-focus music mix kicks in.

Can you spot the moment that this story became make-believe? Yes, you got it—no matter how far technology in our personal lives advances, our experience of technology in the workplace always lags behind. There are some good reasons for this. As individuals, we have already accepted that access to leading-edge tech comes at a cost—often our personal data is sold to

power advertising. But corporate IT departments can't trade confidential IP as easily as we trade our browsing history. Or can they?

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THIS NOW?

Before we get into the current situation and our near-future potential, we need to look at why we're talking about AI. After all, haven't we had AI for years?

The AI we've become familiar with has made all sorts of shopping and viewing recommendations to us, as well as making predictions about future events, based on complex data, classified text, and other content. These tasks were often narrowly defined and required us to provide the AI with very specific direction and lots of feedback for the best results.

However, everything changed in November 2022 with OpenAI's release of GPT3.5, a large language model (LLM) significantly more sophisticated than anything before it. To help explain what a leap this was, I'll use the model of maturity suggested by Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, which has often been used to categorize employees within three levels of maturity—dependent, independent, or interdependent. Since



AI is now becoming part of our workforce, this model can help us explain what's happened and what's coming next.

Our use of AI so far has only been at this first level of maturity. AI has been entirely dependent on us to know what to do and what a good outcome looks like. However, with GPT 3.5, we hit the second level of maturity. With its increased understanding of the complexity and nuance of human language, AI can now carry out significantly more complex tasks than before and does not need a team of humans to provide feedback on that specific task. AI is now capable of independently carrying out tasks, much like a human employee. It can write emails from simple prompts, rewrite emails to be shorter or snappier, create works of art, songs, and poems, provide strategic advice on complex technical problems, or just write code for you. AI is now

ready and waiting to be asked to do many different tasks that previously only a human could perform—and for many of them, it can perform better.

While we're all still identifying uses for this technology and integrating them into our workflow, this is not the most advanced application of AI. That will come when we start developing multi-agent systems. At the third level, AI is capable of acting interdependently with other systems, including other AI systems, and does not need to know specific directions, just the end objective. Rather than asking it to write some code, you could ask it to build an app capable of specific functionality. Rather than asking AI to create some marketing copy, you could ask it to generate a certain number of leads for a certain budget, and it would create a whole campaign.

Level of AI Maturity	Human Maturity	Definition
Level 3 – AI Autopilot	Interdependent	Self-identified broad range of tasks, no feedback required
Level 2 – AI Co-pilot	Independent	More complex tasks, less specific direction required
Level 1 – AI Assistant	Dependent	Narrowly defined tasks, specific direction and feedback required

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SOUNDS GREAT, BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?

It seems like technology providers announce new integrations of level 2-type AI “co-pilots” every day. Content creation, summarization, explanation, suggestions, and similar applications of AI are coming in every new release. But each AI iteration will require new ways of working and will have cultural, financial, legal, and ethical implications as well as the obvious potential cost increases. With so many different potential applications, how do we prioritize what to use AI for?

Consider two factors: your margin and stakeholder value. Applying AI in a way that either decreases your costs through automation or increases revenue will have a beneficial impact on your company’s margin. However, if you use it to automate processes that were previously conducted by humans, such as support, and your clients are aware of the change, they’re going to put downward pressure on the price they pay for your services because they know it’s costing you less to provide them. The table below demonstrates this point and provides a simple prioritization matrix that focuses on increasing revenue and perceived value over cutting costs.

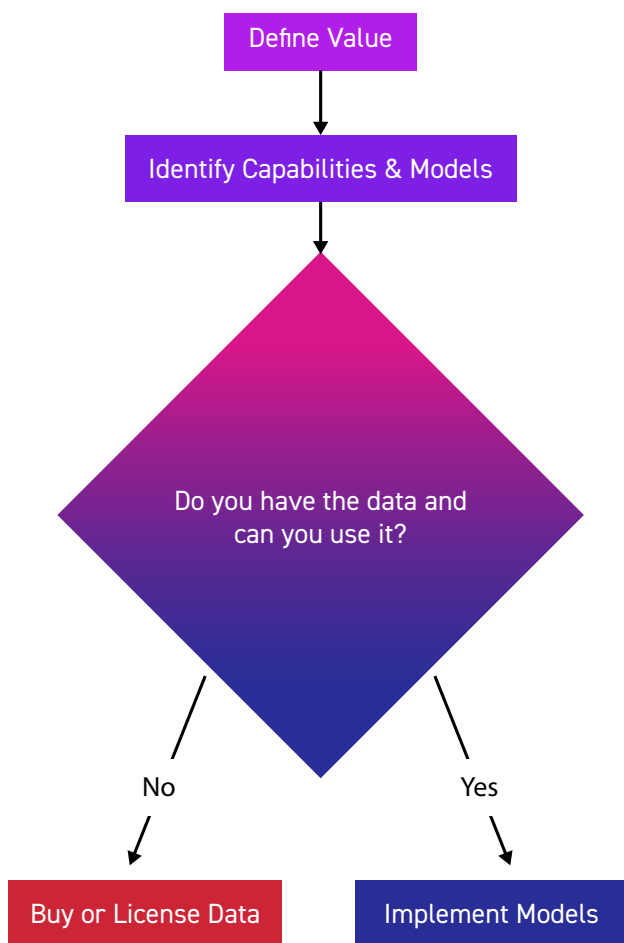
There are other reasons to focus on AI initiatives that increase revenue or perceived value. The first is that initiatives that prioritize value creation will be more readily adopted by employees, especially in organizations with profit-sharing or

other top-line performance incentives in place, than initiatives that cut costs, especially if those cost-cutting measures result in fewer jobs. SAG-AFTRA brought Hollywood to a standstill, and won, because of this very issue. The second reason is that AI provides much faster routes to more and new revenue, with significantly greater upside potential than standard cost-cutting tactics, which have finite and diminishing returns as well as the risks of adverse staff reactions and downward pricing pressure from customers.

WHEN DO WE GET TO AUTONOMOUS AI?

Almost all the AI being implemented right now is level 2 AI “co-pilot” type applications. However, the capability of the models we’re already using supports level 3 AI “autopilot.” So why haven’t we seen more advanced offerings? There are two key reasons. First, it’s not easy to build a scalable product that turns probabilistic and inconsistent (by design) text-based responses from a language model into a more deterministic output that an application can use and enable a user to interact with. Second, the legal and ethical implications that arise from providing AI with the ability to make decisions, and act on them, is still being thought through in many industries. We will see these issues start to be resolved in 2024. So we can expect even bigger leaps in capability in the next few months, requiring even more consideration of the technical and cultural impacts.

Stakeholder Value	Perceived Increase	Priority 2	Priority 1
	Perceived Decrease	Priority 3	Not possible
		Decreased Cost	Increased Revenue
		Margin	



CULTURAL CHANGE RATHER THAN TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Yes, there will be significant cultural impacts if you want to exploit AI to the fullest. For example, the young adults currently in education are building a fundamentally different relationship with AI than the one we (or I, at least) was brought up with, where HAL 9000 and *The Terminator* were the dominant cultural references.

For younger people today, though, AI is the best study partner they've ever had. By the time the next generation is finished with their education, they will be masters in exploiting AI and will have no concerns in doing so. We must ask ourselves, however, what this new generation will lack as a result of relying on generative AI for their homework assignments, book reports, and exam prep. Will they have the same level of creativity or critical thinking? Will they be able to judge the difference between good output and great output as well as those of us who have faced the "blank page" problem hundreds of times?

Be prepared to have to train for creativity, design thinking, and critical thinking in a way we've not had to do before. Know that

doing so, and embedding creativity into your culture, will have a much greater positive impact on your business than previously, given the much stronger relationship we now have between imagination and revenue potential powered by AI. Don't hire fewer junior people because you think AI can do their jobs. Hire more, because they come with an army of AI co-pilots and they're not afraid to use them.

AUTOMATION BY AI VERSUS COMPANY VALUE

Commercial and open-source AI can offer massive benefits to an organization. They'll also be used by your competitors, so how do you create differentiation? It will be increasingly necessary to develop or fine-tune commercial models on your own data, for two reasons: control and protection of your IP and the perceived value of your business.

It is likely that AI vendors will want to use your data to improve their services. They may even incentivize you to do so with discounted prices. This approach has long been a part of standard terms of service. The new risk is that through the use of generative AI, the IP you input to a system may now become part of someone else's output. If there are AI capabilities you want, but you can't share the relevant data with a third-party provider for whatever reason, you'll have to build that capability yourself.

Second, in a future where AI offers us greater productivity gains than the invention of the steam engine, you can be sure that every board member, shareholder, and journalist will be interested in your development and application of AI. "We use ChatGPT!" might not cut it. You'll need an AI strategy. Many of the topics covered above will feed into that strategy, but ensuring a sustainable supply of proprietary data and the necessary legal and ethical approvals to use it in training AI should be at its core. The flowchart above will help you think through your route to data, working back from the value you want to be able to create. Your technical teams can help you fill in the details. Don't have technical teams? Well, that should be the first step of your AI strategy.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK?

If every business is now using AI to automate the tasks that humans used to perform, what do humans do?

We still have a critical, but different, role. Based on our experience, we know when to push back on a request from a client or colleague or purposefully exceed a brief, and this ability will remain a key part of our value and purpose. Without that understanding, the AI's output will always be flawed. So where AI may take more responsibility for the what and the how, we humans will still be responsible for the why. [AQ](#)

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