

Leadership in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Reclaiming the Human Core of Management

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The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed the landscape of organizations, reshaping how decisions are made, work is performed, and value is created. From predictive analytics and automated workflows to intelligent decision-support systems, AI is increasingly embedded in managerial processes. While these technologies promise efficiency, accuracy, and scalability, they also raise a critical question for management scholars and practitioners alike: what is the role of leadership in an era where machines can think, learn, and decide?

Contrary to the belief that AI may diminish the relevance of human leadership, the current era demands leadership more than ever albeit of a different kind. Leadership in the age of AI is no longer defined solely by authority, technical expertise, or hierarchical control. Instead, it centres on sense making, ethical judgment, emotional intelligence, and the ability to guide organizations through unprecedented complexity and uncertainty.

One of the most profound impacts of AI is on decision-making. Algorithms can process vast amounts of data and generate insights faster than any human could. However, AI-driven decisions are only as good as the data and assumptions embedded within them. Leaders must therefore act as critical interpreters rather than passive consumers of algorithmic outputs. Strategic leadership now involves questioning AI recommendations, understanding their limitations, and contextualizing them within organizational values, stakeholder expectations, and long-term goals. Moreover, the rise of AI has intensified ethical and governance challenges. Issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, workforce displacement, and accountability for automated decisions demand moral and responsible leadership. Machines may optimize outcomes, but they cannot define what is fair, just, or socially acceptable. Leaders play a pivotal role in establishing ethical frameworks for AI adoption, ensuring transparency, and fostering trust among employees, customers, and society at large. In this sense, leadership becomes the moral compass guiding technological progress.

AI has also redefined the nature of work and the leader follower relationship. As routine tasks become automated, human effort increasingly shifts toward creativity, collaboration, and problem solving. Leaders must therefore focus on enabling learning, reskilling, and psychological safety within organizations. Empowering employees to work alongside intelligent systems requires transformational leadership that inspires confidence rather than fear, and inclusion rather than resistance. The ability to manage change compassionately is now a core leadership competency.

Furthermore, leadership in the AI era requires a balance between technological fluency and human-centered thinking. While leaders need not be technical experts, they must possess sufficient AI literacy to engage

meaningfully with data scientists and technologists. At the same time, they must preserve the human essence of organizations empathy, purpose, and shared meaning which cannot be replicated by machines. This dual capability distinguishes effective leaders from mere technology adopters.

From a strategic perspective, AI amplifies both opportunities and risks. Organizations led by visionary leaders can leverage AI for innovation, competitive advantage, and sustainable growth. Conversely, poor leadership may result in over-reliance on technology, erosion of human judgment, and loss of organizational identity. Thus, leadership acts as the integrative force aligning AI capabilities with organizational strategy and societal responsibility.

In conclusion, the age of artificial intelligence does not signal the end of leadership; rather, it marks its evolution. As machines become more intelligent, leadership must become more human. The future of management lies not in choosing between humans and AI, but in cultivating leadership that harmonizes technological intelligence with human wisdom. For scholars and practitioners in management sciences, understanding and developing such leadership is not merely relevant it is imperative.