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AI: HIGHLY DISRUPTIVE, YET HIGHLY MISUNDERSTOOD

AI Is the Next Productivity Revolution, But Businesses Need to Start with the Problem

Over the past decade, emerging technologies such as automation, artificial intelligence, data visualization, and robotics have steadily reshaped how organizations operate. Among them, however, artificial intelligence has proven to be both the most transformative and the most misunderstood.

At its core, AI should not be viewed as a replacement for people, but as the next major step in the long evolution of productivity tools. Much of my early work with emerging technologies focused on using automation to eliminate repetitive, manual tasks. This is where AI presents one of the greatest opportunities today, particularly for small and mid-sized businesses that often operate with lean teams and limited resources.

Many finance and accounting teams spend a significant portion of their time managing spreadsheets, reconciling data across systems, and assembling reports. AI-enabled automation can streamline much of this work, from financial reporting and monitoring to elements of risk analysis. When routine tasks are automated, teams gain capacity to focus on higher-value activities such as strategic planning, operational improvements, and supporting the broader mission of the organization.

Another significant advantage is the ability to access and analyze data more quickly. Historically, many businesses have relied on monthly or quarterly reporting cycles to evaluate performance. AI-driven analytics can shorten that feedback loop dramatically, giving leaders more timely insights into the current state of their operations. With faster access to reliable data, organizations can make more informed decisions and adapt more quickly to changing market conditions.

Despite these advantages, many organizations struggle with where to begin. A common mistake is focusing on the tools themselves rather than the business problems they are meant to solve. Instead of starting with technology, businesses should begin by identifying a specific operational challenge. For example, the quarter-end reporting process may take too long, key data points may require extensive manual reconciliation, or teams may lack confidence in the accuracy of certain reports from disparate legacy systems. Once the underlying problem is clearly defined, organizations can evaluate solutions, such as workflow automation platforms, data analytics tools, or AI assistants designed to streamline specific processes.

This problem-first approach helps ensure that AI adoption delivers meaningful results rather than becoming another underutilized piece of software. Ultimately, artificial intelligence is best understood as a capability amplifier. Like other transformative tools before it, its impact will depend largely on how effectively people learn to use it. Organizations that approach AI thoughtfully, focusing on real business problems and empowering their teams to leverage the technology will be best positioned to capture its full potential.

The companies that succeed in the coming years will not simply adopt AI; they will integrate it into the way they solve problems and make decisions.

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