Beat: Technology

AI Isn't Just About Computers. It's About Technology AND People.

Is AI About Computers or People?

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USPA NEWS - I often talk to people in all walks of life about Artificial Intelligence. Most people don't think of AI as "good" or "bad" in a single way. They see benefits and risks all at the same time. To be honest, no one knows for sure where it will go, but I think we'll find out sooner, rather than later.

One thing is for certain. It's not just about computers, software, data centers or hyperscalers. It's about people too. One of the best reports I've seen that helps explain this is research firm Forrester's "Ground Your Workforce AI Strategy In Human Experience" offering.

The Lead Analyst, J. P. Gownder, Vice President and Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, known as 'JP' to most, headed up the report with contributions from James McQuivey, PhD, Shynise McElveen and Bill Nagel, all at Forrester.

His opening remarks are "Too many leaders see their workforce AI deployment as primarily a technology and data exercise".

That perception couldn't be further from the truth: JP goes on to say: "Today's AI remains intimately tied to human users, whose experience with the technology will be a principal determinant of its success or failure. Framing AI as a tool that builds new opportunities for employees in their jobs, lives, and future careers can help. And designing a human-centric culture of AI to reinforce positive practices, beliefs, and behaviors will drive both employee experience and business success."

At last, a human approach. The report makes a strong case for neglecting the human element at your peril. Forrester makes a point that "Underinvesting In Humans Will Undercut Your AI Strategy", suggesting that most AI augments humans rather than replacing them. They make other points such as employee buy-in is crucial to successful adoption of AI, and that misuse can lead to quality breakdowns and ethical lapses, as when employees lack skill with AI, it generates serious business risks. They go on to make the statement that "excessive reliance on AI undercuts human performance.

One of the biggest impressions made on me was that "Cognitive offloading risks cognitive laziness and dependence. A recent academic study reveals the double-edged sword of workforce AI. On the one hand, using AI can help employees by "delegating tasks such as memory retention, decision-making, and information retrieval to external systems," freeing up time and energy for other work. On the other hand, it may lead to a reduction in cognitive effort, fostering what "researchers refer to as 'cognitive laziness.'" The study shows a negative correlation between frequent AI tool use and critical thinking, meaning that people who use AI tools more often see decreasing critical thinking skills. In some cases, they become dependent and forget how to conduct tasks themselves." So there you have it. WE might think we're getting brighter as individuals in the workplace. But maybe, just maybe, we're getting dimmer and lazier.

They go on to talk about how some leaders are 'Satisficing'. Satisficing means accepting an adequate result rather than the optimal solution, leading to an acceptance of the cheaper alternative, resulting in a net loss to the business.

Then, of course, there is the thought that AI will take your job. Forrester quotes a Gallup survey that found that 75% of US workers believe that AI will reduce the total number of jobs over the next 10 years; 77% don't trust businesses to use AI responsibly. One leader who deployed AI to help HR recruiters "got pushback because the recruiters felt it was a criticism of them not doing their jobs well." But, Forrester says, a human focus can help. Their advice is "embrace workforce AI as an opportunity builder for employees.

Overall, it's a report worth reading. Forrester goes into more detail about how organizations should start to showcase success stories, to build skills and career paths, and to try to solve intractable problems (with people!). Forrester advises building a human-centric culture to support AI success, involving shared purpose, establishing a pattern of positive behaviors around AI, creating a cadence of touchpoints around genAI, and including those things that employees "see" around them reinforcing the priorities of the culture of the organization.

Yes, jobs may be lost to AI, but used properly, many more meaningful jobs and careers are likely to be created. Which is nothing new.

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