

A F R I C A ' S

AI LEAPFROG

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AFRICA'S AI LEAPFROG

Africa's technology trajectory has long been about leapfrogging. The mobile phone has allowed it to skip the fixed lines, while mobile money has enabled African countries to bypass the need for banks. Cloud technology is assisting businesses in achieving digital capabilities without the burden of old IT investments.



This opportunity may not just belong to African businesses that are fast in adopting AI. It could belong to organizations that are willing to rethink their management, leadership, structure, and competition in light of this technology.

McKinsey estimates that the adoption of AI at a significant scale could bring economic value of between \$61 and \$103 billion to Africa

with technology, telecoms, and financial services being among the quickest industries to adopt such technologies. Hence, the question for African boards today should not simply be

"SHOULD WE ADOPT AI?"

THE REAL QUESTION WOULD BE:

**WHAT WILL OUR
COMPANY BE LIKE WITH
INTELLIGENT DEVICES?**



The biggest mistake executive managers can make is thinking of AI as just another technology. They will **buy licenses, test it out through pilot projects, and wait for positive results to be seen.**

This attitude can lead to interesting results, yet the strategic importance of the technology will be lost. The technology may affect all areas of an enterprise, such as customer service, finance, procurement, marketing, software development, risk management, and decision-making.

PwC's research demonstrates that although many organizations have started to work with AI, very few have been able to scale it. The downside is that many experiments can take place,

**WHILE THE REAL
QUESTION REMAINS
UNANSWERED**

WHAT BENEFIT
**WAS ACHIEVED BY
THOSE TESTS?**

**LEAPFROGGING IS NOT IDENTICAL
WITH COPYING **SILICON VALLEY****



African companies can operate in different regulatory, cultural, infrastructural, and market realities. Therefore, what works in a multinational company with a big IT budget may not work for **a Kenyan bank, a Nigerian insurance company, or a Ghanaian manufacturing company.**

The message is that Africa does not have to be smaller Silicon Valley. It will be much more intelligent, because it will understand the realities of running a business better than anyone else. A logistics company operating in a fragmented market, poor infrastructure, informal trade, and several languages may find AI more useful than anything else in the country's operations.



THE BOARDROOM SHOULD START THE CHANGE

Successful African companies will not be the ones to introduce many AI tricks. They will be the ones to ask good questions:

How can AI affect our business?

01

What human skills become more valuable?

02

Where can there be regulatory exposure?

03

Are we assessing real business value, or productivity gains?

04

And most importantly:

Have we created our own AI capability, or are we just taking what has been established by the West?

05

Africa does not have to win the AI race by becoming another Silicon Valley, but to learn how to combine technology, African market intelligence, strong governance, and human judgment to achieve success.

About the Author

Dr. Fumbi Chima is a global technology executive who has led digital and operational transformation initiatives at industry-leading brands including adidas, Burberry, Walmart, Boeing Credit Union, and Fox Networks. Her experience spans P&L ownership, M&A, operations, and enterprise technology leadership across retail, CPG, digital, and financial services.

She is widely recognized as an AI thought leader with a strong reputation for aligning innovation with business goals to deliver sustainable value and competitive advantage. At adidas AG, she spearheaded large-scale infrastructure and process transformations, achieving cost savings, accelerating speed to market, and enabling cross-market scalability.

Known for bridging the gap between technology and business, she fosters high-performance cultures rooted in innovation, accountability, and transparency. Her leadership has consistently increased employee engagement and organizational impact.

Throughout her career, she has championed innovative solutions in data strategy, digital marketing, and cybersecurity, always with a relentless focus on driving growth and enhancing customer experience.



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