WHY THE FUTURE OF AI LEADERSHIP

WILL BE DECIDED BY CULTURE, NOT CODE

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WHY CULTURE WILL DETERMINE AI LEADERS OF THE FUTURE, NOT CODE.

We often think that AI leadership is simply a competition between technologies, such as:

MODELS **INFRASTRUCTURES** **TALENT**

and while these elements are important, there is another crucial variable that soon becomes visible: Organizations with similar access to technologies create very different outcomes, but in nearly all cases it won't be because of technical code.

It will be due to the surrounding culture of the code.



While we commonly misuse the word 'culture', in the world of AI and machine learning it has very specific meanings. Cultural context creates the opportunity for the application of AI technology.

ARE TEAMS COMFORTABLE TAKING RISKS WITH EXPERIMENTATION?

IS FAILURE VIEWED AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING, OR A LIABILITY?

IS INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION ENCOURAGED, OR SUBTLY DISCOURAGED?

These cultural inquiries will impact how AI technology will be utilized.
I have seen highly skilled engineering teams reluctant to deploy models because they do not believe that the entire organization is psychologically prepared to accept the model from a key stakeholder perspective.



Trust is, therefore, the key currency, both in terms of customer trust, and in terms of trust from internal constituents.

A business leader does not possess full knowledge of the workings of the model, either, but instead either over-trusts or under-trusts the models. And, neither of those is appropriate. Consequently, closing this gap between the technical and the business sides often means creating trust relationships that allow for translations to occur. Leaders who can be both technical and business-oriented but nonetheless maintain the nuances of each will be of great value, and thus will possess an increasingly rare and valuable skill set.

TALENT VS. CULTURE



Companies spend a lot of resources on AI talent and rightfully so; however, simply hiring top-talent will not guarantee that the team can achieve desired outcomes. If the surrounding culture will not accept change, even the most talented team will have difficulty being successful. In addition, retaining top talent is often difficult in an environment that does not demonstrate the value of one's work or allow for experimentation.



INCLUSIVE DECISION MAKING

This is an area that I do believe remains relatively under-acknowledged. Diverse teams provide a much broader view of how AI technologies ought to be implemented and where potential areas of failure exist.

In fact, this is a functional explanation, as many of the blind spots present in AI systems will be a direct reflection of the blind spots of the teams developing them.
An AI leader is more concerned with developing the environment for the emergence of good questions rather than providing the right answers. An AI leader will create an environment where Charles S. Curie and his agency can succeed at challenging assumptions.

Understandably, this may be a less comfortable experience for organizations that have been accustomed to a high level of certainty; however, relying solely on the technology of an organization does not offer sufficient assurance.

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-scaleinfrastructure 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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