

Not Another Technology

A Human Intelligence Leadership (HIL) Perspective

Marcelo Lemos | Innovar Consulting Corporation

Every leader reaching for a familiar analogy to make sense of AI is reaching for the wrong one, and the reach itself is the first sign of trouble. The responsibility of leadership right now is not to deploy a new tool well; it is to recognize that the business community is quietly minimizing the scale of what is ahead, even as a genuine and unresolved possibility, an economy of abundance no one has ever lived inside, sits on the other side of the same change.

This article makes both claims at once. It names the avoidance directly, because naming it is the only honest place to begin, and it refuses to pretend anyone yet knows where this ends, because pretending would be its own form of avoidance.

Why the Analogies Fail

Electricity. The internet. The assembly line. Each gets offered as the precedent that should calm everyone down. None of them fits.

Those technologies changed what people did. They made work faster, cheaper, more distributed. But not one of them produced something that resembles human judgment. A power grid never offered an opinion. A factory line never made a recommendation. The internet moved information; it did not decide what the information meant.

AI is the first technology whose output looks like a decision. It arrives as a recommendation, a conclusion, an opinion. That is a difference in kind, not in degree, and it is the difference most analogies are built to hide.

Two further things separate it from everything before. It compounds and spreads faster than people and organizations can adapt; electricity and the internet took decades to become infrastructure, and AI is reaching comparable depth in a fraction of that time. And it changes what it means to be useful as a human being, not merely which tasks get automated.

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I have watched the consequence of confusing the two inside the rooms where I work. Leaders treat an AI-generated recommendation as the decision itself, rather than as one input to a decision they are still accountable for making. Organizations adopt tools and agents faster than they build any governance to oversee them. The analogy told them this was just another rollout. It was not.

The Collective Avoidance

The most capable people I know are minimizing what is coming. Not out of malice. Out of comfort.

This is the core of what I want to say, so I will say it plainly. The business community is engaged in a collective avoidance, and it shows up in two sentences that end the conversation before it can start.

The first, and by far the most common: every technology disrupts jobs, and it always works out. The sentence borrows false comfort from history. It treats the past as a reliable guide to a technology that, by everything described above, behaves like nothing that came before. The reassurance is real; the basis for it is not.

The second is more cynical, and I hear it in boardrooms and from small business owners alike. This is someone else's problem. A policy problem. A societal problem. Not theirs to engage with.

I have had this exact conversation with leaders, colleagues, and friends, people I consider far more intelligent than I am, and I have watched them reach for one of those two sentences and visibly relax. On what may be the most significant challenge and opportunity humanity has ever faced, they stopped thinking the moment the comfortable phrase did its work.

That is what makes this a structural blind spot rather than a failure of intelligence. The deflecting sentence is not appealing because people cannot see clearly. It is appealing because it is comfortable, and comfort does not require competence to be seductive. Smart people fall for it precisely because it asks nothing of them.

What Is Actually Being Minimized

Job displacement is the part people think they have already priced in. They have not. The displacement is reaching mid-level and white-collar work, the analytical and professional roles leaders assumed were safe because they were never the roles automation touched before. The line everyone drew between routine work and judgment work is moving, and it is moving upward.

There is also a concentration question that rarely makes it into the room. The systems doing this work are controlled by a small number of companies and a small number of people. Power and wealth follow control, and the control here is unusually narrow. A leader who cares about the health of markets cannot treat that as background noise.

Then there is erosion through disuse. Judgment is a skill, and skills atrophy when something else does the hardest thinking. An organization that routes its most difficult reasoning through a system, year after year, should not be surprised when its people lose the capacity to reason that way at all. What is lost is not only competence. It is meaning, the sense that the work asked something of the person doing it.

And there is the possibility almost no one is willing to face directly: an abundance economy that has never existed before. This is the part I want to be most careful about. It is possible that AI makes the old assumptions about scarcity, labor, and income obsolete. It is also possible it does not. Nobody knows which, and that includes me.

Pretending we know where the abundance question lands, toward optimism or toward dread, is not analysis. It is avoidance wearing a more confident face.

What I am certain of is that neither business leaders nor politicians currently have the right questions about it, let alone the answers. Pretending otherwise, in either direction, is not clarity. False optimism and false dread are the same avoidance pointed at different walls.

The Leader's Responsibility

Human Intelligence Leadership holds that accountability extends to stakeholders beyond shareholders. That principle stops being abstract the moment a technology like this one arrives, because the people most affected by it are rarely the ones who own the company.

The first obligation is candor toward your own workforce. People deserve to hear what is coming from leadership before a restructuring announcement makes the conversation unavoidable. Silence is a decision, and it is the wrong one.

The second is participation in the wider dialogue. Leaders should help shape the societal conversation about AI's impact rather than wait for regulation to define the questions for them. Waiting passively is how the second avoidance, this is someone else's problem, becomes self-fulfilling.

The third is a matter of design. Leaders have a specific responsibility to understand, define, and build the human layer inside their organizations. The human layer is not a residual category of roles AI has not reached yet. It is a designed one: the work an organization deliberately preserves for discernment, accountability, and agency, precisely because those things cannot be delegated to a system no matter how capable it becomes.

The Question Worth Sitting With

The avoidance is comfortable because it lets the present continue undisturbed. Naming it does not. That is the trade this asks of a leader: give up the comfort, and accept the discomfort of thinking clearly about something no one has answers for yet.

None of this requires certainty about how it ends. It requires refusing to outsource the question to history, to policy, or to the small group of people who happen to control the systems. The work of facing it directly belongs to the people in charge of organizations, now, before the answers exist.

I hold a personal view about what the human layer becomes at a scale larger than any one company, what a human role looks like inside an economy of abundance that may or may not arrive. I hold it loosely, as a view rather than an argument, and I am developing it in full in a future piece, "What to do with humans?" For now it is enough to say I believe there is a human layer at that scale too, and that it is worth building toward rather than waiting to discover.

So the question is not whether AI will change your industry. It is this: when you reach for the sentence that makes this feel manageable, are you thinking, or are you relaxing?