

Leader – Managers in the Robotic Era

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Philosophers, sociologists, politicians, researchers, business executives, universities, think tanks, the military, and many others have studied and posited the questions of what leadership is and who leaders are. The common thread seems to deal with the reciprocities of groups, tribes, nations, cultures, organizations, and individuals who stand out due to their influence or power over the masses.

Leadership is viewed as a universal function of association. “The assumptions with which we start are, first, that leadership is a function common to all the different stages of the social process, from its simplest and most primitive to its most complex and highly developed manifestations; second, that it is a function in the expression of all kinds of social interests, whether the interactions be inter-individual or inter-group, Leadership is one of the most primary forms of association. It arises wherever there are interactions reciprocities of individuals or groups, no matter what the purposes or aims of these interactions.” i

The question of what leadership is will continue to challenge us to rethink how we lead and manage organizations in the ensuing AI - Robotic Era. As technology continues its exponential near-vertical path, the changes in how businesses function and, importantly, how they are led will likely be far different from anything we have ever experienced. I am concerned that we have become too dependent on leadership and management models that may have been best suited for prior industrial revolutions but not the ones we currently face or may face in subsequent eras.

I am suggesting the evolution of a new interrelationship between what is referred to as the functional leader and a manager in the robotic era. I am referring to the developing relationship between human workers and robots with AI and the inevitable relationship between Functional Leaders and Managers of robotic teams, whether the teams are all robotic or comprised of humans and robots.

The exponential pace of technology is becoming so rapid that to keep pace; organizations will have to be nimbler, more creative, more innovative, less risk-averse, and, more importantly, have a more rapid, proactive approach to strategic decision-making. This will necessitate a bias against the status quo. We will need new roles, skills, and mindsets of the functional leaders – managers.

It is important to note that I am not suggesting there be no hierarchy of leadership or deployment of skills that have effectively aided leadership and management. We will still need a hierarchy of leadership executives but as part of a full roster of individuals with functional leader—manager skill sets.

In the AI Robotic Era, functional leaders and managers must develop a strategic vision emphasizing AI as integral to the business strategy. This does not mean being dogmatic about their vision but staying agile and flexible to seize fast-developing opportunities. They must advocate for technological adoption, encourage experimentation, and create a culture that embraces innovation.

The Functional Leader—managers will need to embrace digital technology literacy and enable them to guide the integration of technology into the overall business strategy. This includes the ability to use visionary, innovative thinking and data-informed decision-making.

Traditional leadership has always focused on being in command and seen to be in command. The functional leaders—managers—should be felt more than seen. This is a light touch vs. a heavy touch.

As remote work becomes more prevalent, functional leader-managers must learn to manage virtual teams effectively.

The AI-Robotic revolution blurs boundaries between disciplines; functional leaders and managers must collaborate adroitly across all business functions and departments.

While leveraging AI, functional leader-managers should maintain a human-centric approach. This involves active listening and consideration of the well-being of all employees, especially addressing concerns related to job displacement and ensuring that technologies are used to enhance human capabilities rather than replace them.

As organizations increasingly integrate AI and robotic technologies, the functional leader—manager role will become more essential to the business's value creation.

In summary, the synergy between AI and robotics holds immense potential for creating intelligent, adaptable, and efficient systems that benefit organizations, societies, and workers.