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Emotional Intelligence in an AI-Driven Workplace

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more capable, the distinctly human dimensions of leadership become more important - not less. Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing what leaders and organizations are capable of doing. Information can be accessed in seconds, analyses generated almost instantly and increasingly, AI can execute tasks rather than simply provide information. This raises an important question: ***When access to information and cognitive capability becomes increasingly democratized, what differentiates an effective leader?***

Part of the answer lies in distinctly human capabilities: exercising judgment, understanding context, building trust, navigating ambiguity and adapting behavior. Many of these capabilities are closely connected to emotional intelligence.

AI changes where leadership adds value

For a long time, expertise and access to information were important sources of leadership authority. AI is changing that. AI can provide an analysis. A leader still needs to determine whether it makes sense in context. AI can propose a course of action. A leader still needs to consider its consequences. And AI can help develop a transformation plan, but a leader still needs to understand how people will experience that transformation.

The leadership challenge increasingly becomes less about **having all the answers** and more about knowing **which questions to ask, which answers to trust and how to bring people with you.**

This matters because AI transformation is also a human transformation.

Employees are being asked to change established ways of working, develop new capabilities and reconsider expertise they may have spent years building. Some will see opportunity; others may experience uncertainty or resistance. **The more organizations transform through technology, the more leaders need to understand the human experience of that transformation.**

When answers are abundant, human judgment matters

Generative AI can produce convincing recommendations remarkably quickly. But speed and confidence are not the same as sound judgment. Leaders still need to challenge assumptions, recognize incomplete information and consider different perspectives. This requires self-awareness. How readily do I accept an answer that confirms what I already believe? How does pressure affect my decisions? Do I become overly cautious when uncertainty increases - or act too quickly? The same applies to relationships.

AI can generate communication almost instantly. But generating communication is not the same as creating connection. People still notice whether their leader listens, whether difficult issues can be discussed openly and whether their concerns are understood.

Technology can scale communication. Leadership still needs to create trust.



Emotional intelligence is part of the equation

As AI takes on more analytical tasks, leaders increasingly need to rely on distinctly human capabilities: **understanding emotions, exercising judgment, building trust and navigating change**. These capabilities are closely connected to emotional intelligence (EI). Research supports the importance of EI, with meta-analyses finding positive relationships with job performance, satisfaction and organizational commitment, and a negative relationship with job stress.

EI is not the sole determinant of leadership effectiveness, but an important and developable capability in an AI-driven workplace.

Development starts with self-awareness. Assessments, combined with professional debriefing and coaching, can help leaders identify strengths, blind spots and behavioral patterns.

The critical step is connecting these insights to real leadership challenges. For example, understanding how a leader responds when AI disrupts established processes, influences decisions or creates uncertainty among employees. The objective is not a perfect EI profile, but more intentional leadership choices in the situations that matter.

Developing the human side of an AI-enabled organization

Organizations are understandably investing heavily in AI technology and skills. But there is another side of the transformation worth considering:

As we build the technological capabilities required for an AI-enabled organization, are we equally intentional about developing the human capabilities required to lead it?

The future of leadership is unlikely to be a choice between human and artificial intelligence. AI can expand what leaders are capable of doing. But understanding themselves, understanding others and recognizing what their environment requires of them remain fundamentally human leadership challenges.

A conversation worth having

At **The Nexo Partnership**, I help leaders strengthen these capabilities through assessment, coaching and leadership development - connecting individual insight to the organizational context in which they lead.

If your organization is considering how leadership needs to evolve alongside AI, I would be happy to explore that conversation with you.

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