Generative Power – Mapping AI Systems

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MidJourney

A decade ago, when Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms began talking about New Power, it was a jump across a chasm from command-and-control management to much more distributed, horizontal leadership styles. Power, they declared, was no longer something to be hoarded but an energy built upon collaboration and diversity.

But now, as AI technology makes its quantum leap, we are faced with another recalibration of power relations. And Heinemann and Timms are again exploring who the decision-makers are and how that is unraveling. They are dubbing our

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current digital slipstream the Age of Auto-sapience, where algorithms are more human than humans, and AI is displaying characteristics that are agentic (they act), adaptive (they adapt), amiable (they befriend), and arcane (they are mystifying). They say our experience of power is changing again.

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The point of personifying these new generative technologies is to get to know them less abstractly. This is a useful activity if we're to better understand and have agency in our future. Heimans and Timms believe that as AI synthesises and curates more and more of our lives, power will be recentralised and channeled through a "cognitive funnel." This contraction of power means that we will actively have to pursue a diversity of viewpoints to counter its naturally restricting contours.

On the other hand, the increase in individual creators and start-ups may be set to explode as AI continues to make it easier to design and build businesses. And though this provides a great opportunity, it comes with the caveat that the people most likely to benefit from this surge will be Big Tech.

The area of governance could also field a massive change as governments become comfortable with the reliability and suitability of generative AI. There will possibly be a shift to enabling AI to "run" the world's bureaucracies as they "synthesize stakeholder preferences" and "model impacts of complex policy decisions."

The question is, how will we manage the impact on humanity?

Leading in a Generative Power World

Whatever the exact trajectory of AI might be, it's time to consider what it means to lead in this environment. Who do we need to be in the auto-sapient era, and what kind of leadership

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stretch will that entail?

Heimans and Timms see the emergence of a two-pronged skillset. Leaders will have to be able to successfully manage the technological benefits (and challenges) while continuing to champion the value of human attributes and actions. *In other words, we have to be more tech-wise, yet more human-centric than we've ever been.*

To this end, they suggest amping the following:

Make friends with AI — leaders should treat generative AI more as a co-worker than a tool. This includes being perceptive enough to doubt them as well as appreciate them.

Champion the tribe — not a specific tribe; the human tribe. How can we create better and more valuable experiences for ourselves now that we are freed of certain roles and responsibilities? Creative output may become the next popular currency as we have time to ideate and explore the human factor.

Acknowledge the tension — between AI efficiency and a pro-human approach. Where will you land in this tug-of-war and how will you manage it?

Heimans and Timms also issue a final warning. If we treat new generative AI systems as actors, not tools, we are more likely to be energetically involved in the policies and decisions made in this space. If we don't, the future of the human race could sit entirely in the hands of the technologists.

And is that what we want?

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