PUTTING HUMANS AT THE HEART OF YOUR AI TRANSFORMATION

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming industries, reshaping jobs, and redefining competitive advantage. While AI once seemed like a futuristic 'nice to have,' it has swiftly become a critical component of business strategy, with significant implications for workforce dynamics and organisational culture. According to recent findings from the World Economic Forum, 50% of small to medium-sized businesses that have adopted Gen AI are already reporting revenue increases of 10% or more.

Yet amid this unprecedented technological shift, organisations face a pivotal challenge: how to integrate AI effectively without losing sight of the human elements that drive creativity, empathy, and critical decision-making. A potential competitive edge lies in leveraging human strengths alongside machine capabilities, crafting an AI strategy that firmly places people at its core.

I recently hosted a webinar featuring Chris Tomlinson, Muuto Managing Director, Eugene Chin, Group Director of Strategic Workforce and People Analytics at Sky and Andrew Dickinson, EVP Business Transformation at Sage, to explore the importance of putting people at the core of your AI strategy. This article explores insights from our discussion on how organisations can effectively put humans at the heart of their AI transformation, ensuring that technological advancements are more likely to amplify, rather than risk undermining, human potential.

Why human-centric AI matters

AI has the potential to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and enhance decision-making, but to achieve these benefits requires a workforce that trusts and values it.

People are often instinctively fearful of change, particularly in a world of heightened political and economic turbulence. That makes prioritising human engagement even more important when you are implementing an AI transformation.

Integrating AI into an organisation isn't just a tech transition, it's a human one. As I shared in the webinar, people and organisations are more likely to persist with the status quo, unless they are supported by a culture that nurtures AI adoption.

Shifting mindsets and driving workforce development

This kind of culture doesn't happen by accident. It has to be built on fundamentals such as transparency about the impact of AI and investment in pathways that help adapt to this new world. If people have clarity about their role in an AI-enabled future and training to develop the skills to thrive in it, they are more likely to embrace change.

Speaking from his experience in his role at Sky, Eugene commented, "People need to see investment and new jobs coming through otherwise they will lose trust in that openness." If you can get to a point at which people view AI as a way to augment their capabilities and careers, rather than replace them, you're in a good position.

This sentiment was echoed by Andrew, who framed AI adoption as an opportunity to elevate human contributions. "Taking the bot out of the human," as he put it, allows employees to focus on strategic, high-value tasks rather than repetitive administrative work.

AI excels at data-driven tasks, but when it comes to creativity, emotional intelligence and strategic thinking, it can support - not replace - the human strengths that fuel growth. These qualities remain the secret ingredient behind real progress.

Shaping human-centric organisational design

As Harvard Business School professor Karim Lakhani noted, tech is 30% of the challenge of an AI transformation, the other 70% is organisational.[1]

By anchoring AI innovation in the purpose, vision and strategy of an organisation, it shifts from an IT-only concern to a driver of enterprise-wide performance linked to business goals, outcomes, and processes. This includes strategic workforce planning that identifies AI skills gaps and how people can be transitioned to fill them; in short, a reimagining of organisational DNA. More on this and dynamic approaches such as organisational digital twins, can be found in our whitepaper, Beyond Faster Horses: Strategies for Radical Transformation in the Age of AI

As AI begins to power critical aspects of most organisations, governance will also need to be reshaped to guide and support its use. Andrew commented that guardrails are there to enable, rather than stifle, AI's potential: "Our data and AI governance team are working hard to be an enablement function. That's about being on the front foot and proactive about becoming much more structured as an organisation around our use of data."

In our experience, clear guidance around AI is not just a compliance checkbox, but a catalyst for confidence, trust, and sustainable growth. When organisations set intentional, human-centred guardrails for AI adoption, they do more than mitigate reputational and data risks - they empower people to engage with emerging technologies in a way that feels safe, supported, and aligned with strategic purpose.

Equipping leaders to drive AI success

At all levels, leaders play a crucial role in enabling a human-centric culture, whether they are setting the organisational direction or supporting team members to adapt to AI-based change. Leaders that empower people to experiment with AI tools and build a culture of psychological safety in which they feel able to push the boundaries of what's possible will amplify engagement with AI in their teams.

In our experience, real transformation doesn't come from technology alone, it's shaped by how people experience and adopt it. Chris Tomlinson explores this in more detail in Beyond Faster Horses: Strategies for Radical Transformation in the Age of AI: leaders who create the conditions for experimentation, underpinned by psychological safety, don't just foster innovation - they build adaptive capacity into their teams. When individuals are encouraged to lean into AI, to explore and iterate without fear of failure, they develop the confidence and competence needed to stay ahead of the curve.

*"Encourage people to lean in. Encourage people to experiment.
The closer people are to the learning curve, the less of a shock it is when new capabilities emerge."*

Chris Tomlinson, Muuto Managing Partner.

1 'AI Won't Replace Humans — But Humans With AI Will Replace Humans Without AI' - Harvard Business Review 'The New World of Work' with Adi Ignatius and Karim Lakhani

Put the human touch into your AI transformation

At its heart, AI transformation is as much a people journey as it is a technological one. AI offers huge opportunities for businesses and their workforces if it is integrated into a culture ready and eager to take advantage of its benefits. Organisations that prioritise human-centric AI adoption may be better placed to lead the way, creating sustainable growth, innovation, and a workforce that is prepared to thrive in the future.

For deeper exploration of how to give your AI transformation the human touch and further insights from industry leaders, watch the full webinar on demand using the link below, and discover actionable strategies to put humans at the heart of your AI journey.

WATCH HERE

If you're looking for more insight, download Chris Tomlinson's whitepaper, Beyond Faster Horses, to delve deeper into why technology alone won't unlock success and what you can do about it.

DOWNLOAD HERE

Beyond Faster Horses:
Strategies for Radical Transformation in the Age of AI

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Author - Helen Kewell (Muuto): Helen Kewell is a Client Partner at Muuto, with over 25 years' experience in managing transformation across diverse industries and always through the human lens, driving behaviour and culture change as well as enabling new capabilities and mindsets. She is also a qualified and practising psychotherapist with a specialisation in the psychology of life transitions, and a published author on the same topic.

Andrew Dickinson (EVP Business Transformation at Sage): Andrew leads global businesses through organisational transformation, bridging strategy and delivery. He has led Sage's Transformation Office for the past four years. Andrew also leads Sage's Organisation Effectiveness team, owning the ongoing evolution of Sage's operating model, workforce planning and organisation health. Having been heavily investing in bringing AI driven solutions to their small to mid sized client businesses, Sage is also focused on how to use it to transform and accelerate critical aspects of their operating model - such as customer support and coding.

Chris Tomlinson (Muuto): Chris Tomlinson is the Managing Director of Muuto Consulting and a transformation leader with over 25 years of experience, guiding global enterprises through complex change. Tommo pioneered the use of "human-in-the-loop" AI strategies and developed tools like OrgFlowAI to reimagine organisational design and accelerate post-merger integration. Now deepening his expertise through Oxford University's Graduate Diploma in AI and emerging technologies, he is dedicated to turning AI opportunities into measurable business success.

Eugene Chin (Group Director of Strategic Workforce & People Analytics at Sky): Leads people analytics and strategic workforce initiatives at Sky, focusing on the intersection of AI with people and culture. His role involves taking the organisation's strategy and determining the long-term (three to five years) people implications. He develops people strategies to enable the organization's goals, including transforming the business and addressing future challenges. Eugene also focuses on people analytics, driving data insights, and integrating external data to support Sky's strategic objectives.