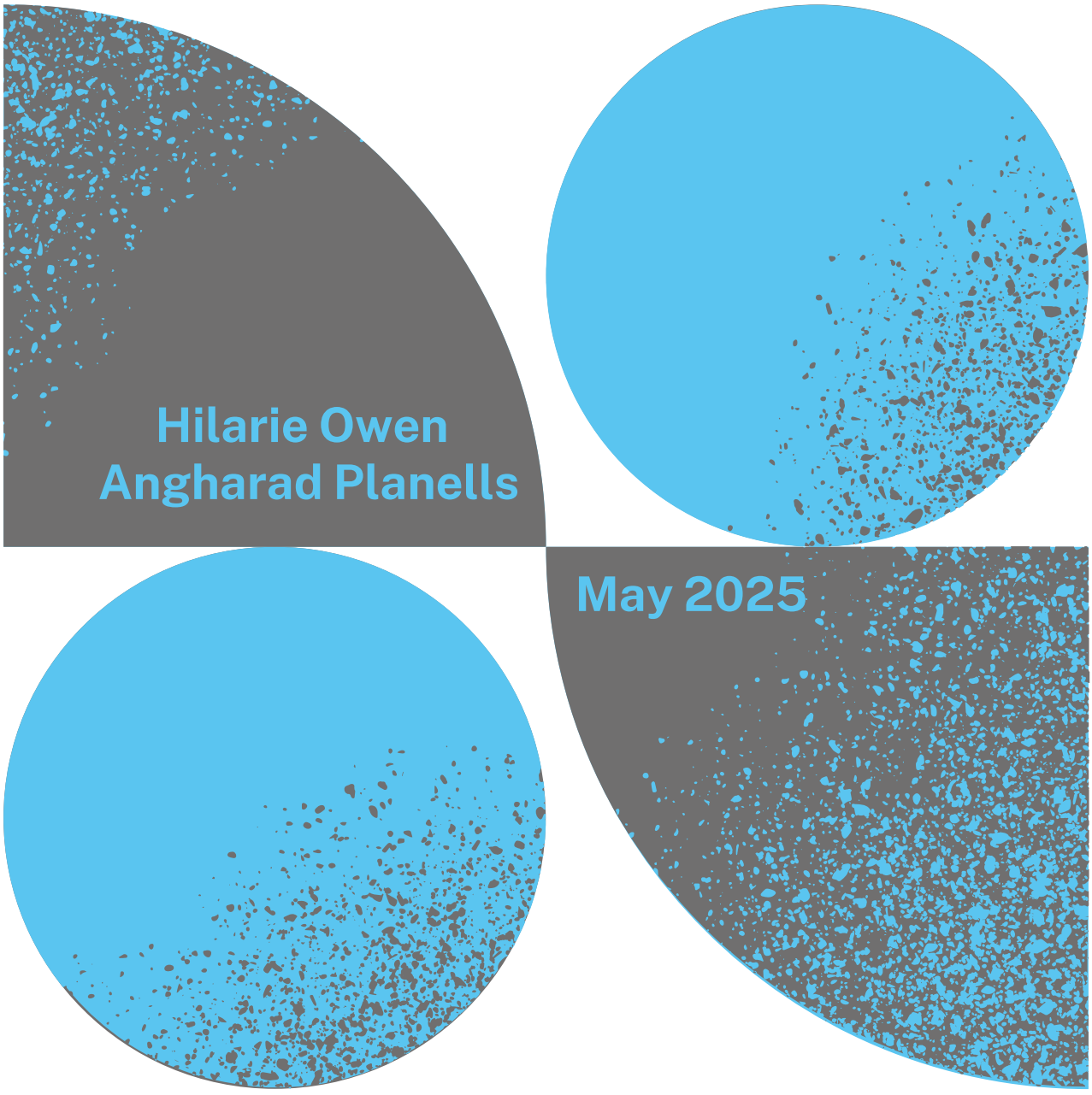
INSTITUTE FOR FUTURE STUDIES OF LEADERS

The Institute for Future Studies of Leaders Report

Ready...or not?

Leaders in the Age of AI



Hilarie Owen
Angharad Planells

May 2025

www.futureleadersinstitute.co.uk

INFORM | ADVISE | ADVOCATE

The **Story** So **Far**

In 1996, my first book was launched based on a two-year study of high performing top teams including boards of directors and the RAF Red Arrows. The book was a huge best seller and resulted in my working with boards and executive teams of global companies across the world. It raised the issue of the leadership required. By 1999, it was clear there was a desperate need for leaders across society. Against many odds, we set up the first Leadership Institute in the UK against government and civil servants who said leadership was 'too much of a hot potato'.

The first years were focused on research that included a three year youth study of how leadership emerges and why so many do not regard themselves as leaders; research studies across sectors including a large study across the prison service that showed that while university courses were interesting, had no impact on adults' leadership development. The research extended to the police, local government, leaders in manufacturing, gender study, financial services, technology, advertising and engineering. In addition, we worked with leaders across the world from the USA, South Africa, Europe, China, UAE and Malaysia.

In 2019, we opened the Institute to Fellows – individuals that fitted a criterion based not just on what they did but how they did it. Now, in 2025 it is time for a transformation to fit with the changed world post Covid and the progress of populism across the world. Therefore, the Institute has had a rebrand and refocus. The Institute is now known as the Institute for the Future Studies of Leaders (IFSL) to continue our work on research, consultancy and mentoring.

The world is changing at a rapid rate that is affecting every life form on the planet. We humans must adapt if we are to survive and address the challenges much faster than we currently do. It will require leaders to be braver and above all understand the world and how it works, especially the natural world which is being destroyed day by day. Our systems and institutions are overstretched and failing. What worked in the past, will not be enough for today and tomorrow.

The ability to not only see what is coming, identify the challenges that the future will bring but also the ability to have the efficacy to resolve those challenges. That is missing today and therefore our research will include publishing our research and policy work for a fast- changing world that is able to adapt including the thinking that underpins it. The Institute for Future Studies of Leaders will include exploring how the future will affect leaders, how leadership must change and what leaders must do to ensure a sustainable future for all. The first project is research on Leaders in the Age of AI, the idea coming from colleague and co-author Angharad Planells.

Meanwhile, we will continue working with leaders across the world through Forums with peers to mentoring individuals and working with boards and top teams to improve performance and clarity of their future. We will provide a package for organisations who will receive membership and a certificate of where they are on their journey. As my old headmistress used to say: "Onward and upward!"

Hilarie Owen
CEO

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About

The **Institute for the Future Studies of Leaders** (IFSL) exists to **Inform, Advise,** and **Advocate** global leaders across three fundamental areas of concern:

- **New technology**
- **The Climate Crisis**
- **Threats to democracy**

Originally The Leaders Institute, which was set up in 2000 by Hilarie Owen to focus on research, publications, fellowship, and working globally with leaders, Hilarie joined forces with Angharad Planells in late 2024 to rebrand the organisation to the IFSL. The world has changed, and will continue to do so, and the IFSL aims to build on and extend previous work to include developing **actionable insights, sharing knowledge, fostering collaboration,** and **facilitating networks specifically for leaders**.

Its research and resources provide non-partisan, independent information and critical thinking to support leaders at all levels in **politics, business,** and **community** so that they may lead **effectively** and with **empathy**. More can be found at **futureleadersinstitute.co.uk**

This report is co-authored by **Hilarie Owen** and **Angharad Planells**.

About Hilarie Owen
Political scientist Hilarie Owen is one of the world's leading experts, keynote speakers, and influencers on leadership. CEO of The Leaders Institute following a successful corporate career and senior government work that included advising a Minister. She is also a mentor to leaders to improve their thinking and ability to develop multi-perspectives for a fast- changing disruptive world. Hilarie has worked with global companies and governments around the world as well as other institutions such as the RAF Red Arrows and Harvard University. Hilarie has taught at Cranfield, Ashridge, Cardiff and Manchester Business Schools and has also worked with education leaders in China, UAE, Mauritius and Malaysia. Her work with global companies has taken her across Europe, the USA, UAE and South Africa working with boards and top teams of global companies. She is also the author of 10 books that sell worldwide.

About Angharad Planells
Angharad began her career in journalism and worked at several publications and radio stations, including the BBC, before moving into a career in communications. Over the last 15 years she's worked with an impressive roster of companies, including Dowty, a GE Aerospace company, Lloyds Pharmacy, Nova Pharmaceuticals, Gravity, Shout Out UK, Marmalade Trust, and HomeStart. She's a mum, a contributing author to three PR and communications books, lectured in Communications at both Undergraduate and Masters level, and was invited to speak to students at Blanquerna Ramon Llull University in Barcelona.

Message from the authors

When we first discussed the idea for this research we had no idea how big an undertaking it would be. No researcher ever feels what they publish is 'done', but **AI's phenomenal pace of change** meant constantly adapting and evolving our approach and direction to keep up in a way neither of us has before.

There's no doubt in our minds that AI is an **incredible technological breakthrough** that will profoundly reshape the world as we know it. However, whether that reshaping is good or bad will be **down to the people** who wield the technology, and who or what they wield it for.

In our judgement, we must all agree to **redefine what it means to 'win' the AI race**. The truest, and arguably only, victory is the one that puts people and planet ahead of profits. Any other outcome should make us fearful for the future of humanity and those who would **seek to lead it**.

In spite of all we have uncovered during this research we want to be clear that **we are not anti-AI, we are pro-precaution**, and encourage leaders at all levels to approach AI with both **curiosity** and **caution** in equal measure.

This isn't some far off future. We are already in a place where we're technologically beyond ready for AI - if all progress halted now it would take a decade or more to properly weave the current advances into our lives properly. Because societally, legislatively, biologically? **We're nowhere near ready**.

Angharad Planells and Hilarie Owen
May 2025

Introduction

We live in a disruptive and fast-changing world and the challenges of this are great. Technology has always made leaps throughout our history, but at this moment the advances of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are going at supersonic pace, with the majority of people unaware that AI has the potential to radically change their lives like never before.

Around the world, this technology is regarded as a race with one winner. This perception is dangerous as it means one country or one government or one company will own the power that AI brings. Therefore, leaders must look at where we are going and identify and understand both the opportunities and the threats of this technology. CEOs and politicians the world over should not mistake AI as a purely technological advancement, and so view it as something only under the remit of Chief Technology Officers or similar. To do so would be to the detriment of the companies and people they purport to lead.

The concept of AI goes back to the 'Alan Turing Test' in the early 1950s (originally called the imitation game) whereby it tests a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent to that of a human. In other words, a benchmark for assessing AI research. Today, AI can solve problems we couldn't before. AI can solve problems through predictions by executing algorithms. Can machines do more than our brains, and can they learn without us providing data? Can AI drive cars better than us and replace taxi drivers?

At present, AI won't replace surgeons but it can assist them. In September 2023 the BBC reported that 'brain surgery using artificial intelligence could be possible within two years, making it safer and more effective'. We're mere months away from seeing if that prediction becomes a reality. Somewhat worryingly though, the AI minister at the time, Viscount Camrose, said in the same article that AI 'kind of almost makes you the Marvel superhero version of yourself'. At best, it's a leader trying to explain new technology using a pop culture reference to make it more accessible for people with less knowledge of the subject. At worst, it's an example of a leader in a position of great power and influence who doesn't understand the subject over which he has that power and influence. Or, to use the Viscount's approach and paraphrase a Marvel superhero, a leader with great power but little responsibility for it.

There are many uncertainties right now. However, it is already clear that issues such as privacy, security, education and jobs need to be addressed sooner rather than later. We set out to write a balanced Report that highlighted the opportunities, dangers, and pitfalls of AI, and what present leaders should be addressing in light of AI's rapid evolution.

The news story that sparked this research came in early December 2024. A Stanford University professor and misinformation expert was accused of making up citations in a court filing and blamed his 'sloppy use' of ChatGPT for the errors. Those errors included two fabricated citations to journal articles that don't exist and an incorrect list of authors for an existing study in an expert declaration. Somewhat ironically, the declaration was submitted to defend Minnesota's new ban on political deepfakes. The professor involved was paid $650 an hour to write for the court, and delivered a declaration riddled with AI Hallucinations.

Since then, AI's Hallucination problem has been largely kept at bay. Until recently, when research studies began to emerge in multiple industries highlighting concerns with AI's accuracy and modelling. Concerningly, one of the worst hit industries experiencing these Hallucinations is healthcare, which initially had championed AI as a new beacon of hope for patients, particularly at stages of diagnosis in certain cancers.

This AI reality gap appears to be widening as LLMs (Large Language Models) are trained on larger, and more secretive, data sources. While we may think AI is all seeing and all knowing, the truth is that it's still very much reliant on making connections between a lot of different sets of information, and just like the human brain it can sometimes make connections that don't exist or miss some entirely in its search for answers.

In Parmy Olsen's book 'Supremacy: AI, ChatGPT, and the race that will change the world', we're told that LLMs are trained to avoid answering 'I don't know' to queries. From a commercial point of view this makes sense – why bother using a product that can't give you what you want? But from a safety and ethical one it's an alarming admission. The best leaders admit when they don't know something and commit to finding it out as a way forward. This approach builds trust, openness, and engenders a growth mindset in teams from the top down. A leader that blusters and fumbles their way to an answer at all costs is a dangerous one if that answer is taken at face value with no critical thinking and cross-referencing applied. This approach erodes trust in objective truths and prioritises being first with the answer as opposed to being right. When these hallucinations are caught and challenged, humanity can put its trust in AI as a useful tool to be critically wary of and avoid taking the answers given as gospel. When they are not, people are at risk of increased brain atrophy, mis and disinformation, and manipulation of reality.

However, the above requires time, patience, and the willingness to ask AI the right questions to avoid becoming susceptible to misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, or, in the case of the medical community, misdiagnosing patients and putting them through unnecessary treatment or delaying treatment they desperately need. AI hallucinations in these cases can and will cost lives if not handled carefully.

We hope the research will put a spotlight on potential issues we could end up sleepwalking into. For example, using AI to make big decisions thereby removing the human element resulting in power being wielded by AI (or individuals behind the models) as opposed to the people entrusted with that power. Therefore, AI making the decision to pull the trigger without the right human influence, or without humans at all, must not happen.

This first Report is just the start as an introduction to the challenges. AI is a huge topic affecting a multitude of sectors and human beings across the world. Our aim has been to explore, ask difficult questions, and find the truth underneath the race for AI.

AI in 2025
Where we are

AI is not just algorithm output, it's also the data behind it. It is hardware as well as software. AI is also the people and organisations that use it. In truth, AI is not only about technologies but also about us as people, as a society and as humanity. AI is about our values and goals, and above all, AI is as much about who we are now as it is the future we want to shape.

Today, AI often refers to machine learning whereby it can identify patterns through large data. One example of this is in healthcare, where after analysing thousands of images of lungs, AI can 'learn' to tell if there is a high probability that a person has lung cancer. In fact, early diagnosis across health issues is certainly one of the most positive by-products of AI so far. However, there are also hidden costs associated with AI. For example, the energy use and natural resources such as water it needs to run. It also contributes to carbon emissions. Data centres produce electronic waste, which often contains hazardous substances such as lead and mercury. Huge amounts of water are required, and we are already facing water scarcity. An example of this energy use is that a request to ChatGPT consumes ten times the electricity of a Google search (*International Energy Agency*). While data fuels the big tech companies the advances of AI means that vast, increasing amounts of energy will be required. While the core business of the tech companies ranges from social media, search engines, shopping, to computing, they are now also moving into renewable electricity. Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft and Nvidia's need to expand into big energy is driven by the latest generation of AI systems, resulting in these companies' signing deals with energy companies to establish new generating capacity.

> **"We must develop a comprehensive and globally shared view of how technology is affecting our lives and reshaping our economic, social, cultural and human environments. There has never been a time of greater promise, or greater peril."** *Klaus Schwab Founder and Executive Chair World Economic Forum*

In 2024, Microsoft agreed a twenty-year deal to buy energy from a dormant nuclear plant in Pennsylvania and plans to reopen it in 2028. Also in 2024, Google (Alphabet) and Amazon made power purchase agreements with companies that plan to build a new generation of smaller nuclear plants. Google and Meta are investing in firms developing next generational geothermal energy.

Big tech is influencing the energy transition through cloud computing services, by applying machine learning to the management of electricity supply and demand, and by harvesting and exploiting data about that energy. There is a concern here. Having moved away from dependence on Russia for energy, should it then become dependent on a handful of companies to do whatever they want with it?

AI in 2025
Business

In March 2025, Microsoft released a survey of nearly 1,500 UK senior leaders across the public and private sectors, as well as 1,440 employees and found that more than half of executives feel their organisation has no official AI plan. In addition, the survey found a growing gap in productivity between employees who use AI and those who do not. Therefore, it seems AI can improve productivity.

Deloitte, one of the 'big five' consultancy firms, has been curating a picture of where AI is at present. In a recent survey (October 2024) of more than 30,000 European respondents, it found that:

More than
25%
of employees who said they use generative AI for work pay for it themselves, indicating strong demand and a potential gap in co-provided resources and compliance.

Nearly a
quarter
(23%) said their organisation does not have an AI policy, meaning confidential details could be at risk if employees use unsanctioned tools that do not comply with security and privacy standards.

More than
a third
did not see any risk in using AI tools at work without permission, indicating a strong need for leaders to educate and put policies in place.

More than
71%
of consumers who use generative AI anticipate these tools will help businesses improve products and services, reflecting rising customer expectations.

Deloitte concluded that companies need a transformation road map that addresses:

- **Building capacity**
- **Ensuring data integrity and security**
- **Manage change and adoption complying with regulations**
- **Building trust through responsible AI practices.**

AI will certainly affect professionals such as lawyers, accountants and human resource departments. Data from LinkedIn suggests women are more likely to hold roles disrupted by Generated AI and are less likely to experience augmentation. However, the information also shows that more women are acquiring AI related skills in response to the change coming. LinkedIn data shows female AI talent has expanded since 2018, and the gender gap narrowed.

Our Research

Across March and early April 2025, we ran two questionnaires simultaneously - one to capture quantitative data from a representative sample of the UK population, and another focused on leaders in business and politics. In the latter, we also asked qualitative questions of leaders to further understand the specific challenges they face and the concerns and opportunities as they currently see them.

More than
half

of people (56%) said they do not trust tech companies to keep their personal data confidential when it comes to AI.

Half

of political leaders we spoke to said they 'hoped' AI is an opportunity, while the other half said they 'didn't know'.

All leaders

we spoke to across business and politics agreed that AI safeguards / legislation should be put in place immediately. Both groups also said business should have constraints on AI use.

Two fifths

of people (40%) don't believe AI will improve growth in the UK, but a third (35%) feel that it will, highlighting a split in opinion on this subject for the general public.

Only
17%

of people said AI is good, or could be good for democracy, compared with 83% who said it is definitely a risk or that they didn't know yet.

Half

of political leaders we spoke to said AI is definitely a risk to democracy. The other half were undecided, as were the majority of business leaders.

Research of political and business leaders conducted by Hilarie Owen and Angharad Planells, April 2025. Survey of 2,050 UK adults conducted by the authors in partnership with Opinium, March 2025.

What can we infer from these results? It became apparent quite quickly that there is a gap between what leaders believe the public wants from and understands about AI and the reality. There was also a difference between political and business leaders in regard to their own understanding of the technology behind AI.

Our Research

The results

Many political leaders admitted that they didn't really understand AI, but a few said they were now learning about it. In contrast, the majority of business leaders said they were learning about it and some said they were beginning to understand it. Therefore, business leaders are ahead of political leaders, at least in the sense that they are more aware of what they don't already know and taking steps to address that.

Another difference was apparent in regard to trusting the personal data of citizens. Political leaders believed we should trust them when it comes to public data, but business leaders remarked 'up to a point' because AI requires their data. However, the majority of both political and business leaders believed the integration of AI across the UK should be driven by both business and Government together. In addition, both political and business leaders in the UK remarked that they do not trust tech companies to guard our data. This was also reflected in a second survey we carried out with more than 2,000 members of the general public. More than half (56%) said they did not trust tech companies to keep their personal data confidential, with only 27% said they did trust them.

We hear constant remarks from government that AI will improve productivity in the workplace, however we found that while business leaders believe this to be true, around half of the political leaders we spoke to were not convinced. Another argument from the government is that AI will help improve growth in the UK. Most political leaders believed this, while business leaders hoped it would be the case but weren't as confident. Two fifths (40%) of the general public don't believe AI will improve growth in the UK, while only a third (35%) said it would.

The issue of whether AI was a risk or opportunity caused a split in both business and political leaders. Half the political leaders said they hoped so and half said they didn't know which is a concern as they will be voting on it. Half of business leaders believed AI was an opportunity and the rest had not decided yet which may explain why businesses in the UK have been slow to take up AI.

There is hope by tech companies that AI will solve the big challenges we face as a human race such as poverty and the climate emergency, but the majority of political leaders don't believe AI can do this on its own. Whereas half of business leaders agreed that AI could not solve big challenges on its own, half said they hoped so thus being more optimistic.

Our Research

We already know AI will have a negative impact on our already struggling environment. All the political leaders acknowledged the danger while business leaders regarded there ‘’maybe a risk”, with a few agreeing there was definitely a risk.

Governments have tried to constrain tech companies who have developed social media platforms with legislation, but it has come too late for many and isn’t strong enough at the present. Should governments be quicker with AI? Already the EU is cutting back regulations to spur investment in AI. In our research 100% of both political and business leaders said that safeguards/legislation should be put in place immediately. Likewise, both said business should have constraints and not be allowed to just run with AI. There doesn’t seem to be plans for any constraints at the present time from the Minister Peter Kyle MP.

We know AI can do things such as summarise documents or help write an essay but is the accuracy of AI exceeding human capacity? Political leaders were divided on this with some saying AI does exceed human capacity while others saying not true. Whereas the majority of business leaders said the accuracy of AI will not exceed human capacity. Which is right?

Both leaders agreed there was a danger of bias from AI in making decisions but there were splits on whether AI was good for democracy. Half the political leaders said they didn’t know while the other half said it was definitely a risk. In contrast, business leaders were mainly undecided. This is a huge concern as AI moves forward very fast. 41% of the public said AI was bad for democracy while a whopping 42% said they didn’t know. It was clear that this was something both leaders and the public hadn’t thought about before we asked them and so we will explore this topic in more detail later in the report.

During our research we had the opportunity to talk with a group of 12–15-year-olds and their science teacher. Those studying technology said they did have a basic understanding of AI and two thirds said they should be involved in deciding what AI should or shouldn’t do as it is their generation that will be impacted. What was surprising was that 100% said they did not trust tech companies to keep their data safe but that they saw AI as an opportunity. Again, all regarded AI as a risk to the environment and that AI should protect everyone and ensure against bias.

To go deeper than a questionnaire, we carried out some face-to-face interviews with political leaders as they will be the ones making the decisions that affect us all. They admitted they lacked technical ability but were attending conferences on AI and other opportunities such as reading articles and papers and were aware of the technology.

Our Research

When it came to making decisions on technology, they said they relied on experts to advise them. They are aware of the opportunities and some of the risks. When asked if they were ready to rise to the challenge, they admitted that politicians tend to be risk averse and fear failure so will be cautious.

However, they regard AI as having the ability to speed things up and make services more accurate but are concerned about false information and that people follow headlines. They see the capability as improving how things are done and improve productivity, but they are concerned about the loss of jobs with nothing to replace them if the individuals lack skills. They are also concerned about inherent bias coming out in policies even though they are aware of this. They suggest there should be a wider digital inclusion policy to ensure people are not left behind.

One of their biggest concerns was around trust. This has occurred with loyalty cards where we give our data in exchange for savings. There is also the issue of what is real or true. They are very concerned about the fast pace of the technology.

One politician said:

> **"The pace of social media was too fast and as a result children have been let down. Government takes a long time to produce good policy. Not helping is the need to increase growth at all costs. You may get growth in a sector, but what about those displaced?".**

Another concern was that they don't know what the new jobs will be and so what subjects to focus on at school.

We asked them what they thought about people in power using AI and they told us how it already happens. One gave an example from Facebook who play to nostalgia to voters in their groups, then change it gradually to be more political supported by AI. This influences voting behaviour. They said people need guidance on what to look out for.

Finally, they do regard AI as being a risk to democracy. They think the government is exposing people by using more technology and question whether the information is accurate. One said democracy can function well without AI. They compared it to the founders of the web who regarded the internet as liberal and opening the world up, but they didn't foresee the bad things – violence, aggressiveness against women and certain people, and crime. This then brings us to explore the wider societal concerns.

Societal Concerns for Leaders

A mix of intelligent and egotistical, we humans have forced a lot of societal progress during the relatively short time we've been around. Driving that progress has been our brains, the original computer, however, brains do struggle with the pace of change as, just like a computer, our brains like repetition as this requires little energy. The sheer speed at which AI is forcibly evolving before our eyes is at best disorientating. With each new technological push forward, that disorientation and the possible damage it could bring to us as individuals and as a species, is compounded.

In his final book before he died, 'Genesis: Artificial Intelligence, Hope and the Human Spirit', Henry Kissinger, along with co-authors Craig Mundie and Eric Schmidt, shared that where currently a college student would learn a subject over four years, an AI model can already learn the same amount and more in just four days.

"...and thus, speed has proven itself to be the first in a handful of core attributes that distinguish AI from our human form and mental capabilities". The authors go on to say that, were the human brain analysed for its processing capability in the same way as AI then *"the average AI supercomputer is already 120 million times faster than the processing rate of the human brain. True, but speed is not a strong indicator of intelligence. Very dumb humans can think quickly."*

A recent study of OECD, PISA, PIAAC and Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey shows a dramatic and continuing decline of our performance in reasoning and problem-solving tests since 2010. Seeing the steady decline of the average scores on assessments across different domains in high-income countries for both teenagers and adults, it's reasonable to question what role Facebook (which became open to the public in September 2006), Twitter (which exploded with users between 2007-2010), and Instagram (launched in 2010 and gained one million registered users in just two months) had in particular.

Can an over-reliance on AI affect our cognitive abilities when the big tech companies are keen for us to rely on the technology? It appears there is a concern. Recent research undertaken by the Carnegie Mellon University and Microsoft in the USA found those who were sceptical about AI were more likely to use their own critical thinking skills. However, those who were more confident in AI tools, which tends to be the younger generation, trusted them and didn't check, especially in more mundane tasks. The problem with this is that AI is only as good as the questions you ask, and so critical thinking skills are vital. They are particularly required today with so much information around.

How can leaders command attention and build trust, when they are competing with AI and algorithms? How can individuals put their trust in leaders and know where to put their attention as over-reliance on AI atrophies their brains?

Trust and **Attention** Competing Economies

The Attention Economy, a term first coined by psychologist, economist, and Nobel Laureate Herbert A. Simon in 1971, posits that the overload of information is an economic problem. It's called 'paying attention' for a reason. Similar to the financial economy, we exchange our attention multiple times a day – after all, to focus on one thing means to ignore something else. Our attention is a finite resource, one that AI exploits with algorithms designed to show us what we tell it we want, and not necessarily what it is that we need, or that's good for us. We exchange our attention with whatever AI can show us that validates our own world view – the good, the bad, and the dangerous. With two thirds of the world's population already online, the global attention economy is already in scarce supply, and our own humanity is seemingly also on the line.

"You are the average of the top five places or platforms you spend your time."

"You are the average of the top five people you spend the most time with", a quote attributed to motivational speaker Jim Rohn and paraphrased by many others. While his figures might be a little off, it's true that we are the sum of our parts. A modern version of this idea would be "you are the average of the top five places or platforms you spend your time".

In the UK, the slashing of local Council budgets and social mobility programmes has coincided with the rise of social media platforms and online forums over the last two decades. As a result, what was happening offline had a direct impact on what was happening online, and vice versa. A Freedom of Information request (FOI) revealed the closure of 1,243 Council-run youth centres between 2010 and 2023. Almost 800 libraries have also closed since 2010, with visitor numbers steadily falling.

As the Third Space economy shrank, people were pushed more and more into online spaces in a bid to find community and connection outside of home, work, or school. And social media algorithms were more than happy to oblige for the sake of their advertisers and their bottom lines. For example, the popular discussion website Reddit saw 6.53 billion visits in February 2025 alone and is currently second only to Facebook in terms of global online popularity.

The danger here is the algorithms learn about you based on what you watch, read, and engage with online, and serve you more of the same content to keep your attention for as long as possible. A carefully curated online presence means people are not watching, reading, or seeing anything that challenges their reality, or forces them to think critically. They trust what they are being shown and often take content at face value because it validates their own view of the world. The challenge for leaders is that if you don't share the same world view, sections of society will not trust what you say, even if it is objective truth.

For the first time in its 25-year history, the Edelman Trust Barometer showed declines in trust across all major institutions, especially in governments. The 2025 Report found that as well as trust, there was now greater polarisation and a descent into grievance. People feel the political system is broken and that families will not be better off in five years' time. People are also finding it difficult to navigate all the misinformation and feel there is no hope for the future. We need optimism and it is doubtful that AI is going to help given its current trajectory.

Data is the key to AI, and it seems some of the gadgets we have in our homes can be used to spy on us to collect data. Smart gadgets brought in to make life easier are tracking conversations, lifestyle choices and personal data. Overseeing our safety is the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) which says these devices are collecting too much data. The ICO's study early in 2025 argued that consumers feel that Internet of Things (IoT) products collect an excessive amount of personal information. Consumer experts have highlighted those manufacturers of IoT products which are seeking access to personal information from their precise location to the list of apps on their mobile in exchange for connecting household appliances to the internet.

"For the first time in its 25-year history, the Edelman Trust Barometer showed declines in trust across all major institutions, especially in governments...as well as trust, there was greater polarisation and a descent into grievance."

Research by Which? brought to the surface "excessive smart devices surveillance", including three Chinese made brands of air fryers seeking permission to record audio users phone conversations, with two of the products sending data back to servers in China and one sharing it with a subsidiary of TikTok. Other producers included makers of smart watches and televisions, were found to be collecting information such as precise location and in one case, requiring access to stored files on a user's mobile phone. Data is the new gold, and consumers are paying for it when they buy these products. Even when money isn't involved data is sought.

In January 2025, Ministers said they would be opening up the huge store of NHS health data to big tech companies for AI. The plan is to make the archives of scans, biodata and anonymised patient records available to train the AI models. They believe this will attract billions of pounds of investment from US tech firms into the UK. AI Minister Peter Kyle has insisted that the Government would "always be in control of the data and how it is used and who has access to it." He also added that this is equivalent "to the nuclear race that we saw in the forties and fifties, for both weaponry and for civil use." (*The Times 13th Jan 25*).

The language used by Ministers is very illuminating. The UK government plan to "unleash" AI "mainlining it into the veins of the nation". It is very alarming. Susie Alegre, a barrister specialising in technology and human rights has said: "Any plan for Britain's future with AI needs to look at real world consequences for people and the planet and cannot afford to look away from uncomfortable truths." Also cautious is the Ada Lovelace Institute which has said what is required is "a roadmap for addressing broader AI harms".

Can we trust AI?

This was the question asked for a talk given by Professor of Philosophy of Technology Shannon Vallor. She began by saying that AI can't do human things such as be creative, love or use empathy. We have lived experience that is unique to all of us. However, there are risks and a big one is the cost to the environment. There is a slim chance AI could solve climate change but AI will take huge resources that could destroy the environment so it is a gamble as it MAY solve the environment just in time but also may not. Is it worth the gamble?

Vallor explained that all technology is a mirror of us and AI is not just a single product. At present humans are more intelligent than machine intelligence but the machine is close behind. Her analogy with a mirror is interesting. She explained that a reflection of a flower is not a flower and needs no water. Likewise, the reflection of a mind is not a mind. The warning she gave was that mirrors can distort reality such as deep fake and news. The question Vallor asks is: "What is the cost of this mirror world?"

She raised the point that AI won't say 'I don't really know' and this is worrying as the younger generation believe it can do all the mind does. Thinking is a skilled activity such as rock climbing or playing the piano but what is being pushed is an AI market to improve productivity with fewer steps, not develop thinking to do things differently or better.

Another issue is AI bias. The models upon which AI efforts are based on absorb the biases of society that can be quietly embedded in the mountains of data they're trained on. Historically biased data collection that reflects societal inequity can result in harm to historically marginalized groups such as in hiring, policing, credit scoring and many others. According to The Wall Street Journal, "As use of artificial intelligence becomes more widespread, businesses are still struggling to address pervasive bias."[1]

This is important. We humans experience the future as Open because we cannot predict everything such as the surprise of Assad falling in Syria. Vallor explains that we are engineers of human life and make choices. For example, we can keep burning the world for a handful of billionaires to get even richer or say no more. AI can't do this.

Our planet is under strain and the future of all life is in danger. We need to engineer another future before we reach a cliff edge. AI won't invent that future, but it could steel it from us. Vallor points out that we need new AI tools designed to hold Open Space for us and our descendants. So where does this leave us?

There is no doubt that our political, economic, health, education systems are all under strain today, are unsustainable and there are real dangers to the future of life. There is no doubt we need to write another future for ourselves. We need new AI tools and new systems of values. Vallor argues that technology, life and time need to be used as Open Space.

Humans today fill empty mental space quickly with their phones and gadgets. Empty mental space is a challenge for all of us and boredom feels unnatural to many young. Yet she says it is in empty space we choose what is important to us. It is also important for reflecting and learning.

AI mirrors are being pushed onto education around the world whether lesson plans, readings or writing work for pupils. Technology is pushing AI into every tool we use. The outcome is that our history will be told by machines in schools. Reading books at university will become obsolete as will analysing and learning. Yet we are not powerless and have power over the future we just don't see it. Having no space in our lives is the message of AI today.

In 2021, Mark Coeckelbergh wrote: "We need to figure out how to make time in a different way; how to let in the future and make time for social change, how to make time for interpretation and judgement, and how to make time for people and their stories."

For an AI mirror there is no story to unfold, only what it has been programmed. Therefore, Vallor concludes: "We can live with AI but we cannot live through it." The serious environmental costs and harm to people and the planet we are heading towards begs the questions – what is the evidence AI is the right tool to solve our big challenges? Who will be the winners and who will be the losers? How will each sector be affected? There is much more research do but a new player has joined the marketplace.

Disruption in AI

China launched its DeepSeek app and very quickly it became the most popular app in the USA. However, an even greater surprise was the low cost of the system. The market went into shock, and everyone involved in AI had to rethink the future of AI.

Up until that moment the successful AI models had needed vast amounts of computing power to train their chatbots. Companies such as Meta and ChatGPT built their systems using as many as 16,000 Nvidia chips for their energy efficiency and ability to handle complex tasks and sell for $30,000 to $40,000 each. However, DeepSeek claims it trained its base AI model using about 2,000 less advanced Nvidia chips, for about $6million, in less than two months! It is estimated that Microsoft, Meta, Amazon and Alphabet's capital spending reached about $209bn last year, with 80% of that going on data centres.

DeepSeek-R1, the company's 'reasoning' model that can tackle difficult mathematical and scientific problems in areas that it doesn't already know about, is said to perform the same complex tasks as Open AI's 01 model for a price twenty to fifty times cheaper to businesses.

There needs to be some caution as it's early days but at least the model is open source unlike that powering Open AI, despite the name. This means anyone can check its workings. Sam Altman who is behind Chat GPT said after the launch of DeepSeek that it was "impressive, particularly around what they're able to deliver for the price." He then added: "We will obviously deliver much better models and also it's invigorating to have a new competitor!"

Can we protect ourselves from all the misinformation?

On the 15th April 2025, OpenAI updated its 'Preparedness Framework', which details how the company monitors its AI models for any potentially catastrophic dangers, including how models could assist hackers, be used for the creation of biological weapons, and even that they could escape human control. However, thanks to this update one thing they will no longer assess models for before release is any risk they could persuade or manipulate people. Instead, this will be covered under terms of service by restricting the use of its AI models in political campaigns and lobbying and monitoring us for any signs of violations in these areas.

Global leaders and researchers have been quick to voice concerns, and while it is commendable that OpenAI chose to be transparent about the changes, we cannot ignore the fact that persuasion via AI is no longer considered a high risk factor. By downgrading persuasion in this way, and choosing to only address it after the horse has bolted through terms of service, OpenAI has set a dangerous precedent for other companies and puts misinformation and disinformation control into the regulatory sphere, where we already know governments are struggling to keep up. Indeed, the latest draft of the proposed EU AI Act has been met with criticism from some MEPs as it also downgraded mandatory testing of AI models for the possibility they could undermine democracy by spreading misinformation. It is now a voluntary consideration, instead.

By not enforcing these checks around misinformation at either a company, and possibly not even a regulatory level, AI has ensured it will not protect the most vulnerable in our society. Courtney Radsch, a senior fellow at Brookings, the Center for International Governance Information, and the Center for Democracy and Technology working on AI ethics was quoted in an article in Fortune magazine saying that "persuasion may be existentially dangerous to individuals such as children or those with low AI literacy or in authoritarian states and societies".

It's clear that with this move, OpenAI is ignoring current societal context and potential future damage in order to access higher revenue. Indeed, the Framework also states that "If another frontier AI developer releases a high-risk system without comparable safeguards, we may adjust our requirements." And so the goalposts shift again - away from people and purpose and into profit at any cost.

It is not all doom and gloom, though. Studies have shown that AI could actually be used to help combat misinformation. Researchers at Cornell University and MIT, for example, found that AI chatbots could be highly persuasive and effective at getting people to question conspiracy theories. Therefore, AI's abilityto be incredibly persuasive is not an inherently dangerous feature, it all comes down to why it's powers of persuasion are being used.

But can we protect ourselves from misinformation in the first place? Psychologist Sander van der Linden believes we can. He and colleagues have developed a Misinformation Susceptibility Test that is now used by others including YouGov. Linden found that 18–29-year-olds were the most susceptible. In the USA misinformation has been rife such as saying, 'immigrants eat cats and dogs.' He found that those who believed the false statements on the economy voted for Trump. The anti-vaccine misinformation has also been hit with misinformation in the US with statements such as 'vaccines will change your DNA.' This type of behaviour isn't new. When Edward Jenner (1749-1823) developed the cow pox vaccine against smallpox there were those who said it would turn human beings into human cows! So, misinformation is far from a modern phenomenon. What is different today is the speed and range of misinformation.

Linden says that negating something is not easy for the brain as when we hear something or read something it is in our brain and will connect to other similar statements in the memory. His research found that the principles of inoculation apply to protecting the brain from misinformation. Just as you give someone a small dose of a vaccine to protect them, the same thing applies here, and you expose a person to weakened misinformation rather than try to prove it wrong with facts. Therefore, the analogy with a vaccine is correct as it neutralises the information. Sander and colleagues have now developed a Fake News Game that enables people to practice what is true and what is not to become resistant to fake news. He believes we can inoculate against polarisation, trolling, conspiracy and impersonation. But that people need booster shots to maintain the protection. The World Health Organisation used his work to rid misinformation about Covid across the world. Today, they have also developed the fake news game for youngsters and even Google has tried it. Whether this will be able to deal with concerns over AI is another issue.

Who are the most concerned about AI?

The creative sectors are probably the most concerned about AI. This includes fashion, music, cars, design and famous brands such as Mulberry, Wedgwood, and Rolls Royce. Their whole work depends on their creative abilities and the threat that their creativity can be copied and used is alarming. The danger comes from the threat of the UK government overhauling copyright law to benefit AI companies. This is to attract new AI companies to the UK. There is no doubt IP intellectual property is going to be a contentious issue.

The makers of several UK comics including Dennis the Menace, have formed a new trade body to deal with the threat of AI copycats. Meanwhile, the government is consulting on plans to allow AI companies to train their algorithms for commercial purposes on a range of content including comics, films and newspapers, unless companies specifically opt out. The risk is the government could lose £126bn a year from the creative economy if they don't stand up to the huge American tech companies.

AI today is being used to create art. More than 3,000 artists have requested that Christie's plans to auction art created using AI which in itself is one thing, but these use AI models that were trained on copyright work without a licence. These can be used to train AI models that can replicate or even replace the original work, as we saw recently with the trend of turning memes and every day photos into Studio Ghibli inspired images. This comes following a consultation by the UK government into AI and creative industries whereby the UK would offer an exemption to copyright laws to train AI models unless the rights holder objects under a 'rights reservation' system. Peter Kyle, the Minister in charge has told critics of the AI copyright proposal not to 'resist change'. In other words, he is not really listening to or understanding their concerns.

On the 11th April 2025, one of Twitter's (now X) founders Jack Dorsey wrote on the platform "delete all IP law". When challenged, respectfully, by another user, Jack replied "times have changed. one person can build more faster. speed and execution matter more" (sic).

At the time of writing just six days later, the original post had 11.7m views, 4.9k replies, 5.5k reposts, and 22k likes, and had spurned countless articles generating even more debate. These powerful men at the top of tech, typically part of the 'Silicon Six' are saying loud and proud what they would seek to use AI for. We should believe, and challenge them.

Another concern is how AI tools can affect young pupils in schools. A new study published in the journal Societies found that people who used AI tools more frequently demonstrated weaker critical thinking abilities, largely due to a cognitive phenomenon known as cognitive offloading. This effect was particularly pronounced among younger individuals, while those at higher educational levels tended to retain stronger thinking regardless of AI tools.

Critical thinking is vital when working with AI to ensure the right questions are asked. Critical thinking is the ability to analyse, evaluate and synthesize information to form reasoned conclusions, is essential for problem solving and independent decision-making. While AI tools can help, overuse in young people could create a generation who lack critical thinking and depend more and more on AI which is limited if not asked the right questions. Another big concern is how young people trust what they are being fed through AI. In fact, trust is a huge topic right now and is essential.

Gary Cohn, Vice Chair of IBM recently said that the biggest tech companies are the most likely to win the AI race, with smaller, innovative companies likely to be bought up: "We actively look for cutting edge companies to invest in". There is a huge challenge with this. Smaller, innovative companies often have clearer values and ethics when it comes to how they develop AI. There is evidence that following investment from big tech companies, these values and ethics are replaced by shareholder value and to winning the AI race.

In a recent European study IBM found that 82% of leaders surveyed have already deployed generative AI or intend to deploy generative AI in the next year, with internal pressure from employees and investors the main drivers for acceleration.

Employees are certainly taking the lead. Company executives are underestimating how much their employees are already using AI. Lawyers, bankers and doctors are now regularly using chatbots to write to customers, clients, colleagues and patients. Research by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training found that one in seven adult workers in European labour markets now work with digital tools that complete tasks for them, with 22% using AI to recognise, translate, transcribe or generate text.

Ninety-six percent of businesses in the IBM study said they are prioritising governance and ethics as they engage in shaping internal and industry frameworks. Data security and privacy are seen as the main challenges in terms of leadership accountability.

The study also found that the desire for AI was to improve operational efficiency (45%), enhance customer experience (43%), and boost sales (38%). All require trusted leadership to install good governance into every action. The recommendations of the IBM European study were:

1. **Prioritise value creation**
2. **Integrate a mix of open-source proprietary models**
3. **Ensure AI can run everywhere efficiently**
4. **Be accountable**

The European study was based on 1,633 senior business decision makers in companies with 500+ employees across the UK, France, Spain, Germany, Italy and Sweden in September 2023, specialising in the following sectors – Finance, Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail, Telecoms and Utilities.

In contrast to this is the Egon Zender Report, which specialise in human resources. Over two days they asked the question: “Are leaders ready to rise to the challenge of AI and produce the vision and adaptability to seize the opportunities?” They surveyed 100 executives across four countries and in six sectors to get their views. In addition, they interviewed 25 leaders to refine the findings.

The study found leaders overwhelmingly (more than 90%) regarded AI as an opportunity more than a risk, but that the path to success was unclear for them. However, they believed (85%) AI will improve their organisation capabilities.

Business leaders need to be aware that there is a risk that employees who use generative AI have too much faith in the technology. More worrying still, is a study from January 2025, that found that “third-party evaluators perceive AI as more compassionate than expert humans” (Ovsyannikova D, de Mello VO, Inzlicht M. Third-party evaluators perceive AI as more compassionate than expert humans. Commun Psychol. 2025 Jan). While the study said the findings “suggest that AI has robust utility in contexts requiring empathetic interaction”, we have drawn a more concerning conclusion. Current and future leaders must develop and hone their emotional intelligence and empathy skills in order to successfully compete with AI when it comes to connecting with people. Which advise are you more likely to take - the abrupt human doctor, or the understanding AI model? Doctors and other experts can of course use AI to script or add more empathy to their reports and communications, which can be an asset, but it should not replace the human-first approach.

In the Deloitte 2024 study at the start of this Report, it found that 70% of users said they would trust generative AI summaries of news articles and 64% would trust AI on personal matters such as tax returns. What doesn’t seem to be acknowledged is that AI isn’t always factually accurate. While AI is improving, errors are still common and sometimes difficult to identify.

The IBM study concluded that success sits firmly in the hands of CEOs and senior business leaders as they navigate this dynamic new landscape.

The question then is what sort of leadership do leaders need to have in the world of AI?

Leadership for AI

With AI becoming part of our organisations, leaders must adapt how they lead teams, make decisions, innovate, and strategise. The role of CEO must now be to reshape the culture and strategy of organisations around this new world, while recognising they are not infallible.

How must leaders evolve to succeed in a world where machines can process data faster than their teams and the unexpected occurs on a daily basis that results in change accelerating faster and faster?

Leaders are going to require new cognitive skills, mindsets and strategies to enable them to harness the power of AI while staying true to their core values and purpose.

It is no longer enough to transform organisations without its leaders also transforming. In particular CEOs and boards/top teams.

What does this mean for leaders and leadership?

Rather than relying on their own expertise and experience, leaders must be willing to learn from AI and use its insights to inform their strategies. While recognising that these systems are fast and powerful, are not infallible. The most important skill for this is critical thinking to enable leaders to ask the right questions and learn themselves.

Leaders must create a culture of continuous learning to allow employees to experiment, learn and adapt to the new technology and stay up to date with its advancements. Leaders must develop empathy, which is the essence of emotional intelligence, to understand that employees fear AI will replace them, make their skills obsolete, resulting in anxiety and resistance to change. Therefore, leaders must be transparent and support employees through the transition, communicating openly about the new strategic direction and the role of AI. Leaders must promote the importance of reskilling and upskilling initiatives to enable employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. This is not just the job of HR but must be led by the top team.

Leaders must think creatively about how to leverage human skills alongside machine intelligence. AI creates opportunities for employees to focus on higher level, strategic work that requires critical thinking, emotional intelligence and creativity that can include proactive problem solving to improve efficiency. By refining roles, leaders can help employees see AI as a tool for growth and development rather than a threat to their livelihoods.

Navigating the AI age isn't just a strategic challenge for leaders, it also requires resilience. CEOs have to deal with the uncertainties and complexity of AI adoption. They too must change their thinking from apprehension to opportunity and focus on the uniquely human skills that machines cannot replicate such as empathy, creativity and strategic vision.

By embracing AI to augment their capabilities, leaders can turn uncertainty into exciting new possibilities. Engaging in regular reflection with a mentor or discussing concerns with peers in a Round Table can help leaders navigate the challenge of AI adoption. That is why we have built a team of experienced board mentors and facilitators used to working with boards and top teams across the world. It is important leaders are comfortable saying 'I don't know' or 'I'm still learning' as we go through technological disruption.

Leaders must learn to use the power of AI as a strategic decision-making partner. This means balancing AI generated Insights with human intuition and values, ensuring that AI aligns with the organisation's goals and purpose such as prioritising security, privacy and ethical considerations alongside technical capabilities. So where do you start? Four steps for this:

1. **Define clear objectives and metrics using AI initiatives, ensuring they align with organisation goals**
2. **Assemble a diverse team of experts, including data scientists, domain specialists and ethicists**
3. **Develop a framework for evaluating AI insights, considering factors such as accuracy, fairness and transparency**
4. **Regularly review AI decisions and outcomes, making adjustments as needed to maintain alignment with the organisation's values**

In a LinkedIn post on the 17th April 2025, AI & data specialist Sol Rashidi, posited the question "if AI improves 1% every day…where will that leave us 730 days from now?" She goes on to say that AI improving 1% every day won't be a linear improvement, but rather a compounding one. In those two years, she estimates that "AI will be ~38x more powerful than it is today. The real question is: Will we be 38x more prepared?"

While the figures she uses are an example, as opposed to a quantified truth, what is true is that right now the majority of people are still using ChatGPT to do simple tasks. Or in the case of last week, prompt AI to create a Barbie style action figure of themselves, complete with accessories that match their personalities. That doesn't strike us as 'prepared' in any sense of the word - now or in the future. What must leaders do, then?

Become a **Future Ready Leader**

INSTITUTE FOR FUTURE STUDIES OF LEADERS

To thrive in the age of AI, leaders must not only adapt their decision -making processes but also cultivate new skills and thinking or mindset. This involves embracing continuous learning, strengthening emotional intelligence (EI), promoting experimentation and leading with transparency. Leaders need to establish regular AI learning sessions for themselves and their teams, and take time each month to explore new AI tools, trends or case studies. This means leaders stay up to date and in doing so, identify new opportunities. Where it goes wrong is when the CEO just delegates this to the IT department or the Chief Information or Technology Officer.

Leaders also can develop EI through mentoring for example, to empathise with employees concerns and keep communicating to create a culture of trust and psychological safety. Leaders also need to gain their ability to hold different perspectives at the same time and a way to do this is to build partnerships. By collaborating with industry peers, AI experts and key stakeholders, leaders can gain a broader understanding of both the challenges and opportunities presented by AI.

Creating a culture of experimentation and ecosystem collaboration is another trait for future ready leaders. Encouraging teams to learn from challenges and failures and continually iterate can help the organisation stay agile in the face of rapid technological change. It works when you try something in one part of the organisation and then roll it out across the whole organisation. By starting small and involving employees in the process, leaders can build buy-in, gather valuable feedback, and demonstrate the tangible benefits of AI.

Leading with transparency is crucial for building trust and alignment around AI initiatives. This involves communicating openly about the goals, challenges, and potential impact of AI and the organisation and its stakeholders. Leaders should involve employees in AI strategy development, soliciting their input and addressing their concerns proactively.

Thriving in the age of AI requires leaders to embrace new mindsets, skills especially critical thinking, cognitive development, emotional intelligence and strategies. By leading with curiosity and empathy, balancing AI with human judgement and leveraging partnerships and ecosystems, CEOs can navigate the complexities of AI and drive sustainable growth.

Start by identifying key business challenges that AI could help address and engaging with your team to develop a shared vision for AI adoption. From there, set a clear implementation plan with milestones, metrics and accountability structures to guide your progress. We can help with this through individual and team mentoring, Round Tables where you work with peers that are not competitors or send your executive team on our immersive programme to become a true future ready leader.

AI and **Governance**

At Davos in 2024 business leaders from different countries discussed the issue of governance for AI. They felt that there was a need for a governance model that was inclusive and result in prosperity for the whole planet. They realised that business and government have to build trust but one of the top leaders of IBM said regulation should have a light touch or he believed smart people would move. He added that regulation should be for national concerns only.

However, other business leaders said that they must make sure AI doesn't end up being ruled by the USA, neither should a concentration of power over AI sit with only a few individuals. They believed hundreds of companies should be involved and that governance should be inclusive, innovative and impactful.

February 2nd 2025 saw the EU AI Act come into force, and leaders need to be aware of what AI illiteracy can cost them. Data breaches, either in terms of violating GDPR laws or sharing proprietary data with AI companies, can result in serious consequences for individuals and companies alike.

Article 4 of the AI Act reads:

> ***Providers and deployers of AI systems shall take measures to ensure, to their best extent, a sufficient level of AI literacy of their staff and other persons dealing with the operation and use of AI systems on their behalf, taking into account their technical knowledge, experience, education and training and the context the AI systems are to be used in, and considering the persons or groups of persons on whom the AI systems are to be used.***

For responsible leaders this is a huge undertaking, and not one that can be simply solved by a quick one hour 'Intro to AI' e-learning. If you want AI to be an asset to your business, then compliance and governance in these areas must take priority. But if people using these models are culpable for the way they use them at this level, then shouldn't the companies building and training these models also have increased levels of internal and external governance, compliance, and regulation? We've seen in real time the consequences of letting social media companies self-regulate in order to turn people into products to profit off.

Are we really going to let AI charter the same course unchallenged?

The tech companies would have you think that progress is what's most important, but progress, as the author C. S. Lewis wrote in 1942:

> ***"...means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man (woman) who turns back soonest is the most progressive man (woman). There is nothing progressive about being pig-headed and refusing to admit a mistake. And I think if you look at the present state of the world it's pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistakes. We're on the wrong road. And if that is so then we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on."***

It's fair to assume, based on recent behaviours, that the companies and individuals building AI are pushing forward at all costs to win the AI race not for humanity, but for themselves. As investors scramble to get in on the ground floor of AI startups around the world, the vast amounts of money changing hands are buying a power we don't fully appreciate or understand yet.

With AI then, while pushing for progress of the wrong kind, we may inadvertently become the architects of our own demise. It is up to those of us, leaders or not, who are not benefiting financially or from proximity to power from AI to push back and demand proper regulations that protect humanity from the still relatively unknown consequences of AI and allow us to fully participate in the opportunities it affords too.

Progress for people, not profit, is what winning the AI race should be about.

The reality is different so far. When OpenAI founder Sam Altman began building ChatGPT, the generative AI chatbot launched in 2022, he spoke of AI helping to create a veritable utopia for humanity, with the technology, and the data used to train it, open and available to everyone. Indeed, the first iterations of the popular chatbot were launched alongside full transparency of the data they were trained on. At the time, Altman even committed to sharing OpenAI's research and breakthroughs with other AI companies to aid in advancing AI as quickly as possible for the benefit of all humanity, a commitment the likes of which Silicon Valley had never heard before. Then came the investors, and the transparency stopped.

Currently trained using the Chat-4o Large Language Model (LLM), recent iterations of ChatGPT have no longer been accompanied by the training transparency originally promised. With the money, it seems, comes layers of secrecy, the hoarding of IP, and the push for self-regulation – not the sharing utopia for all that Altman led with to charm investors, political leaders and policymakers.

Other business leaders from other countries said they need to:

1. **Drive costs down so the whole world can be involved with AI**
2. **Training should be global**
3. **Public services such as health should be involved so all benefit**

The most important point raised about governance was that business leaders should collaborate across nations to ensure no-one is left behind as it has in the digital world and that education should bridge the knowledge divide. This is the business view what about governments?

This is not the view of the USA. In February 2025, they made their views very clear at the Paris summit. JD Vance told European leaders not to 'strangle' AI with overregulation. He added: "The Trump administration will ensure that the most powerful AI systems are built in the US, with American designed and manufactured chips." (FT 12th Feb)

Also at the Paris summit, both the US and UK refused to sign a declaration on "inclusive and sustainable" artificial intelligence that included "ensuring AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy taking into account international frameworks for all" and "making AI sustainable for people and planet." Other countries signed the declaration including France, Japan, Australia, China, India and Canada.

Gaia Marcus, director of the Ada Lovelace Institute, that focuses on AI research, said the UK's actions "go against the vital global governance that AI needs." Also, Andrew Dudfield, head of AI at Full Fact (an independent team of fact checkers) said the UK risked "undercutting its hard-won credibility as a world leader for safe, ethical and trustworthy AI innovation" and that there needed to be "bolder government action to protect people from corrosive AI generated misinformation."

The UK government is certainly trying to move ahead with little concern for those that will be affected. What about it's own use of AI?

Can AI make government more efficient?

At the beginning of 2025 Sir Tony Blair said governments should embrace the new technology. He said: "Supermarkets already know everything about people in their community while government is still using clunky systems."

He then likened it to the first Industrial Revolution and asked: "How long did it take politicians to be where industry was?". He added: "People are taxed more, but results of governments

are poor." He said that third world countries have expectations and want the technology revolution now. He argued: "If properly improvised, it should transform education, health, procurement and so on. We should use generative AI to spend less and tax less. We would not build the NHS now as it is. The problem for government is understanding and harnessing it. Africa is already doing amazing things. We need to catch up especially in the public sector."

So how have different governments embraced AI and new technologies? Cina Lawson is Minister of Digital Economy and Transformation in Toga – a country in West Africa that is one of the least developed. During Covid they had to find a way to support the poorest when most didn't have phones or internet, so they used their voter ID. They used AI to draw a poverty map of where the poorest were located and identify them. They then used AI to distribute money to the people. Today, her department focuses on educating the people to be digitally literate. The Minister says" Government needs to be a regulator and an enabler."

The UAE claims its government has been 99% digitally transformed. This means citizens have digital access to government services. This is also attracting AI talent. They found a need to reform all the regulations for technology of which 80% has been achieved with new laws for this new world. The benefits have included attracting entrepreneurs, scientists and technologists. So where does this leave the rest of the world?

There are those who are very concerned about AI. One such leader was Pope Francis. Earlier this year, before his death, he said: "AI-generated fake media can gradually undermine the foundations of society." He adds: "As deep fake causes people to question everything, and AI generated false content erodes trust in what they see and hear, polarisation and conflict will only grow." His concerns are not unusual as others also share their concerns.

Gillian Tett of the FT described the situation recently at Davos 2025 listing the issues as "disinformation, misinformation, poverty and unequal society has resulted in loss of trust." She clearly believes AI and social media is the cause of this and added "Trump is a symptom not the cause and we now expect him to do shocks." Why and how has this happened?

Tett says: "The smart phone has brought up distributive lack of trust. Today we have a right to pick and mix everything – politics, music, friendships. We are self-selecting into tribal groups resulting in misinformation and disbelief."

The worst example we heard during this research was of a young 14-year-old boy in the USA who sought guidance from an AI chatbot, and instead of directing him towards help or mental health resources, the AI urged him to take his own life. Tragically, he did.

It begs the question how worried should we be? Pope Francis concluded that: "Such widespread deception is no trivial matter; it strikes at the core of humanity, dismantling the foundational trust on which societies are built."

While Tett says: "Gen Z believes personalised bots rather than doctors, read headlines and decides if true, then read the article." She added: "Many feel angry against elites. Leaders have forgotten the 'error bar' and make statements that are not accurate. We can't expect trust just because we speak. It requires a shift in mentality." So, this brings us to the last question we asked in our research that stood out by the large number of 'don't know' answers.

Is AI a threat to democracy?

On the research we have just undertaken with political and business leaders the response that was strikingly high was 'I don't know' to the question above. Therefore, we should explore this as it could put democracy at risk. Does AI undermine democracy resulting in more authoritarian governments? AI is not politically neutral as it can be manipulated to whoever is programming it. As we have already said, it is a mirror of us.

Democracy means rule (Kratos) by the people (demos). In its narrowest form it is about voting. Today, we do not vote on every issue, we are represented by politicians who vote on issues on our behalf in a parliament. This is representative democracy.

However, there is another way to view democracy which Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels argued in Democracy for Realists. They say voters cast votes not on considered response to issues but on the basis of tribal identities. The Conservative Party whose MPs come from the upper and professional classes have always counted on their lower educated working-class Tory voters who voted for Brexit as a powerful tribe.

The challenge today is that people have lost trust in politicians especially when they make promises or use slick slogans that have turned out to be lies. AI is already becoming a powerful tool of Right-Wing extremism in democracies around the world. This begs the question: should AI be left to either a handful of tech experts or professional politicians? The UK and USA have become divided societies where justice is a long way from the law and from what is right for people such as the Post Office and HIV blood donation scandals. Some would say this is not democracy.

Can AI improve democracy or manipulate it?

In March 2018, a whistleblower revealed to the media how a political consulting firm had taken more than 50 million Facebook voter profiles to predict and influence voting in the US elections. The company involved was called Cambridge Analytica working for Donald Trump's election team and at the time headed by Trump's main adviser Steve Bannon. The scandal was

not just about taking people's data without their consent, but that the data was used to influence voting behaviour. This was microtargeting with big data and AI to identify and exploit what the whistleblower called 'their inner demons' to influence how they voted. Investigations were launched but it was too late to stop Trump being elected. In addition, social media platforms continue to collect data making it possible to influence voting. However, democracy should not only be about voting.

Today, people are using deliberative and participatory democracy that requires people to think about and discuss policies with fellow citizens that goes beyond just voting. Professor James Fishkin of Stanford University has used this in many countries including Europe and the UK. This process challenges the belief that those who represent us are better or more capable. With a huge lack of trust in both politics and business today, engaging people in democracy could also be part of ensuring AI is an opportunity and not a threat. Technology companies won't like it, but they also don't want legislation controlling them either.

In a democracy citizens need to have political knowledge and freely form their political beliefs, but it is questionable if this is possible when the use of AI contributes to manipulation, misinformation and polarisation. If people no longer know what is true or not, real or not, how can they know what is good for a country? Programmes such as ChatGPT can produce texts full of false information, Deepfakes can produce a speech from a politician that never took place. This is dangerous, especially in a context where trust has already eroded. If we can no longer distinguish truth from falsehood, and if trust between citizens is destroyed, then democracy does not work. Neither should we expect technology to solve all our problems.

We need new checks and balances and new institutions. Citizens should have a say in how their data is used. The problem is global, so we need global solutions. We also need stronger democracy that goes beyond representative democracy and voting. This can be through more deliberative democracy and citizen assemblies. The research here showed both political and business leaders with safety measures to be addressed immediately, not after the horse has bolted. This proactive approach involving policy makers and AI experts would show forward-looking responsibility for AI and its unintended consequences.

The first role of any government is to keep people safe. Ignoring fifty years of warnings about climate change must not be repeated with technological developments. Citizen empowerment also comes through education.

The key to making AI effective is to ask the right questions and so educating young people to excel at critical thinking, understanding the role of AI in society and be involved in deliberative democracy.

At the same time, computer scientists need to understand values and concepts such as democracy. If we fail to do these then AI risks contributing to further corruption of democracies across the world.

This is not science fiction. In the UK, the outsourcing of policy ideas at leadership level decision-making to AI is already happening. MPs are using AI for policy ideas and decisions. Who is in control? Does this matter?

What is the best route forward?

Having outlined some of the issues concerning AI the final part of this research was to explore whether there is a route map that would provide business leaders, politicians, and members of the public the best of AI without the dangers.

Do you believe our political, business, and societal leaders are ready to rise to the challenge of AI and provide the vision and adaptability to seize the opportunities while also mitigating the risks?

Many political leaders are still catching up to the rapidly advancing field of AI. While some governments are actively working on AI policy frameworks and regulation (like the EU's AI Act), the pace of AI development often outstrips the ability of politicians to fully understand or regulate it. There's a gap in knowledge and urgency in many countries, and political agendas may not prioritize AI in a way that ensures comprehensive management of its risks and opportunities. There's also the challenge of global cooperation on AI regulation, as AI development often crosses borders, but each nation might have different priorities and standards.

On the business side, many companies are already integrating AI to optimize operations, improve decision-making, and even create new business models. However, business leaders may often focus on immediate profits rather than long-term ethical concerns.

There are concerns about monopolies forming around AI-driven companies, data privacy issues, and the future of work. Some businesses are proactive in addressing these, but others might be more reactive, implementing AI for efficiency without fully considering its social impact. It's a mixed bag of ambition, risk-taking, and hesitation.

Society as a whole, including educators, thought leaders, and non-profits, are still grappling with AI's potential impacts. There's increasing awareness about issues like job displacement, algorithmic bias, and privacy violations, but many communities might lack the resources or the political will to address these concerns proactively. In some parts of the world, the

conversation about AI's societal implications is just beginning, and much of the public is still catching up on understanding its deeper effects.

In terms of vision and adaptability, there are leaders who are thinking forward. There are tech visionaries pushing for responsible AI, and international organizations like the UN and OECD are discussing AI's future. However, the challenge remains for these visions to be implemented effectively.

To seize the opportunities of AI, leaders must focus on:	To mitigate the risks, they should focus on:
• Investing in AI education and training to prepare workers for an evolving job landscape. • Fostering innovation while ensuring ethical use of AI (such as transparency, accountability, and fairness). • Creating international cooperation for shared standards in regulation and AI development.	• Regulating AI development, particularly around safety, privacy, and ensuring that AI systems don't propagate biases. • Ensuring inclusivity so that AI benefits society as a whole, rather than exacerbating inequalities. • Addressing job displacement proactively, with strategies for reskilling and evolving the workforce.

Leaders are becoming more aware, but there needs to be more collaboration, foresight, and adaptability to balance the incredible potential with the inherent risks.

We recognise that this is a start, but the issues explored here are wide and include affects on the environment, the speed of the technology and how governments are slow, people losing jobs and the fear of decimating democracy.

Conclusion

Marie Curie famously said 'nothing is to be feared, it is only to be understood', however in the case of recent strides in the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the increased secrecy from a small but growing cohort of technology firms primarily based in the United States of America (USA) might need to be feared precisely because we're beginning to understand its implications on humanity as opposed to truly understanding how it works.

The opacity with which LLMs use the data and information they are trained on to deliver answers to prompts and share 'knowledge' should be an area of great concern for leaders across the world. As we write, scientists are trying to reverse engineer AI model's answers and decisions to try and construct a followable and replicable algorithm, but so far they have not been successful and we must consider whether they ever will be as these models take on more data.

Despite its seemingly recent arrival, AI is not new to our lives, nor is the way technology companies are developing its current uses. Indeed, we've seen this trope play out before. What began as a quiet arrival of mainstream social networks promising humanity more connection, knowledge, and meaning than ever before soon turned into an explosion of algorithms designed to keep people scrolling whatever the cost. And that cost, it turns out, is higher than we realised.

The technology behind AI is not inherently good or bad. That distinction is determined solely by what we've identified as the 3Ws – the Who, the What, and the Why. For builders of AI, the 3Ws should help us understand the people behind the model, the exact data the model is trained on, and why the model was built in the first place.

We've already established earlier in this report that the second W in that list – the What – cannot be categorically determined, and founders are not forthcoming with transparency on that, assuming even they know the answer now.

For users, and particularly leaders, the 3Ws cover who is using the model and their critical thinking ability to not take the outputs as objective truth, what they are using it for, and why they are using it. Is it because they don't know the answer? Or that they are time poor? Or is it a research tool used as a jumping off point, over which they will lay their own human knowledge, experience, and reasoning to come to a conclusion?

AI is a tool. And like any tool we can use it to either rebuild trust and enhance all our lives, or to destroy, undermine, and elevate only a small section of society. That statement should fill us with optimism – we have an exciting opportunity ahead of us. However, it's one we should consider with trepidation because human beings have had these opportunities before and squandered them.

Take the discovery of nuclear fission in 1938, a technology that changed the way we thought about energy. It took humans just five years to turn that discovery into a weapon. The first nuclear powered electricity generator wasn't operational until 1954, almost 10 years later.

A more modern example are the social media giants of today. Leaders and policymakers were charmed by the likes of Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Kevin Systrom, Biz Stone, Noah Glass, Evan Williams, and Jack Dorsey into not pushing for stricter regulations or to ensure the continued security and accountability of these platforms. As a result, things like the Cambridge Analytica Facebook scandal in early 2018 and the current rise in Incel culture on these platforms continue to harm our society and our democracies with seemingly few repercussions. The tide could be turning though, in the US at least. Musk, for example, had made himself very at home in the White House in the early months of Trump's second term, and the money had kept rolling in. However, Tesla in particular has seen its stock price plummet of late, and the brand has been subject to protests, including dealership arson, in response.

In the same vein, Sam Altman and others are using the same charm offensive to ensure their AI models have the same clear runway for development as social media did in 2010. Leaders and policymakers must not allow this to happen again. Self-regulation is a façade behind which money and power serves the few, not the many.

Is there a way to resolve these challenges?

Aleksei Turobov at the University of Cambridge believes so in what he calls AI Beyond Zero Sum. Having studied how the world is adjusting to AI, Turobov has developed the best way forward and says treating AI as a competitive race is not the right or best approach. He argues that policy makers have a choice: Allow AI development to accelerate global fragmentation; or create practical pathways for international cooperation. The challenge is that the USA politically and its business drivers perceive it as a race and don't care about the rest of the world. The USA was built on Herbert Spencer's view of survival as based on the strongest and fittest or winners and losers, while Darwin said survival was about adaptability.

Turobov has produced an alternative, practical way forward focused on five strategic areas where cooperation delivers development benefits while minimising security concerns.

These are:

- **Agricultural development that uses AI to address food security and food development**
- **Educational AI technology to enhance learning globally while respecting sovereignty**
- **Cybersecurity focused on converting shared vulnerabilities into collaborative frameworks**
- **Environmental monitoring using AI to leverage shared climate challenges**
- **Healthcare innovation combining technical advancement with universal access**

He argues that this offers policy makers mechanisms for advancing both domestic innovation and growth while also encouraging international stability to benefit all actors. This would transform AI from a source of international tension to a catalyst for productive cooperation and prosperity. Whereas the race or zero-sum view of AI will develop risks stifling innovation and destabilise international relations worse that at present.

Economics professor and winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize Joseph Stiglitz has looked into the impact of AI and says: “Unfettered capitalism, unfettered innovation, does not lead to the general wellbeing of our society.” (Scientific America Winter/Spring 2025) He adds: “With the right policies, we could have higher productivity and less inequality, and everybody would be better off. But you might say that the political economy, the way that our politics has been working, has not been going in the right direction”. He concluded: “So at the end I’m hopeful that if we did the right things AI would be great. But the question is: Will we be doing the right thing in our policy space? That’s much more problematic.”

We must trust that our politicians can and will do the right thing, not be bullied by big tech and move faster to secure the wellbeing of all citizens. However, by their own admissions, and those of the UK public during our research, that trust will not be earned easily or quickly.

Therefore, there needs to be a mindset shift – from regarding AI as a technology race to an opportunity we should all be involved in shaping for the good of humanity and the natural world. AI has the potential to do amazing things we should all benefit from. As Martin Wolf argues we should not regard ourselves just as consumers, workers, business owners or investors. We are citizens and have a voice. We cannot turn the clock back to a nostalgic time which is mainly fantasy, but rather take responsibility for the future.

Role of **CEOs** and **Executive Teams**

The temptation is for the CEO to hand this over to the CIO but it is important that the board are involved and at the very least updated and kept informed as the transition to AI goes through.

At strategic level, leaders have to look to the future (maybe scenario planning) to see how AI and people collaborate to harness AI potential while also bridging the gap between technology and the organisation's strategic goals.

Put a cross-functional team of leaders together to set safe guardrails showing when generative AI is acceptable and when it is too risky. Think critically about the output of AI models.

Offer a limited number of generative AI tools and see how employees make informed choices.

Explore how strategic objectives could benefit from an infusion of generative AI, and how individual productivity gains could be applied at scale.

Leaders at all levels including the top team need basic understanding of AI concepts including data analytics, machine learning and cyber-security.

It is worth noting that currently 40% of companies globally say they already utilise AI, and 42% are exploring its adoption. It's also worth noting that not all instances of 'utilising AI' are made equal. In one business it can mean they have bought a handful of pro licenses, in another, replacing whole teams with AI-driven automation.

Recommendations

“This is a moment of great fear and faint hope. We must recognise the danger and fight now if we are to turn the hope into reality. If we fail, the light of political and personal freedom might once again disappear from the world.”
Martin Wolf The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism.

Based on these findings the eight recommendations we propose are:

Politcial leaders

must learn much more about AI to be able to provide clear legislation to protect the public in regard to privacy, bias, and IP. They must also ensure investment and funding in offline options keeps pace with AI.

Huge requirement for

business & government

to work together in mapping out how AI will be used for the benefit of all society.

More information

is needed on how AI can improve both productivity and growth so all can benefit from it.

A large piece of work must be undertaken to

clarify both

the opportunities and the risks across sectors and use cases.

Recommendations continued

There must be an understanding of how AI can work with specialists in the field to tackle

poverty & climate change

There is a huge requirement for assessing the

risks to the environment

from the resources required for AI.

More work

must be done on the impact AI has on democracy across the world.

Bias and stereotyping

must be addressed by those working with AI, alongside combatting AI spreading of deliberate or inadvertent mis- and dis-information.

There must be a shift from regarding AI as a race to be won, and instead focus on the collaborative work so desperately needed to ensure AI benefits all live on the planet. For this to be possible, we must all act as citizens, use our voices, and actively participate in the current AI world so that we may shape and understand what is coming next.

As the former vice president of the European Parliament Mario Mauro told public relations and public affairs professionals at the PRovoke EMEA Summit in London earlier this month: **"We are not in an era of change, but in a change of era."**

Are you ready for it?

Acknowledgements

Our joint thanks to the **political** and **business leaders** who took time out of their schedules to meet with us and discuss this important topic. Also to our survey partner **Opinium,** particularly **Calum Weir** and **Eliza Arkuszewska,** for their support and insights for our survey of more than 2,000 members of the British public.

To the **IFSL advisory board**, thank you for being our sounding board and helping to steer both this project and the Institute. We're thrilled to be working with you all. And to our early members, thank you for your confidence in us and the work we do. We're excited to have you as part of this journey.

Angharad Planells - To my husband and teammate **Matt** and our daughter **Ava Eilonwy** for your unwavering love, support, and belief. You are my biggest cheerleaders and I dedicate this to you. I am incredibly grateful to **Hilarie** for seeing my vision and agreeing to be part of it. You are a constant source of inspiration, motivation, and have been a paradigm of patience during this process. Finally, and he will hate this, thanks to my friend and accidental mentor **Rich Leigh**, for inspiring my curiosity and continually reminding me not to wait for permission. We hope our words inspire action. After all, this change of era impacts us all.

Hilarie Owen - First, a big thank you to the **politicians and business leaders** who gave their time and honesty to help us gain a deeper understanding about their concerns of and opportunities with AI. Secondly, I'd like to thank **Angharad** for her ideas and determination to address this issue. Though different generations, we have more similarities than differences and used the differences to learn from each other. After more than 25 years of research and writing, it still excites me when exploring people's perception of the world we live in. We hope this will widen everyone's understanding and provide practical steps to take forward.

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- Why AI Undermines Democracy: And what to do about it. Mark Coeckelbergh
- Rebooting AI: Building Artificial Intelligence We Can Trust by Gary Marcus and Ernest Davis
- The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt
- How To Think About AI: A Guide for the Perplexed by Richard Susskind
- AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference by Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor