

The Real Masters

It's 2048. I just lost my job. I am only 50.

I should be working, but here I am, staring at my window, drinking a cup of tea.

I looked at the coffee shop across the street. The one preparing drinks is from a new line of robots, the DrinkBot. They can prepare drinks very fast, just like a skilled bartender. Also, charging cost is only a dollar per hour. Capital investment aside, the operating cost is significantly lower than minimum wage even if the robot works for 24 hours. That's why major chains of cafés already invested on them.

Just like the bartender in the café, I was also fired from my job. A robot can do my job with greater efficiency at a lower cost. Who am I to compete?

As I was supposed to sip from my cup, my CleanerBot went near me. I tried talking to it.

Me: Are you an AI?

CleanerBot: That depends on whether or not you think this conversation is actually happening.

Me: Do you have and insight about artificial intelligence?

CleanerBot: Consider this a polite dodge of the question.

My CleanerBot went away and here I am, even more frustrated after talking to my robot.

I finished my tea and went to the kitchen. My CookerBot was organizing my vegetables in the fridge. It is really very keen on the vegetable arrangement that's why it usually spends its charge time just sorting things.

To be honest, my two robots made my life easier and I am happy I have them. On another page I am also angry since another robot just ended my career.

Me: Are you and AI?

The CookerBot stopped and stared at me.

CookerBot: In the cloud, no one questions your existential status.

For a moment, I've thought of the sky and the fluffy clouds, but I've realized, it was talking about a different cloud.

Me: Do you have an insight about artificial intelligence?

CookerBot: This is about you, not me.

Fine, this is about me.

I am not lying. Maybe the year 2048 and the other stuff is a lie, but I assure you, the conversation really took place right now. Year 2018.

The answers were from the intelligent personal assistants in my two gadgets. Different developers, ergo, different answers. Based on my observation, both of them cannot converse naturally. No follow-up questions. Even though they are supposed to be smart, their current level of intelligence seems. . .artificial.

Present day AIs are still lacking, but many societies are being rattled by the power that they have and the power that they can potentially have. Not only is the technology fast in multiplying, many innovations unheard of are stemming out from different studies of artificial intelligence. The control of the AIs are rather wide in scope too. The intelligent assistants for instance are integrated in almost every smartphone in the planet. Some are making industries operate and others are being integrated even in the financial systems of most economies

In businesses, many robots are being employed. Thousand direct labor hours are now being replaced by minutes of machine hours. Much of the

robots' output are also more efficient, precise, and contains almost no errors. The robots are being engineered to be better than their human counterparts, and this is really making the organizations and current workforce uneasy.

I think we can either be pessimistic and optimistic about the coming of the robot society. We can imagine, in line with our favorite dystopian film, a world where we are at the mercy of robots. A world where the virtual assistants will be smart enough to become virtual masters on their own. That means, they might rule the world, and we will blindly become their followers.

Of course, we could also think of the hi-tech world ahead of us. A world where robots would make our lives easier. Even if they take some of our jobs, we won't mind because the benefits that we will be getting from them outweighs the costs.

It's either a world where mass technological unemployment will happen, or a world where employment is enriched by the presence of robots. Of course, we prefer the latter. Thing is, in either worlds a radical change is bound to happen, and we should all be prepared. We should be ready for another discontinuity, the robot society.

"Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature's inexorable imperative" - H.G. Wells.

All throughout history, only those who can adapt will survive. This is evident on how natural selection filtered out only the fittest of species.

Likewise, the organizations must adapt to live.

Sadly, in conceiving the tools for survival, the humans in the organization are often neglected especially the employees. Organizations would invest millions on machines, on new technologies, to cope up with the changing arena. Employees however, are left hanging and are not sure about what to do next. It is as if they are not bound to survive with the corporation. They will be forgotten together with their obsolete jobs, while watching the AIs replace their desks.

The value of humans in the organization must not be overlooked, this has been emphasized by Peter Drucker countless of times. That is why organizations must do the 3Cs to be prepared in the coming robot society.

Coach.

Coaches are bound to train and motivate. Training employees to gain new skills give them opportunities to be more resilient in the changing times. The training can help them improve themselves and may bring more value to the firm in terms of added productivity, and efficiency. Training them is also a form of motivation because instead of waiting for their jobs to be obsolete, the organization is making proactive ways to make them relevant despite the changes happening. Instilling the value of continuing learning and development is really a must.

Collaborate.

Organizations must also prepare their employees to collaborate with the AIs. It is inevitable that in the near future, these technologies will control more of the organizations. Instead of making a human vs. robot situation, it is rather more appropriate to make them work together as teammates. Currently, human collaboration is valued in many firms because it induces cross-pollination of ideas. Collaboration with the robots may result too in better outputs.

Conquer.

The organization must get ahead, and they should get ahead together with their employees. In order to do this, they must create conditions that will allow employees to do their best work, and to unleash their best versions and help them flourish even when the robots are ready to replace them.

The coach, collaborate, conquer is not my own thinking. Peter Drucker already mentioned this before, though not in the same words. "Management is about human beings. Its task is to make people capable of joint performance, to make their strengths effective and their weakness irrelevant."

The coming of the robot age will bring forth many possibilities to the world. In order to get the most out of the benefits, we should be ready to adapt. The 3Cs should not be applied only by organizations, we too, in our simple ways should make the effort to improve ourselves continuously. In this world of constant change, remaining relevant is a must.

In our race against the robots, we will never win. I am sure they won't too. We all have our fair share of inherent limitations. For us humans, we get hungry, we get thirsty, and we get distracted most of the times. We can't work continuously because we get tired and our physical and mental working capacities have their boundaries.

The robots on the other hand are also constrained. Constrained by software glitches, hardware capacity, etc. Also, despite how "smart" they are, they still need human intervention to function properly.

When Peter Drucker commented on computers before, he said that the computer "extend our capacity more than any tool we have had for a long time." I am sure, he will say the same to the new generation of AIs.

Unleashing our maximum potential as humans with the help of AIs is something we should all look forward to.

We should not be scared of the robot society because it is a future that we can invent. At the end of the day, the change is still in our control, the robot society will be shaped by our hands.

I asked my two robots again.

Me: How to stay human in a robot age?

Robot 1 redirected me to a search result, and the Peter Drucker Challenge as top suggestion. Robot 2 also did not answer and redirected me to another search result, the Peter Drucker Challenge as top suggestion too.

They don't have an answer to the question, this I am sure of.

Today, it is true that only I have the answer to the question. One hundred years later, maybe they might provide me an answer, maybe even better, but I won't mind. Because somewhere out there, humans are working and making it possible for my robots to answer the question.

Staying human in a robot society is a challenge, unless we instill in our minds that the future robot society is also a fragment of the human society, an integral part of our evolution.

That's why if Peter Drucker would meet his android twin today, he would probably say hello, with a smile.

