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7 Strategies to Get Your Employees On Board with GenAI

A culture that accepts this new technology can also learn how to innovate with it. *by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic*

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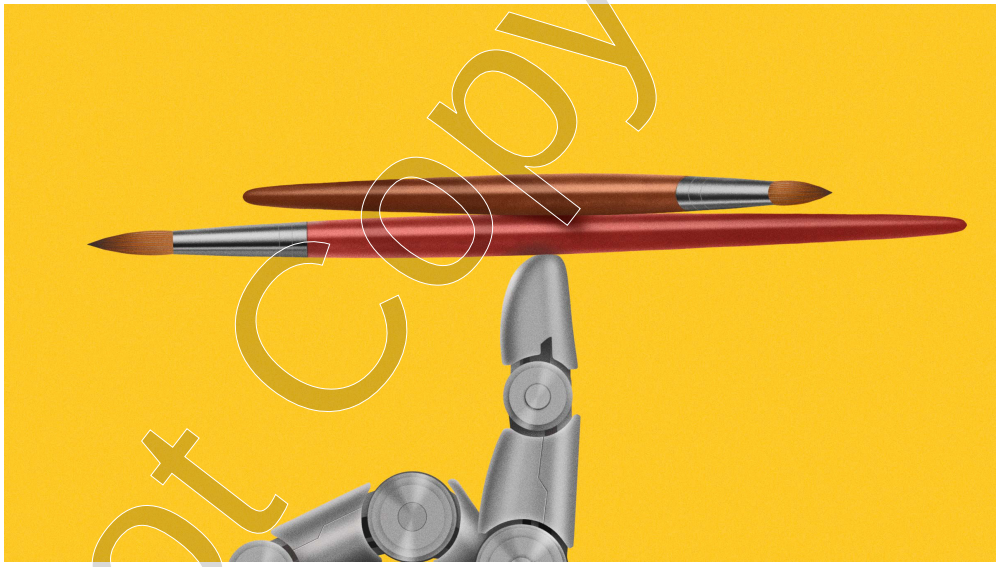

Illustration by Alex William

Despite record rapid adoption and persistent media hype — ranging from dystopian to utopian coverage — generative AI is more of an area of intellectual promise or concern for businesses than an operational reality. Amidst estimates of an AI market that could reach almost $670 billion by 2030, adding up to $4.4 trillion in productivity, business leaders are still wondering what exactly to do with AI, how to leverage it, and how exactly it will deliver the advertised economic benefits. And

there is no shortage of hope or belief in AI's potential, especially during turbulent economic times.

As with any aspect of digital transformation, the effective deployment of generative AI will depend less on technological capability than on human adaptability. Indeed, the human factor — people and culture — will drive the adoption of AI, or lack thereof. That means that companies need to spend as much time thinking about how to harness cultural strengths, and implement the necessary processes to complement or compensate for its cultural weaknesses, to drive AI adoption. For example, if a culture is passive aggressive or risk averse, then setting up the right formal incentives to reward risk will work wonders. Conversely, if a culture is so entrepreneurial that it jumps on any new market opportunities to the point of being distracted by shiny new objects, formal incentives and processes must reward focus, discipline, and the ability to ignore novel fads.

While GenAI is too new to understand or predict how far it may develop, and AI in general has only gone mainstream relatively recently, there are still valuable lessons from the recent corporate history on how organizations have adopted and realized the value of emerging technologies. These explain why some cultures are better equipped to not just embrace new tech, but also innovate. More specifically, evidence from both scientific research and real-world case studies identifies seven generalizable lessons for improving your ability to adopt GenAI, and any novel technology, at an organizational level:

Understand where resistance comes from — and give innovation a boost.

Change or change will change you. This is the biggest argument for innovation, though at times it runs up against an organization's

reluctance to change. This resistance exists in every organization. But to stay competitive, companies need to be able to push through.

Generative AI is no exception: while some organizations embrace it, there are too many that are resistant on the grounds that they have tried and tested ways of doing things already, and the fear of the unknown eclipses any desire for change. Like any other innovation, GenAI will be effectively strengthen an organization if it can be deployed throughout its systems, future-proofing it and increasing its general fitness. This however, requires the right champions (change agents, intrapreneurs, etc.) to combat the innate, knee-jerk pockets of resistance in the system, which bristle at any change that could be regarded as a threat to the status quo.

Successfully bringing new technology into an organization — especially if its buzzy or controversial — also requires understanding where resistance is coming from and the logic behind it. At times, resistance can be formal and explicit, as when reports suggest that 75% of organizations are considering banning employees from using generative AI. Other times, it is informal resistance that needs to be tackled, a phenomenon so common that there's a specific academic term, "passive innovation resistance," coined to highlight the unconscious pushback resulting from employees' resistance to change and satisfaction with the status quo. The best way to address such implicit fears is to sell the ways in which this technology will strengthen the organization — and increase the resilience of each part — with the goal to upgrade attitudes from negative to positive, or at least neutral.

Focusing on the problem helps.

Generative AI is very versatile technology. However, this can be a disadvantage, as it is not obviously linked to a specific problem, which

may dilute it to the status of a clever solution waiting for a problem to be solved.

In order to address this shortcoming, organizations must start with the problem. That is, identify the most pressing and painful challenges the business must address. Once they have a clear target, then they should test AI alongside other potential solutions. When it comes to generative AI, an important mindset shift is to focus less on automation, which tends to denote destruction or elimination, and more on amplification.

For example, H&M went from being a laggard to a pioneer in AI by seeing AI not as "artificial" but rather "amplified" intelligence, focusing on how this technology could enhance or augment existing organizational capabilities, as opposed to merely eliminating inefficiencies, including humans. Likewise, among the giant tech players, Amazon was relatively late to the AI game, but managed to prioritize and leapfrog rivals once it positioned AI as an enabler of other innovations within existing business lines. And Walmart decided to invest in generative AI as a means to improve customer service through augmenting their associates' ability to help them find what they need and attend to their demands.

As always, less is more.

In general, small, incremental improvements over the status quo will represent a better approach to test and deploy technological innovations than a grandiose masterplan at scale. As Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson notes in her latest book, *Right Kind of Wrong*, this is also the best way to design experiments that result in smart failures, as it enables us to catch small errors before they spiral out of control to become big endemic problems.

So, getting started sooner rather than later, and approaching your AI pilots with an open mind and an experimental mindset, is the best way to learn, including from your failed experiments — and failing fast is a good formula for creating the conditions for success in the long run, provided you learn from those failures.

Intuition is the common enemy.

There is no bigger obstacle for deploying generative AI, or any form of data-driven automation, than human intuition. Indeed, the production of human-like activity by autonomous technologies is often seen by people — no matter their role — as a threat to control, power, and autonomy. To be fair, it often *does* reduce freedom and improvisation by humans. Workers fear being displaced by the very technology they are busy training. Executives who see AI-based standardization as an assault on their powers as decision-making and actions become encoded in the system and detached from individual agency.

As such, it's important to communicate that there's a tradeoff here: In relinquishing some control over minor decisions, people can focus more energy on higher-order tasks.

For example, recruiters and hiring managers tend to overrate their ability to evaluate other people's talents, but research shows that AI is at least as accurate, if not more, at identifying people's potential. Ultimately, whenever tech manages to reach human levels of ability, humans have an opportunity to develop and deploy others skills, particularly those tech (including GenAI) cannot master. For instance, at ManpowerGroup, our recruiters are leveraging GenAI to outsource some of the more repetitive and non-creative tasks (e.g., summarizing and parsing resumes, proofreading and correcting application letters, and punching up job ads) so they can spend more time on high value activities: helping candidates understand whether a job is a good fit for

them, and helping clients to reduce the gap between the candidates they want and the candidates they actually need.

Everybody loves change, until they have to do it.

Change is a lovely idea, but whether at the individual or collective level, the idea starts to lose much of its appeal once we become aware of the effort, persistence, and struggle needed to execute on it. In fact, what we like is not change, but to have changed.

So, too, with generative AI: the notion of having an organization that has already gone through the phases of experimenting with it, leveraging its powers, and scaling or industrializing it, is enticing. However, the process of navigating these stages and going through these experiences is the actual job to be done. Thus, organizations should approach the adoption of AI like individuals would approach the acquisition of a new language or completion of a new college degree: with patience, time, dedication, and a fundamental awareness that what matters is not so much the destination as the journey.

Process eats culture for lunch.

Cultural resistance is often outlined as the main barrier to AI adoption. Although organizational investment on "culture change" interventions continues to grow, deliberate attempts to mold or reshape company culture take a great deal of time and have low success rate.

A better approach is to see culture as a constraint or a set parameter and treat it as you would treat your relationship to the weather: not as something you can change, but something that informs your choice of clothing. The key is to put in place new systems and processes that counteract the effects of culture, like extrinsic formal incentives that inhibit the influence of informal dynamics and forces. As academic reviews show, such processes are best deployed and operationalized via

mid-level managers, for their behaviors and decisions mobilize change and instill new habits in the wider workforce.

Be proactive about ethical concerns.

As typical media coverage of generative AI is pretty sensationalist, it is common for this subject to evoke moral dilemmas, legal fears, and ethical concerns. Organizations must tackle these at the outset, to position AI as both ethical by design and an improvement over the status quo. For example, being transparent with users, enabling people to "opt in," and ensuring that the application of AI represents an improvement over existing processes and methods will not just keep companies out of trouble, but also convince skeptics that generative AI can make a valuable improvement to their work and lives. As a Gartner report on ethical AI adoption recommends, transparency is critical: "Be forthcoming with people, whether they be staff, customers or citizens, about the fact that they are interacting with a machine by clearly labeling any conversation multiple times throughout."

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Ultimately, culture is always evolving. Progress is not the result of adopting every innovation or new technology, but rather leveraging the right tools to advance one's strategy and improve the long-term effectiveness of the organization. If companies can work out how to seamlessly integrate AI within their strategy and culture, they will likely increase their competitive advantage over their rivals. Most organizations are still trying to figure this out. The companies that manage to crack the code on cultural adoption will be the ones that reap the rewards of this new technology.

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