# Leading in the Era of AI: Creating an Inquisitive Intelligent Organization

Like it or not, the era of AI is here

Launched in June 2020, OpenAI's GPT immediately captured global attention with its remarkable language-generation capabilities, igniting widespread interest and fervent debates on its applications across various industries. Now, as experimentation progresses, individuals are accomplishing a diverse array of tasks using ChatGPT and other AI-powered tools with unprecedented speed and precision. Today, many organizations are actively exploring ways to integrate AI into their services and products (e.g., APIs, chatbots and customer support, content generation, brainstorming ideas, translation, code completion and software development), while others are still contemplating the most effective approaches to capitalize on this groundbreaking technology.

Despite the recent decline in the media hype surrounding AI, it is less indicative of another passing trend and more suggestive of a quiet spell before an impending storm. Nonetheless, the ability to leverage the immense potential of AI is contingent upon a leadership and organizational climate that fosters and supports inquisitive mindsets, with individuals who possess the capacity to pose insightful questions and establish appropriate hypotheses to guide their exploration. Thus, it is imperative for today's leaders to take decisive actions regarding the use of AI instead of remaining hesitant or even fearful of the tools, or risk being left behind in an increasingly competitive landscape.

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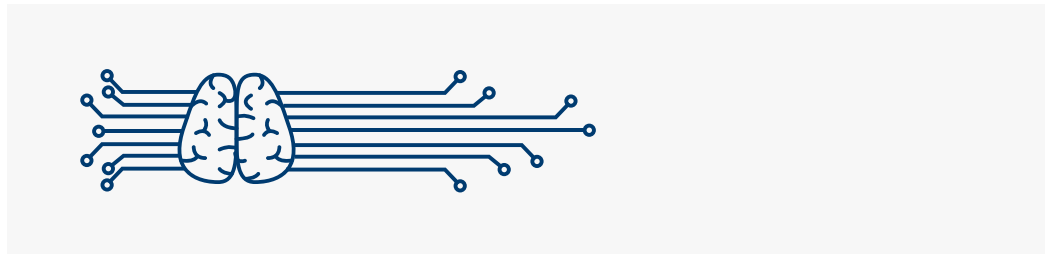
The Inquisitive Intelligent Organization (IIO)

The truth is, as seemingly limitless as AI-powered tools appear to be, they are still bounded by the questions you ask them as well as those you have yet to conceive. At least for now, AI-powered technologies are simply tools that answer questions and complete assigned tasks, and the quality of the work depends on the questions asked and commands entered, as well as the quality of the resources they draw from. To harness the incredible power of AI, leaders should focus not only on merely adopting the technologies, but also on preparing employees to embrace and effectively leverage such technology, in effect creating what we call *Inquisitive Intelligent Organizations (IIO)*.

At the heart of an IIO lies **a commitment to curiosity, critical thinking and open-mindedness**. This isn't just an abstract ideal; it's a strategic response to the AI-driven world. Traditional organizations often view AI as merely another tool in their arsenal. In contrast, IIOs recognize AI's transformative potential and view AI as a malleable asset, constantly adapting and refining based on the insightful inquiries arising from their teams.

These organizations, rooted in a culture of learning agility, **empower their employees to challenge and redefine the very paradigms of AI applications**. Instead of just harnessing AI for routine tasks or data analysis, they might question its broader applications: Can AI help in fostering creativity? How might it reshape organizational structures? Or even, how can AI be used to further enhance productivity by relieving employees from mundane tasks and allowing them to focus on those tasks that create value? How can we leverage AI to develop applications that best suit the organization's needs? The goal isn't just to implement AI but to continually reimagine its capabilities.

Moreover, in IIOs, **cross-functional collaboration becomes even more critical** in the context of AI. IT professionals ensure the technological soundness, domain experts ensure its applicability and ethicists ensure its moral integrity. Such a holistic approach ensures that AI projects are not just technologically advanced but also ethically responsible and truly beneficial.

In essence, **for IIOs, AI isn't a static tool but a dynamic partner**. It grows, learns and evolves, driven not just by data but by the ever-evolving, inquisitive nature of the organization. This synergy ensures that IIOs aren't merely spectators in the AI revolution but active participants, shaping the future of AI as much as they are shaped by it.

The roles of leaders in an IIO

The role of leadership in fostering an IIO is more pivotal than ever. Leaders in IIOs are not just visionaries; they are also **role models of curiosity**. Their charismatic allure often stems from their unique blend of intelligence, creativity and strategic insight – all hallmarks of an inquisitive leader. Such leaders understand that while AI can sift through vast data lakes and automate myriad tasks, its most potent capability is in answering profound questions. Therefore, their role becomes twofold: to constantly question the status quo and to ensure that the AI tools at their disposal are calibrated to address these questions.

Proactive support for experimentation is another hallmark of IIO leadership. Leaders should allocate dedicated time for employees to chase their innovative hunches, be it exploring a novel use case for AI or iterating on an existing process. In these periods of "guided freedom," AI becomes an invaluable ally, enabling rapid prototyping, generating insights or even suggesting entirely new avenues for exploration.

But the leader's responsibility isn't to simply encourage inquisitiveness. They must **actively invest in honing the inquisitive skills of their teams**. This includes facilitating workshops on crafting impactful open-ended questions, promoting active listening and fostering a culture of constructive feedback. The use of AI tools should be seamlessly integrated into this learning process, ensuring that as employees become more inquisitive, they simultaneously become adept at leveraging AI to explore their curiosities.

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In essence, in an IIO, leaders stand at the confluence of human curiosity and AI's capabilities, ensuring that the two forces don't just coexist but synergize, pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

Culture is also critical

To nurture an IIO, leaders must **create an atmosphere that encourages questioning without fear of retribution**. The emphasis on prudent risk-taking, underpinned by a reward system for curiosity and critical thinking, ensures that employees see AI not as a mere tool to replace human ingenuity but one that amplifies it, becoming an extension of the team's inquisitive asset.

However, inquisitiveness is only effective in an environment in which problems can be openly addressed. When leaders work to create a **culture of open communication and candid feedback**, employees will not only feel comfortable raising concerns but will have the opportunity to gain exposure to the most pressing issues facing the organization. Open communication can also help create transparency and trust, making employees feel valued and supported. **Fostering a diverse, equitable and inclusive culture**, in which employees feel safe, valued, respected and included, can help ensure that diverse perspectives are presented and considered, providing a rich tapestry of ideas, each potentially the seed of groundbreaking innovation. And by embracing inquisitiveness and open communication, organizations can encourage a mindset of continuous learning and improvement, leading to enhanced innovation, productivity and success.

Navigating mixed emotions

Sometimes, the widespread enthusiasm around AI can be accompanied by an equally palpable sense of apprehension and skepticism. AI, particularly tools as powerful as ChatGPT, elicits a mixed bag of reactions, ranging from wonder and amazement to concern and trepidation. The duality of these emotions is understandable. On one hand, the potential to revolutionize industries and daily lives is undeniable, yet on the other, fears of job displacement, ethical implications and the potential misuse of technology lurk in the shadows.

Some worry about the erosion of human touch in services or the overreliance on machines for critical decisions. As organizations integrate AI, it is paramount to address these emotions – both positive and negative. Effective communication, training and ethical guidelines can serve to not only alleviate concerns but also harness the collective enthusiasm to build AI solutions that are human-centric, transparent and aligned with the organization's core values. The journey with AI isn't just about technology; it's as much about understanding, managing and guiding human emotions and expectations in this rapidly evolving landscape.

All in all, organizations that prioritize inquisitiveness and empower their employees to explore are more likely to successfully adopt emerging technologies and thrive in today's fast-paced business environment. By creating a culture of openness, curiosity and innovation, organizations can harness the full potential of their employees and technology, driving success and achieving breakthroughs that were once thought impossible.

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