

## Expert opinion

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### **No artificial intelligence without collective intelligence**

By Philippe Le Gloahec, Consultant Manager, Hardis Group

*Artificial intelligence is a source of uncertainty, fear and enthusiasm. But whatever we think of AI, its march will continue at pace in the coming years. So now is a good time to think again about how organisations can develop collective intelligence.*

#### **AI and employees: a shared destiny**

Artificial intelligence is a common theme of science fiction films. And for good reason. It is fascinating and terrifying in equal measure. Organisations are embracing AI because it allows them to automate certain tasks – a move that is prompting fears that technology could replace people in the workplace. Yet AI is not the only development that poses a threat to jobs. Progress has, in its own way, always impacted the world of work. The arrival of piped water forced water carriers to become plumbers. Coach drivers were replaced by mechanics with the advent of the car. And the invention of cash machines saw bank clerks take on more of a customer advice and support role.

Put simply, AI and employees have a shared destiny. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) solutions are an interesting case in point because the automation of cumbersome and repetitive tasks is giving those who used to perform that work a chance to reinvent themselves. Process automation is the foundation on which organisations across every sector will need to build new business models, shaped by new practices, new services and higher added-valued tasks.

Technological progress, no matter what form it takes, can only be judged in terms of how it helps people carry out their work or go about their daily lives. Technology and humans are inseparable. And AI will be no exception that rule. It will address needs and create new ones.

#### **Collective intelligence: driving innovation through soft skills**

Organisations rely on hard skills to fulfil their purpose. Some of these hard skills go to the very heart of an organisation's added value. Others are a "necessary evil" without which it cannot function properly. Automation solutions, and AI technologies more generally, have to do with this second category.

But organisations equally cannot function properly without soft skills – without employees who can live, thrive and grow together. Take project management, for example. An AI solution is perfectly capable of analysing project team members' skills and assigning them roles accordingly. But qualities like instinct, emotion, creativity and empathy, and the relationships between team members, are resolutely human facets. And these aspects can only be managed by human beings.

Artificial intelligence operates to strict, logical rules. To counter the threat from technology, organisations must explore ways to develop their employees' soft skills and collaborative

capabilities. In other words, they must encourage collective intelligence. Yet doing so at organisation-wide scale is easier said than done.

### **Focusing on small groups and training**

Artificial intelligence, and digital innovation more generally, is quickening the pace of organisational change. For some employees, the pace of change can be overwhelming. Organisations therefore need to support change and secure employee buy-in, innovate and devise new ways of working with AI, and develop collective intelligence. To do so, they must let employees form – or at least not stop them forming – small, pioneering, agile groups that embrace learning.

These small communities, united behind a project leader, will foster creativity and get around the limitations of bigger, more rigidly structured organisations. They will experiment with new ideas outside conventional lines of command, guided by the good will of their members. Then, they will take what they have learned and share those lessons with other employees.

More generally, the march of AI and the profound organisational changes that it brings will require organisations to develop new ways of bringing people together, in a spirit of purpose, trust and collaboration.

Organisations can only harness the potential of collective intelligence if employees get the support they need. These new working methods must be included in initial training programmes for young people who will enter the workforce in the future. And today's employees need to learn collaborative skills and complete ongoing training – on the changing nature of work and new, more intelligent tools – throughout their careers.

### **About Hardis Group**

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Hardis Group, a consulting firm, digital services company and independent software vendor, is committed to accelerating the transformation of its clients' value chains, information systems and supply chain.

Its teams support the strategic, organizational and technological transformations of companies in order to increase their competitive edge. They design, develop and integrate differentiating applications, capitalizing on the most innovative technologies (cloud, platforming, artificial intelligence, IoT, robotics, etc.). Hardis Group's Reflex software suite and Eyesee inventory drone enable international companies to meet the challenges of efficient logistics operations in warehouses, factories and stores all over the world.

Remaining independent since its creation in 1984, Hardis Group cultivates the spirit of initiative, the creativity and talent development of its 1,000 employees to sustain its growth, and the long-term trust of its 2,500 clients. Hardis Group achieved a turnover of 99.1 million euros in 2017. It has offices in Grenoble (head office), Paris, Lyon, Lille, Nantes, Bordeaux, Geneva, Madrid and Utrecht.

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