

## Artificial intelligence: an opportunity and a threat.

*By Massimo Milletti for Harvard Business Review April 2024 – English translation*

“Even if there are always more arguments for fear, choose hope” (Seneca). Hope, indeed! Perhaps that’s what we have needed the most over the last few years, stressed, as we have been, by significant gravitational forces: a pandemic that has never really been fully explained, a series of conflicts of variable degrees of severity, a pauperising inflation. Challenges of a high physical, emotional and mental intensity which have hit generations numbed by widespread affluence, their intellects deadened by a diffuse use of digital devices and sated by an abundance of superficial information.

“You can measure someone’s intelligence by the level of uncertainty they are able to bear” (Kant). And there it is, the hope, the hope that we have exercised our minds enough that we can face, calmly, the issue of marrying together the two forms of intelligence: the emerging and the atavistic. One synthetic, the other natural. The inevitable confrontation with rules of engagement that are still imprecise, given that we have yet to develop awareness of the potential of new technologies. This is an issue currently faced by all companies, given the speed at which the phenomenon is expanding and the need to evaluate how changes in the way we do business will impact organisations.

From the outset, it seems clear that the inviting prospect of improving the efficiency of business machinery can only favour the development of AI. However, this comes with the risk of stifling the noble ethical concerns of those who are worried about social impact and who would like to set limits (which can of course be circumvented). The same ethics that seek to contain the sense of danger that comes not from what we know, but from what we think is true but in fact is not.

And now one talks of restructuring, upskilling, reskilling: three parts of Dante’s Inferno in which companies are seeking – with the support of AI – to place personnel of greatest operational importance. Eliminating the unusable, retraining the usable, recycling those with potential. The selection criteria are well known: competence, flexibility, openness to change. This would appear to be a replica of what we have already seen in numerous digital transformation campaigns. Only that now we are talking about a revolution. Not quite the same thing. If greater efficiency represents the dark side of this modern revolution, equally tempting, however, is the prospect of enjoying increased wellbeing, of having the opportunity to develop professional skills of greater added value, of being able to free up our creativity.

But we can only access this fascinating Eden if we do not allow ourselves to be dominated by AI and are instead able to make constructive use of the temporal and mental space the new technologies will grant us. These conditions are intrinsically linked, because while the artificial side is growing unstoppably

– greedily devouring information and honing our palate – and evermore sophisticated responses are erupting, the human side must also develop to ensure it is not overwhelmed.

“The mind that opens to a new idea never returns to its original size” (Einstein). This is a challenge which represents a great growth opportunity for those individuals who are able to nourish their minds by studying, reading, going into depth, listening and widening their outlook beyond the limits of competences. And when the widespread use of AI tools threatens to lower companies’ unique competitive advantage, that is when the creativity of the illuminated human mind will make a difference. This is a scenario that will require managers not only to initiate a dialogue and build a relationship with technologies that are constantly mutating, but also to look up and aim for objectives that had been previously unimaginable. And this will be down to intuition, reflection, vision and a search for new connections from minds which are evolved, open and free from operational constraints. It will therefore be up to companies to identify managers who have a potential that does not fit traditional views, and which will enable them to manage issues and situations that have never been seen before.

Such individuals will know how to react credibly to these demands, given that in their lives they have consistently developed their minds. It will be their project to use the time and energy that will be liberated. To the benefit of their working – as well as their private – lives.

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**Massimo Milletti,**  
**Honorary President**

[mmilletti@ericsalmon.com](mailto:mmilletti@ericsalmon.com)

[Massimo Milletti | LinkedIn](#)