

# Enhancing the Enterprise Will Power Better Business

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If you think work tomorrow will look like work yesterday, we have some news for you.

We ran a small **LinkedIn** poll, and **43% of respondents** said that within five years, ChatGPT was going to be **bigger than the Internet or even the steam engine**.

Some might assert that this is yet another example of inflated expectations, but in reality our expectations may not be inflated enough.

The discussion that followed unearthed what is the most likely scenario: the real story about ChatGPT is not actually about ChatGPT specifically. What we're seeing is even bigger. It's the first big quake of the technology landscape shifting. It will change—but not destroy—many of the jobs we do today (and tomorrow).

None of us remember the first click of Morse code or a grainy black-and-white picture on television. But you may remember when the Internet became popular in the mid-1990s, or the first time you swiped on an iPad.

Those moments happened in different eras, but after each moment, our expectations and understanding of technology shifted massively

and irrevocably. Nothing was ever exactly the same afterward.

Our season of ChatGPT fever is one of those moments.

The ability of our new machines to parse context and narrative, then respond in nearly natural language, has entranced (and scared) us. Most of us are using one of the great achievements of the modern age to construct rap songs about colleagues or write pancake recipes in rhymed couplets.

That's fine, but this technology will not stay in the realm of parlor tricks and adolescent humor. In fact, it will profoundly disrupt how we work, communicate, and live.



# The Next Innings of the Digital Revolution

The steam engine was invented in 1764. Maybe that stuck with you from a history class; maybe not. What's less known is that it took about three more decades before the cotton gin was invented (1793), and **many** more decades—in the Industrial Revolution that ramped up in 1840s—before our new machines dramatically amplified human productivity, which we all know changed business and society forever.

This trip down memory lane is worth considering because it's happening again today.

Whether it's policy, law, jobs, art, or society, why does seemingly every headline today have **something** to do with technology? It's because we're leaving the **discovery** phase of the Digital Revolution and entering the **dissemination** phase of what the **World Economic Forum** calls the **Fourth Industrial Revolution**.

For business and technology leaders, as the Boss says, "Mama, that's where the fun is."

Today's steam engines are, of course, amazing new technologies. Over the past few decades, the cloud, advanced AI, ubiquitous connectivity, mobile computing, and more have all been "invented." They've certainly shaped how we work and live, but the full impact on business is really just getting started.

As the curtain opens on the next act of the revolution, we are witnessing those tools take an exponential step forward. In particular, whiplash-inducing advances in generative AI (combined with other maturing technologies) are poised to accelerate our journey to the future of work.

This is leaving many business and technology leaders with questions and perhaps even some FOMO about how to surf the building wave of productivity improvement **without** risking the company. Fortunately we have some street signs and guard rails.

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## Business Process Reengineering 2.0

In 1993, consultants Michael Hammer and James Champy introduced ideas about re-engineering the organization.[1] Their method was designed for industrial economy firms to better align work to business **outcomes** while eliminating non-value-adding work.

Business Process Reengineering was a brilliant vision, but the technology of the day was far less powerful than what we have today. In spite of the work done and value delivered, Business Process Reengineering never fully unlocked the total economic value it could have.

But that was then.

Our revolution will certainly run on software fueled by generative AI systems like ChatGPT, Bard, OPT, and others. In addition to making work better/more productive/fun, properly deploying these technologies via productivity enhancing software will create an overwhelming economic advantage for practitioners, so **this** revolution will be mandatory, not elective.

# Software PLUS Talent Enhances the Organization

Earlier frenzies about **AI DESTROYING ALL THE JOBS** have taught us—or should have—that it’s easy to fall into the trap of concluding that the work we humans do is easily **replaceable** by new technology. A bot comes to work. A human goes home. Rinse and repeat until there are no jobs left except Terminator maintenance.

That was the fear, and it was wrong, and it’s still wrong.[2]

**Generative AI won't replace you unless you choose not to learn how to use it to do your job better.**

The real potential for these new AI systems is to enhance – not simply replace – humans doing knowledge work.

We’re already seeing impact in the technology sector. Programmers are using generative AI tools to help draft code in line with very specific requests. Talent specialists are crafting more effective role descriptions and other communications. New use cases and pilots are popping up every day. **Microsoft, Google, Alphabet Inc., Meta, Amazon**, and others are racing ahead, but we are really just getting started.

Imagine this technology deployed in every essential value chain in banking, healthcare, high-tech, retail, transportation, entertainment, insurance, etc. This is the future of work and technology in a nutshell.



For those who dig their heels in and hope that this time the Luddites will win, it’s going to be a miserable decade. For knowledge workers eager and able to imagine a new relationship with the machines and how we work, these generative AI tools will **enhance** us with 2x, 5x, 10x the productive power we had without our a bot “sitting” next to us.

It’s a total game changer if we can achieve even the lowest end of that improvement, so let’s get started.

# Six Steps To Enhance Your Enterprise Today

The real opportunity for business and technology leaders is to recognize that software – now fueled by ChatGPT and its relatives – can “enhance” the organization by improving knowledge work productivity.

The key here, as it was with other major technology shifts, is to consider as possible unimaginable productivity increases available via new machines that **make us better** (i.e., more productive). Leading analyst firm **HFS Research** refers to the technology layer that brings this to life as creating an “autonomous enterprise.”[3]

Making this kind of enhancement more feasible and straightforward is the real superpower of ChatGPT and its cousins and offspring. It’s early days, but there are some clear steps savvy leaders can take today to build and maintain relevance in the next phase of the digital economy.

## Focus on the work, not the tech.

“Get me to the Metaverse!” “Let’s use ChatGPT to cut costs!” “Let’s build an AI system that does ... **everything!**” These ideas are flashing warning signs. Immersive technology will be incredibly important, but only for certain types of experiences. Generative AI can certainly cut costs, but it can also **raise** cost and risk unless you aim it at the right work processes or consumer experiences. Getting into the

business of building some kind of AI **godbot** is a money pit for investment unless that’s the business you’re in.

The best strategy? Focus on the work and consumer experiences where **applying** – not inventing – new tech can significantly improve productivity and consumer delight (**#revenue**).

## Look for your value chain pressure points.

Whether it’s developing new medicines, providing mortgages, creating software, or selling consumer products, every industry has specific ways it creates value. Now is the time to reimagine those work processes and customer experiences with tech-powered software in mind. It may be frustrating, and this is not a one-and-done exercise. Business processes grew over years (or decades) for good reasons at the time,

so, they are hard to evolve, but **that’s where the money is**. Where to start? Look at the steps in each major work process that are:

1. At scale (you do it a lot);
2. Data intensive (the more the better);
3. Are largely routinized (not needing a human touch); and
4. Have friction (find knowledge work that just sucks; people will tell you).

## Make enhancement—not replacement—your strategy.

Assuming that automation will easily replace rooms full of knowledge workers is a common worry (or cost-cutter fever dream), but it's a red herring for practical business action. The assumption is: bots replace humans. That's wrong, particularly for true knowledge work. The reality will be: a bot comes to work; the smart human is enhanced with AI-fueled software; and now she is 5x more productive,

happier, creative, and fulfilled because the bot took over the most mundane tasks that are part of her job. Trying to **replace** the vast majority of knowledge work jobs with tech is a fool's errand, and it will end in tears. Instead, deploy new tools to **enhance** specific work processes and consumer experiences that can impact overall productivity.

## Don't mechanize what humans do best.

AI-fueled bots are great at a lot of things, and now they're starting to sound smarter when they "talk back." That's awesome, and useful, but there's a lot they don't do. Curiosity, judgment, empathy, creativity, adaptability, memory prioritization, etc. are all skills that

humans do well and bots do not (and won't). Will bots get better at human mimicry? Sure, but unless building AI platforms is your core business, put your investment dollars elsewhere. People will still be at the heart of the digital economy (**#irony**).

## Befriend the Bot.

What about **YOUR** job? Imagine **using** just your back and a shovel to compete against someone using an excavator. No matter how strong you are, it ain't happening (**#JohnHenry**). History teaches us that casting the machines as "foe," trying to slow them down or smash them, has never worked for very long.[4] There are many unknowns about the future,

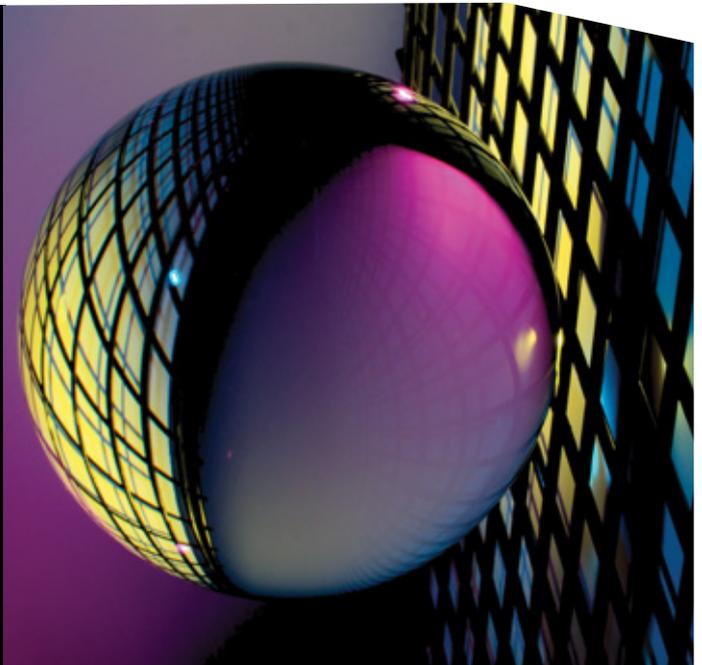
but one certainty is that great new technologies increase productivity. Those who embrace this idea, and get skilled at working **with** our new tools, will thrive. Those who oppose it face a cold slide into irrelevance.

## Just Push Play!

**Nicholas Thompson**, CEO at **The Atlantic**, captured perfectly the idea that we are at a moment where perhaps the most important thing we can do with these new technologies is just mess around, experiment, play, start working groups to imagine what these tools

can do to improve **your** business. If this doesn't sound practical or urgent enough for your company, well, that discomfort is part of what disruptive change feels like. Thompson advises that the important thing is to, "press forward with open minds and big ideas." [5] He is right.

Marc Andreessen famously said, “Software is eating the world.” Now software is becoming more essential to every business value chain than ever before as it “eats” knowledge work. Next-gen AI systems will become the new toolkit for knowledge workers, and honestly, this can be great! Value will be generated. Work will get better, more fun, more fulfilling. Anyone using or building technology now has a chance to be a hands-on participant in one of the greatest revolutions since the transistor—or maybe even the steam engine! What could be more exciting than that?



[1] *Reengineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution*, Michael Hammer and James Champy, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, 1993.

[2] For more on what’s coming, see *What to Do When Machines Do Everything: How to Get Ahead in a World of AI, Algorithms, Bots, and Big Data* by Malcolm Frank, Ben Pring, and Paul Roehrig, PhD. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017.

[3] See Phil Fersht, *2023 is the year of ‘The Autonomous Enterprise’ as economics trigger change*, January 21, 2023, [https://www.horsesforsources.com/2023-autonomous-enterprise\\_121422](https://www.horsesforsources.com/2023-autonomous-enterprise_121422).

[4] For more on our evolving relationship with new technology, see *Monster: A Tough Love Letter on Taming the Machines That Rule Our Jobs, Lives, and Future* by Ben Pring and Paul Roehrig, PhD. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2021.

[5] Thompson, N. (2023, March), *A note to the staff about AI*. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/note-staff-ai-nicholas-thompson/>.

## About the Authors



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