

# BEYOND AI

By Michael Kairios, MHRM, SHRM-CP



## Balancing Artificial Intelligence with a Human Touch

**T**here is no question that artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping how businesses operate, make decisions, and engage their people. Its rise has been rapid; automation tools can now screen resumes, predictive analytics can help inform workforce planning, and algorithms can draft integral communications once crafted by hand. AI can go so far as to handle the simpler aspects of the day, such as crafting our emails and performing essential administrative tasks. Many business leaders view AI as the next great accelerator of efficiency and innovation, and it most certainly aims to be.

Recent data underscores how fast that shift is happening: according to a 2025 Gallup Poll, the proportion of U.S. employees who say they use AI “a few times a year or more” has nearly doubled from 21% to 40% in just two years.<sup>1</sup> In industries such as technology, professional services, and finance, that figure climbs even higher, signaling that AI has moved beyond experimentation and into everyday business practices.

Yet, amid the ever-growing implementation and progress of technology in business, one thing has remained a constant success tool: the human touch. For decades, successful businesses have thrived not only because of data or tools, but because of the human judgment, empathy, and ethical reasoning that shape every decision. AI may amplify productivity, but we are likely a long way off from it genuinely replicating emotional intelligence, context, or conscience, all of which sit at the core of effective leadership and organizational success. The challenge for modern businesses is not whether to adopt AI, but how to integrate it without losing the distinctly human qualities that make work meaningful and successful.

### Why Human Judgment Still Matters

AI can identify patterns, but it cannot yet interpret meaning the way humans do. It can generate recommendations, but it cannot weigh the values. These distinctions become critical in areas like performance management and compliance, for example, where the “right” answer often requires empathy, an ethical context, or legal precision.

Take performance reviews. A manager can use an AI tool to summarize productivity data or attendance records, but the essence of a performance discussion is not all about numbers. It’s about growth, feedback, and connection. Imagine an employee who has recently struggled with deadlines after taking on caregiving responsibilities. AI may be able to flag declining performance, compile performance data quickly, and suggest corrective action, thereby reducing the time spent preparing a performance review. However, a human leader can see the bigger picture, including effort, potential, and circumstance. A meaningful conversation might lead to a solution better suited for the retention or success of this employee.

The same applies to legal and compliance matters. AI tools can draft contracts, analyze case law, or interpret employment regulations. Yet, even the most sophisticated algorithms can misread nuance, misapply jurisdictional details, omit key factors, or flat out give you the wrong answer. If a business relies solely on AI to make a compliance decision and gets it wrong, it won’t be the AI tool facing fines, lawsuits, or reputational damage; it will be the business, and it is hard to credibly use, “AI told me this was right” as a valid defense. The truth is that a single misinterpretation of a regulation

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or a missed update in a state law can cost a company thousands of dollars in penalties or permanently damage its credibility. Similarly, human review can help businesses avoid introducing unintentional bias into common practices that could lead to violations of federal laws like Title VII or the Fair Credit Reporting Act.<sup>2</sup>

### Where AI and Humans Must Co-Exist

To have a truly effective business, leaders must design AI systems that support, but never substitute for, human insight. There are several areas of business where this partnership is both necessary and productive. For example:

#### ■ Talent Acquisition and Selection

AI can help recruiters efficiently review thousands of resumes and identify key skills, but human recruiters bring intuition to the table. They can spot when a candidate’s non-traditional

background holds transferable skills, or when an algorithm's rejection stems from biased data. Here, a conversation with a human can reveal adaptability or values alignment that might not be found on a resume, yet are still considered essential qualifiers for a role. AI can be your screening partner, but should not act as the gatekeeper. Organizations that keep the human review in the loop reduce bias, improve the candidate experience, and preserve authenticity in their hiring process.

In some cases, human intervention is even a requirement by law. Several states and cities have begun regulating how employers use AI in hiring and employment decisions, such as requiring regular bias audits of automated employment decision tools and applicant tracker systems, notifying candidates and employees when AI tools are being used to make decisions, or obtaining consent from candidates before using AI to evaluate video interviews. Bipartisan moves like this throughout the United States demonstrate that even the most

advanced AI tools must operate within human-governed frameworks, and businesses must remain prepared to navigate emerging requirements in how they utilize technology.

#### ■ Engagement and Development

AI-driven analytics can help identify gaps in engagement or communication. This identification might be common, for example, within remote teams. However, these analytics may only reveal what is happening, as opposed to why it is happening. A skilled manager, through conversation and observation, can uncover deeper causes that lead to these gaps, such as burnout, a lack of recognition, or disconnection. By using AI data as a starting point instead of an answer, leaders can intervene with empathy and purpose.

#### ■ Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Although AI might be able to suggest how to handle tension on a team, it cannot sit down with two employees who no

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longer trust each other and rebuild their relationship. True conflict resolution requires listening and emotional nuance. A skilled manager or HR professional knows when to acknowledge frustration, when to guide reflection, and when silence speaks louder than words. These are moments of human connection that algorithms just cannot replace.

## Building a Balanced Framework

The future of work is not about choosing between humans and machines, but about designing the relationship between them. The businesses that thrive will be those that view AI not as a replacement for human capability, but as a tool that amplifies it.

- **Define the Human Scope:** Identify which decisions require moral reasoning, empathy, cultural context, or human verification, and ensure that these remain in human hands. Recruitment outcomes, disciplinary actions, performance evaluations, and compliance should always include human review and verification.
- **Establish Oversight and Accountability:** Create governance structures that pair AI systems with cross-functional human review, like HR, legal, operations, and ethics. This review ensures that automation supports compliance rather than compromises it.
- **Maintain Transparency:** Communicate openly with employees about how AI is being utilized and how human oversight remains an integral part of that process. Transparency fosters trust and sustains a strong company culture.
- **Prioritize Skills:** Upskilling employees to use AI effectively is important, but equally essential is reinforcing soft skills. The most future ready professionals will be those who can effectively merge AI literacy with interpersonal and ethical skills as well as sound judgment.
- **Keep People at the Center:** Continuously ask, “Does this tool enhance or erode the human experience at work?” AI should never depersonalize the workplace; it should make human connection and building relationships, which are essential to a business’ bottom line and success easier, not rarer.

## The Advantage of the Human Touch Enduring

Technology may be evolving at an unprecedented speed, and it is a welcome shift in how we conduct business. However, the essence of business remains timeless, where people make decisions that impact others. Human judgment, compassion, and conscience are what give businesses credibility and direction – but AI can certainly help us be better. The future of business belongs not to businesses that automate everything, but to those that balance technological advantages with human understanding, where machines handle the mechanics, and people uphold the meaning.

Because no matter how advanced AI becomes, it will always take a human mind and heart to lead. ■



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## Resources

<sup>1</sup> Gallup 2025: AI Use at Work Has Nearly Doubled in Two Years. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/691643/work-nearly-doubled-two-years.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> SHRM: Using AI for Employment Purposes. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/toolkits/using-artificial-intelligence-employment-purposes>