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Book Review

Integrating Social Ethos in Digital Transformation in AI Era

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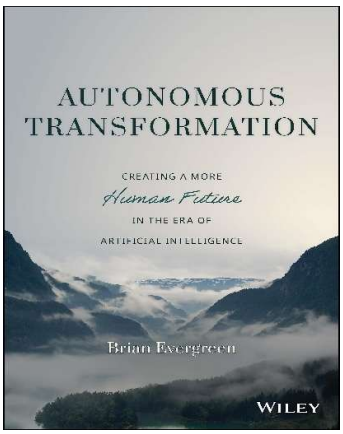
ABSTRACT

Autonomous Transformation: Creating a More Human Future in the Era of Artificial Intelligence by Brian Evergreen a holistic critique of the pitfalls of automation for the knowledge workers in the age of machine learning and artificial intelligence. In the book, Evergreen tries to uphold the autonomy of humans over the proverbial autonomy of machines. He strongly criticizes the mechanical world view that emerged during the Industrial Revolution and gained currency after the concept of Scientific Management became popular among the managers and engineers. Contrary to the Scientific Management view of the organization and the people, Evergreen sees organization as a dynamic social system wherein technological advancements trigger creativity, innovation and experimentation. He strongly believes that technology should foster social equity rather than turning humans at workplace redundant through automation powered by machine learning, and artificial intelligence. Evergreen advocates human-in-the-loop architecture as a way forward for effective and meaningful automation transformation by leveraging technology in sync with socio-cultural and ethical considerations.



KEYWORDS: Automation, Digital Transformation, Artificial Intelligence, Human-in-the-loop Architecture

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Book: Autonomous Transformation: Creating a More Human Future in the Era of Artificial Intelligence
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Corporate obsession with digital transformation in the last two decades has raised more questions than has answered. Speed of optimizing legacy processes through rapid adoption of faster and cost-effective software based on artificial intelligence, and agentic architecture has left the employees hapless. People in the organizations invariably look at digital transformation with suspicion, frustration and apprehension regarding change in their functional roles and responsibilities as well as possible job losses due to eventual automation. It is true that automation induced by digital transformation drastically reduces operational overheads while fueling human obsolescence at the workplace.

The book under review provides a holistic critique of the pitfalls of automation for the knowledge workers in the age of machine learning and artificial intelligence. Evergreen tries to uphold the autonomy of humans over the proverbial autonomy of machines. He strongly criticizes the mechanical world view that emerged during the Industrial Revolution and gained currency after the concept of Scientific Management became popular among the managers and engineers. Contrary to the Scientific Management view of the organization and the people, Evergreen sees organization as a dynamic social system wherein technological advancements trigger creativity, innovation and experimentation. He strongly believes that technology should foster social equity rather than turning humans at workplace redundant through automation powered by machine learning, and artificial intelligence.

In the book, Evergreen suggests that technology can play a role of enabler for human capabilities. For example, autonomous AI systems at Bell Flight were trained by using curricula which were meticulously designed human pilots. Thus, the position of the human pilots was elevated instead of getting redundant in handling the complex mechanics of landing of the drones. However, instead of balancing man-machine interactions and collaborations, the top leaders roll out automation with short term view sans any human, ethical, and social

considerations. Indeed, managers have been trained for over a century to look at employees in a particular manner as per the Scientific Management worldview. Unfortunately, according to Evergreen, Scientific Management, which is the foundation of automation, is a flawed concept. Fredrick Winslow Taylor, the father of Scientific Management, has assiduously formulated a notion that human employees can be optimized, minimized, and ultimately substituted by automated components.

For long, Scientific Management has governed the mindsets of the board members of the small, medium as well as large companies. Evergreen postulates that the Scientific Management worldview is untenable in the current times. Best way to look at autonomous transformation, according to Evergreen, is through the lens of social-systemic perspective. Evergreen suggests that systemic resilience depends on diversity, equity, inclusion, sense of belonging, ownership, and empathy contrary to the mechanistic worldview in which humans are construed as predictable machines whose routine cognitive workloads can be subsumed by machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Drawing from behavioral sciences, neurosciences, and organizational sociology, the book clearly indicates that the companies which optimize for Profitable Good innately attract superior manpower and outsmart their competitors who look at artificial intelligence as a short cut for reducing the headcounts. Evergreen's thesis is based on a comprehensive view of Silicon Valley, Wall Street, and the usual shop floors at large across the world. While Silicon Valley has extraordinary technological capabilities, it is plagued by short-term venture capital outlooks. On the other hand, the Wall Street perspective is governed by quarterly predictability, and incentivizing automation for eventual cost reduction. The shop floor view represents legacy systems, physical supply chain networks, and human workforce experiencing cultural alienation in the wake of automation or fear of digital transformation which can make employees outmoded.

Evergreen advocates human-in-the-loop architecture over automation focused on cost reduction, speed, and precision. It has generally been observed that fully automated agentic systems do not succeed in solving highly complicated and open-ended problem scenarios. Thus, the rationale of human-in-the-loop architecture is established. Further, Evergreen not only provides the philosophical foundations for human-centric automation but also suggests a pragmatic framework for digital transformation projects. Moreover, he has successfully

debunked the hype around artificial intelligence and machine learning as panacea for all corporate downsides. Finally, Evergreen suggests that the long-term value of the organization is linked to its human-centric ecosystem filled with enviable talent pipelines.

REFERENCES

Evergreen, B. (2023). *Autonomous Transformation: Creating a More Human Future in the Era of Artificial Intelligence*. John Wiley & Sons.