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Technology drives change, but will ?human? ways remain?

In a piece that reflects a theme we have also been exploring at Totum*, our guest writer, Change Consultant and Coach Dan Bright, explores how personal relationships fit into the ever-rising use of technology in business.

Many professions, from legal and accountancy to banking and insurance, are quite rightly embracing new technology and change. Artificial intelligence (AI) is already automating and re-designing production and customer engagement processes, driving efficiencies and collaboration between provider and buyer/user. In the emerging open banking area, for example, we are seeing how technology platforms are disaggregating services, with customers being able to pick and choose services. Many technology platforms can offer services currently done by traditional banks and allow the customer to lead and define the user experience.

New, innovative, technology-enabled processes in the traditional professions are good ? many professional services firms too are looking to use AI to deliver new kinds of services, reduce costs and ultimately benefit customers. However, in the midst of this technology-driven change, are we in danger of neglecting the ?final mile? when it comes to trusted personal relationships ? i.e. where the lawyer or accountant works collaboratively with a general counsel or finance director?

Future choices

Let us imagine a scenario where a major company needs to consider the range of factors and data before a proposed merger in an overseas region - including everything from the external legal, social, cultural, political and economic factors to internal company areas, such as organisational changes, relocations, internal stakeholder impact, etc. AI may help collate and analyse insights across 1000s of research related documents, which will certainly help with scenario creation, but the executive board will still need help for its decision making and ethical perspectives, let alone common-sense checks for strategic choices. An intelligent personal assistant like Alexa may tell me about five new local bars to try, but my friends and I will still decide which one to go to. In large organisations, many firms will still rely on professionals such as lawyers and consultants to help them decide options or create creative solutions.

For the conceivable future, creative thinking and independent thought will need humans. Undoubtedly, AI and other types of new technology will take away some of the data crunching and repetitive manual tasks, but the ?professional? will be needed to craft convincing and persuasive argument or solutions to address evolving real-world problems. But above all, professionals will need to become ever more client focused and relationship driven because the complexity of business and ?human? challenges still need trusted, non-linear one-to-one client relationships.

Those professional services firms that succeed will combine new technology and processes with a razor-sharp focus on building relationship skills. Relationships will count even more as the professional will need

to become a craftsman, advisor, left-field thinker. This requires the age-old skills of active listening, curiosity and the ability to put one's self in the clients' shoes, anticipate problems and proactively suggest new ideas.

Clients want their advisors to help them solve problems. While the latest technology that advisors use themselves is important, it is not the sole reason why clients would employ them. Advisors' ability to offer solutions based on an in-depth and nuanced grasp of clients' personal and business challenges is what usually clinches the deal. For example, in my business I appointed my accountant because of the value I place on his professional advice and suggestions; I didn't choose him because I thought his calculator was exceptional.

Best of both worlds

With many of the 'me too' differentiators (e.g. 'we are big') used by professional services firms becoming increasingly meaningless, and many rushing to say how they're 'embracing AI'; the core differentiation will remain with those that delight clients and deliver exceptional client service quickly. Adopting technology such as AI-supported research and CRM tools with genuine, empathy-focused client relationships will enable professionals to achieve this goal and perhaps become solution offering artisans!

Dan has a passion for business innovation and driving change: seeing business challenges and delivering practical, commercial solutions that work in reality and make a difference to business. He has led strategic projects and teams at a senior level in global organisations, including Linklaters and Andersen, specialising in strategic business development, one to one coaching, marketing and change management. Dan bridges the gap between strategic and commercial expertise and the needs of businesses; translating the importance of the client experience and business development to the day to day working of the individual and teams.

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Or [click here](#) [2] to visit the Dan's Brighter CRM website,

We recently wrote a similarly themed article, entitled 'Human vs algorithm: What role for professionals when technology dictates life decisions?', which explores some of these ideas in the context of several industry sectors. If you would be interested in reading this article, [click here](#) [3].

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