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Enterprise-grade AI: Benefits and adoption in 2020

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Continuing from the previous article where we introduced how AI will affect work within the enterprise and its associated challenges, this second installation shall explore some of the benefits and risks to AI adoption in the enterprise.

Benefits of AI

Improved customer service: the ability of AI to speed up and personalise customer service is among the top benefits businesses expect to reap from AI.

Improved monitoring: AI's capacity to process data in real time means organisations can implement near-instantaneous monitoring; for example, factory floors are using image recognition software and machine learning models in quality control processes to monitor production and flag problems.

Faster product development: AI enables shorter development cycles and reduces the time between design and commercialisation for a quicker ROI of development dollars.

Better quality: Organisations expect a reduction in errors and increased adherence to compliance standards by using AI on tasks previously done manually or done with traditional automation tools, such as extract, transform and load. Financial reconciliation is an example of an area where machine learning has substantially reduced costs, time and errors.

Business model innovation and expansion: Digital natives like Amazon, Airbnb, Uber and others certainly have used AI to help implement new business models, suggesting its success.

AI risks

One of the biggest risks to the effective use of AI in the enterprise is worker mistrust. Many employees fear and distrust AI or remain unconvinced of its value in the workplace. As AI models become more complex, explainability and understanding how an AI reached its conclusion will become harder to convey to frontline workers who need to trust the AI to make decisions.

AI errors: While AI can eliminate human error, problematic data, poor training data or mistakes in the algorithms can lead to AI errors. These errors can be dangerously compounded due to the large volume of transactions AI systems typically process.

Unethical and unintended practices: Companies must guard against unethical AI. Enterprise leaders are likely familiar with the reports on the racial bias baked into the AI-based risk prediction tools. Companies must also be alert for any unintended consequences of using AI for business decisions.



Erosion of key skills: This is a rarely considered but not unimportant risk of AI. In the wake of the two plane crashes involving Boeing 737 Max jets, some experts expressed concern that pilots were losing basic flying skills, as the jet relied on increasing amounts of AI in the cockpit. There are key skills we may not want to be entirely lost to AI expansion.

Adoption of AI

Companies that have deployed AI are realising that figuring out how to use AI is not the same as using AI to make money. Businesses are finding it much harder to weave AI technologies into existing business processes than to build or buy the complex AI models that promise to optimise those processes.

This is because they lack last-mile infrastructure such as robotic process automation, integration platform as a service, and low-code platforms needed to connect AI into the business. They also lack domain experts who can assess what AI is good for, specifically figuring out which decision-making elements of a process can be automated by AI and how to then reengineer the process, as well as lack of feedback on machine learning models, which need to be updated to reflect new data.

Industry best practices for deploying AI, however, are constantly emerging, highlighting use cases from practitioners at Shell and Uber among others in charge of large AI initiatives. The most critical factor cited by all the data scientists was the need to work closely with the company's subject matter experts. People with in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, they stressed, provide the context and nuance that are hard for deep learning tools to tease apart on their own.

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