AN ESSAY

ICC by Humans. *Made by AI.*

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On the new teamwork: idea, concept and control by humans. Written or generated by AI.

CORIN VALE

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I

The spark

When the iPhone was introduced I was electrified. Emails on the go, an easy to use touch screen, the internet with you at all times. I was first in line on release day. I took the day off and planned to spend the whole day with the phone: unboxing it, setting it up, testing every function, feeling it in my hands. The magic was there. Even today, taking the slate in my hands sparks joy, fascination, wonder.

I've seen many technology waves and hypes come and go since. Cloud, mobile, social media, smart homes, robots, self driving vehicles. None of them gave me that feeling again. Then I had my first conversation with ChatGPT. I watched the response being generated right in front of me, and it sounded like a human was answering. I wrote back and saw it react to my inputs. A magical moment. The joy was back, and with it the sense that we stood at the edge of something big. Really big.

I have not felt such a profound change since the iPhone. And this one runs deeper. A technology revolution this fundamental shakes society at its foundations. The greater the revolution, the bigger the impact. Like gravitational waves, it shakes the fabric of society, and the ripple is felt in every atom. Our individual lives will change. Our organisations will be reconfigured. Our economy and our politics too. The ripples shake so hard that some buildings collapse, and society has to rebuild them. Differently. Better. More sustainable for humanity.

I know the iPhone had plenty of downsides. The camera wasn't great. The screen was tiny compared to today. It cost far more than other phones. Nobody had cases yet, so scratches and dents showed quickly, and repairs were expensive. The critics were right about every flaw. They were wrong about the direction. The flaws got fixed. The direction stayed.

I hear the same complaints about AI today. It makes things up. It gets facts wrong. Some of that is true, and I'll come back to it. But raising a concern is one

thing. Being a permanent complainer, only ever seeing the downside, is another. It's so tiresome. Kill joys. They probably didn't have much fun as children either. No, don't climb the tree, you could fall. No, don't build the spaceship out of Lego, you could swallow a brick. If we always saw the downsides first, we would still be stuck inside a stone cave, afraid of everything outside. We humans are explorers, conquerors, curious to learn about the world and its wonders. We like to use our surroundings to make things, build, design, express ourselves. We use tools to enhance our capabilities.

II

The team

AI is such a tool. With AI at my fingertips I can do things I couldn't do before. I am not a developer. Now I can develop. Build things only experts could do. AI extends the radius of my capabilities: building a website, making a family holiday video, personalising a training plan, writing blog posts and managing their entire publication.

Some of these I could learn and do by myself. But it takes a lot of effort and, above all, time. My time is limited. I have a job, a family, I need to sleep. I have to be selective, so I choose the things that give me the most value, that are important, and the things that simply need doing. Very little time is left for anything else. And when I want a website, I want the website! I want to design it, think about how readers would like to navigate it, anticipate what they want to see and what gives them the most value, so they enjoy it as much as I enjoyed dreaming it up. That is where my joy lies. There is no joy or fulfilment for me in learning programming, web design and the technicalities behind it.

Let me give you another example. Say I love beautiful clothing. The design and the fashion, how the fabric feels and drapes over my body, how I look wearing it. Expressing my taste and emotions through clothing doesn't mean I want to learn tailoring and sewing, master pattern making, buy machines and yarns, and spend hundreds of hours acquiring the skills before I can make the dress I'm dreaming of.

The taste is mine. The craft can come from elsewhere. And I'll know whether the dress is right the moment I put it on.

So AI is a powerful new tool in my toolkit. It lets me express myself in ways I was incapable of before. With AI I have a helperling at my disposal: someone with expertise in many areas, in fact all areas, who carries out my commands. But it is so much more. You are now managing an entire team of subject matter experts. The best in their fields sit in your multidisciplinary team. They work tirelessly and do as they are told. You can ask for suggestions, ask them to challenge your ideas, brainstorm with them to produce new ones. You steer the ship. You decide which road to take, what to dismiss and what to prioritise. You are in a very powerful position. Now it's up to you how good you are as a manager, a ruler, a CEO.

And the team is mine, rented or not. I could run open weight models on my own machine at home, and no one could take them from me. If I worried about data privacy or monthly subscriptions, or simply wanted to be self sovereign, that's the route. For now, renting makes more sense. The technology moves so fast that a home server isn't worth the money yet, while the big providers subsidise heavily and keep you on the latest and best models. That may change once things settle and hardware gets cheaper to run. Until then, I do with AI what I already do with email, chat, gaming and my files: trust a corporation enough to run the machinery, because the experience is better. AI will most likely end up a mix. Easy things that need a fast response run locally. Heavier tasks run in the big data centres.

III

What stays human

What AI doesn't have on its own is intent, direction, motivation, desire. It doesn't initiate anything. The starting point must come from you. In your organisation of one, you need to show leadership. Lead your AI team.

There is more AI doesn't have. Humans see beauty and recognise it. We have feelings and emotions, and we need no training for either. I know nothing about

painting. Nothing about techniques, or the epoch a painter lived in. Yet when I walked into a gallery room full of paintings of the French Riviera, my eyes were drawn straight to Signac's *Women at the Well*. The colours. The composition. It sparked something deep inside me. A lifetime of growing up and learning had prepared me for that moment, without a single art lesson. AI can mimic emotion and learn when to show one or the other. It does not feel it deep inside.

Your team also needs steering. AI goes down rabbit holes and gets stuck in them. It digs deeper than the task requires, gets sidetracked, misses the bigger picture and drifts away from the overall goal. That's when the human redirects the work back to the original goals. What is it we wanted to achieve? What is secondary, or third priority, and doesn't need doing now, or perhaps ever? A lot of things could be done. The judgement of whether they need doing now, or at all, is still on the human side.

And a leader checks the work. Ultimately, humans are accountable for what AI produces, so we cannot skip the control step at the end. I don't care about the code one bit. I judge what it produces. When I see the website, I have an immediate response. Does it spark joy and excitement? Does it work the way I envisioned? The colours, the font, the design and layout. Can I find the right content, can I navigate intuitively? Does it achieve the goals I set out at the beginning? I judge it the way I judged the painting: on sight. Only you can make that judgement. You alone are accountable for the actions that follow. The tools never take accountability. They can't be blamed or punished, and they can't carry the moral burden of what follows. That is, and will remain, a human task.

When you turned over an iPhone, the back said "Designed by Apple in California. Assembled in China." This new age needs a new slogan to capture the new teamwork. My suggestion: "ICC by Humans. Made by AI." Idea, concept and control by humans. Written or generated by AI. It captures my current thinking best, and it should be written under every website, article, essay or image produced with AI.

IV

The ripples

For all my enthusiasm, I am fully aware of the consequences a revolution brings. Only a maniac could ignore them. The concerns are real and have to be dealt with. AI is so groundbreaking that it rips through the fabric of our society, and its negative externalities are many: data centres and their electricity demand, job losses, skills that lose their worth, the speed of change, hybrid war, chip shortages and rising prices in certain areas. Then tax revenue, social benefits, a fair society.

One concern I don't share is the existential threat. It grabs the headlines, and the tech CEOs made a blunder even raising it. It belongs in science fiction films, not in reality. Like any tool, AI can go rogue if it isn't controlled properly, drift off course or be used with malicious intent. A powerful new tool needs new protection and new threat models, and we should build them.

On jobs, I am with Schumpeter. Every great technology destroys old work and creates new work, and every time, we adapted. In the end we generated more jobs and more opportunities, and as a society we reached a higher level of wealth and quality of life. We came out ahead.

Some say this time is different. Past revolutions went after physical work. This one goes after cognitive work, the last refuge for humans. I disagree with that simplification. Many physical jobs are still done by humans today. Even as humanoid robots take over more and more physical tasks, there will always be a new allocation of labour and capital, of humans and robots. What the ratio looks like depends on the task and the job, and the balance keeps shifting. Economists call it comparative advantage. Even if one country is better at everything, trading with the weaker one still makes both richer. The same holds for labour and capital. Even if robots become better at everything, it still pays to put humans on the tasks where their edge is greatest. As machines become better at certain tasks, humans stop doing them and have time for other tasks. I don't believe we will ever run out of new human tasks.

Keynes predicted we would work fifteen hours a week by around 2030. We grew richer, as he expected, then found new things to want and new work to do. He was wrong about the hours, and the critics are wrong again. The future doesn't repeat the past exactly. It rhymes. And this time it rhymes again.

Not everyone came out ahead. There are always individuals who lose and end up worse off, and I am sorry for them. That's where society and politics have to play their part. They need to set the frameworks and make the policies that leave few losers and many winners. And even if I am wrong and we do run out of work for humans, the ideas are already in the drawer: a universal income, taxing machines. We could function as a society in a post work world, if we ever reach that stage. I highly doubt it, and I give it a very low chance.

Whatever comes, we need to move faster. Society and politics both. Politics is a derivative of society. If we want to move faster, politics will move faster too.

V

Get on with it

We don't know where this will lead us. But we won't be able to stop progress. We never have. It's a force of nature, and the upside is too big and too foundational to slow down, let alone stop. Curiosity, invention and progress are encoded in our DNA. We cannot not progress.

So my advice is to get on with it. Embrace the new technologies. Get accustomed to them, use them, learn them, integrate them into your daily life. Understand what they mean, what they do, how things around you change. Then draw conclusions. What still works, what doesn't. What must change, what can stay the same. How best to adapt and use it to our advantage, and how to design and create a new society that works for all of us. Then implement it, quickly. We cannot afford to delay, stall or plan forever, stuck in old structures that move too slowly. An 80% solution for the new world is better than a 100% solution for an old world that no longer fits. That takes a mentality shift many individuals and so-

cieties struggle with. Some will realise their inability to cope with the new too late, and they will fall behind and be worse off.

I have drawn my conclusions, for now. They are always subject to change, and I'll change my stance as new information becomes available and I've processed it. I've learned my lessons from past experience. I have opened my mind and I'm ready to receive the new. I'm willing to adapt and throw old assumptions overboard. As the new seeps into me, I'm willing and optimistic to build, create and design the new me. How I think, how I behave, how I act. Possibilities first. Consequences second. I ponder both constantly, and I'm writing this to share my thoughts with the world.

Perhaps you are in the same boat. I believe you are. Perhaps you need another point of view to get going. You might be stuck in a vortex of negativity and need a push to escape it. You are welcome! With the right mindset you can become part of the solution, part of the new world, and help create it. Write yourself into the new chapter. The future is not written yet. We write it together, in real time. Be part of it. Come with us. Take my hand and let's go. We are better together, and the AI needs us humans: for the idea, the concept and the control.

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