Your Bot Boss: How AI will Change The Future of Leadership
By Prof. Niels Van Quaquebeke

Prof. Niels Van Quaquebeke's Talk offered a fascinating glimpse into the future of work and leadership in an age dominated by Artificial Intelligence. He argued that AI can be better at solving vexing problems of   human motivation, relationships, and purpose than human leaders/managers.

With algorithmic management already in practice it is time for us to accept that traditional leadership is undergoing transformation. The Hugo Boss factory in Izmir exemplifies this shift where machines handle production, and AI algorithms manage task distribution and monitor productivity. Workers receive task directions and real-time performance feedback through tablets, and team bonuses foster collaboration. While it seems impersonal research has shown that workers were satisfied more and spoke about the impact of real time feedback and fairness, the algorithm eliminates the ill-effects of personal biases and limited cognitive complexity of the manager.The example of factory in Turkey demonstrated how AI can replace middle management and systematize routine leadership functions.

 The Self-Determination Theory, which states that human motivation depends on the fulfillment of three core psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness may be used to explain why the use of algorithmic management may be more efficacious than traditional management.

1. Competence refers to one's desire to feel skilled and effective. AI can fulfill this need by helping individuals track progress and improve performance, much like fitness trackers that celebrate goal completion. In the workplace, AI can match tasks to a person's skill profile, increasing motivation and growth. In another context, using ChatGPT to generate initial drafts or brainstorming ideas helps individuals overcome creative blocks and feel more capable. Empirical studies at BCG and Procter & Gamble show that AI-enhanced work improves performance by over 40%.

2. Autonomy involves feeling in control of one's choices. While AI may guide decisions, it does not enforce them. Instead, it offers suggestions that respect personal agency. Importantly, AI can also simplify complex information. By summarizing dense corporate documents in plain language, it helps individuals understand their work environment—an

essential aspect of autonomy. Unlike managers, AI doesn't judge, and offers the possibility to ask clarifying questions freely.

3. Relatedness is the need to feel connected to others. In recent years, particularly after COVID-19, organizational identity has declined due to remote work. AI may help restore this by providing empathetic interaction. Studies show AI can write more emotionally resonant and inclusive speeches than experienced executives. In tests, LLMs provided more empathetic responses than human doctors on Reddit forums. Chatbots like Replica AI have even helped users feel less lonely and more socially prepared. Unlike humans, AI offers non-judgmental, consistent interaction and emotional support.

AI is positioned not just as a tool but as a partner in leadership, capable of empowering individuals, streamlining decisions, and enhancing motivation. With careful oversight and ethical considerations, AI can bring out the best in humanity, something traditional leadership often struggles to do at scale. While AI won't entirely replace human leaders in the near term, it may eventually outperform average managers. Exceptional leaders may still offer irreplaceable value, but for multiple tasks, AI can effectively fulfill leadership roles. The future of work and domain of competence that humans can develop does not lie in providing answers. AI will provide better answers as technology improves. Future competence lies in humans asking better and more meaningful questions.

What are the downsides- one is what stares us in our face, the inherent biases in the training data of the large language models (LLMs) and how it will impact the answers. Another is as AI becomes deeply integrated into daily workflows, questions will arise about data ownership and user autonomy. Also, hypothetically, if employees bond with a personalized AI at work, leaving the job may feel like leaving a trusted companion and thus reduce agency. There's also the possibility of the use of AI for communication leading to mistrust because of not being sure who is really writing- humans or AI.

The talk by Prof Niels Quaquebek instead of asking "Will AI replace us?", asks a more empowering question: "How can I bring out the best in us?" If you're curious about how to thrive, not just survive in the AI era, this is a must-watch.

YouTube video link to the talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWI9_MvSISo