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Part 1

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developing organisations



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Cover image: A theatrical script rehearsal

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Beyond Genuine Stupidity: Ensuring AI Serves Humanity

Reviewed by Paul Levy



Book details

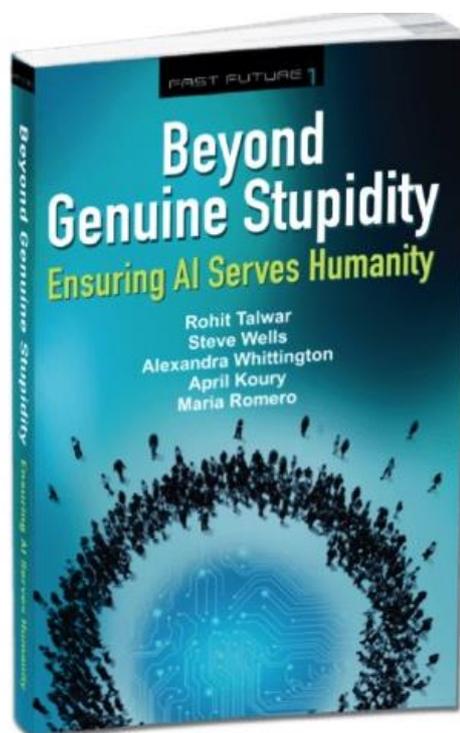
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Scope

The five authors have collectively penned this book, sharing the chapters between them. Between them are the skills of global futurism, foresight research and futures analysis (to name but a few). It is perhaps then not surprising that this book is visionary and predictive. In our times, much AI (Artificial Intelligence) futurism is either technophilic or presents a much more apocalyptic vision of the future. This book has a realism about it even as it attempts to describe a world several years ahead of our current experience.

The book is divided into four major sections, all of which will be of interest to Organisational Development (OD) practitioners. Each section contains both warnings and opportunities that humanity can misunderstand, ignore and avoid at its peril, or grasp, manage and innovate as a beneficial opportunity.

The first section explores the impacts of AI on society, the second looks at the effect on different major industries. The third section focuses in on the business world, and the final section considers the impact on jobs and the economy. So this is a book with a broad reach, yet it feels like a rich study, articulate, informed and evidence-based. Plenty of examples are offered and the diversity of authorship doesn't prevent the book from feeling joined up as a read. The authors have clearly collaborated well here.



Riding the tiger

There is a sense that the oncoming technological wave is something we need not only to survive, but also to ride with some skill. This wave could overwhelm us, or we can put it to the service of humankind, a species of flesh and blood. We are going to need to direct how we use AI, and OD practitioners will be working in and with organisations that are in collaboration with AI-based entities. Automation is going to change (and is changing already) the design of organisations and wider communities, as work will be transformed and the ability to cope with that becomes a more intense challenge for consultants and leaders of change. What will organisational models and strategies look like as AI and Human intelligence interact, intersect and even merge?

Plausibility

This is a very accessible book, an important book, conversational in style yet academically grounded. It carried a lot of clout for me as a reader. It's essentially underpinned by a view that AI should serve humanity. In fact, if we do not design it from the ground up to do that, catastrophe, or at the very least mediocrity may result.

Work is becoming more cloud-based, with less need for physical offices. AI is going to re-define organisational life and this is going to create a new need for OD practice.

“Replacing actual offices with code” is, perhaps a frightening, yet very real, prospect. Work becomes less physical, yet will we become creators and framers of code, or victims of it?

[‘Beyond Genuine Stupidity’](#) is an important and timely book that explores “a post-job future”, proposing some I.T. assignments from 2019-2025. We are offered two different views of A.I. One is narrow and deep A.I., where A.I.-based work won't be focused only on increasingly clever and complex algorithms but will also require skilled and wise application of those algorithms by human beings. This will be a new organisation design, intensifying challenges already reflected in approaches to agile organisation and experiments in less hierarchical forms of organisation such as [holacracy](#).

Technology is viewed not as the enemy, but as “a hugely malleable tool that “works at our disposal and its role in the workplace is up to us to decide.”

The book takes us further into the future. In 2021, we see the disruption of [C-Suite hierarchies](#) and possibly the development of the wider organisational population as I.T. experts: we move from institutionalised top-down leaders to organisation-wide [emergent leadership](#), working with more dynamic forms of organisation. In this scenario, new skill sets emerge, such as the rise of training and teaching of A.I.

‘Blended organisations’?

This raises the possibility that we could over-connect, and there may be a loss of the human element of work. So the challenge could be to create a very human workplace, reconnecting human beings as they form part of the new “blended” workforce:

“The advent of these new technologies, working alongside or in place of humans creates a whole new requirement for how we supervise, mentor, motivate and reward such a blended workforce.”

This prospect develops further, as we'll have to consider "not just the rights and protections of people, but also robots." (How might we facilitate conflict resolution between a human and a robot?)

OD may well become even more important as the design and development of these blended organisations is far less clear, and this is not covered in any great detail in the book. However, undoubtedly there will be a need for new organisational structures and development processes.

This book leaves the shape of organisation design far more open and undefined with regard to the future scenarios it envisages. Nevertheless, it affords a well-articulated, believable and inspiring prediction of the near and farther future world of work. It paints a rich, futuristic and contemporary picture of A.I. and its impact on organisational and business life. This is essential reading for anyone in the field of Organisation Development, and I thoroughly recommend it.

About the reviewer

Paul Levy is Senior Researcher at CENTRIM (The Centre for Research in Innovation Management) University of Brighton, United Kingdom. He is also a facilitator for the Bitcoin and Blockchain Leadership Forum, a director of CATS3000 Ltd, a change and transformation company based in Brighton, UK, and founder of the online publication, FringeReview. Paul is the author of several books, including Digital Inferno (Clairview Books, 2014) and The Poetry of Change (Catten Publishing),

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