

## Hey! What's New? 2025-128

### AI and IQ: Can Leaders Have It All?

Meghan Walsh writes, in an article on the Korn Ferry webpage, that “adoption of ChatGPT and similar tools has been so quick that researchers are only beginning to understand the impact—on humans. A number of studies are demonstrating that AI isn’t just rapidly transforming the ways we learn, create, and execute. It’s also changing how we think – just not, as it turns out, the way most of us want. Indeed, some worry the technology may be eroding the very cognitive capacities that help Siddhant collaborate so successfully with ChatGPT: an internal reservoir of industry knowledge, robust critical-thinking skills, and the intuition to know when to call BS. For Amelia Haynes, a research manager at the Korn Ferry Institute, it all raises a key question as the AI revolution looms: “What are we trading for efficiency and proficiency?”

Currently, Walsh says, “we are in the age of hybrid intelligence, when digital learning systems still require human governance. Experts say, though, the day is not far off – and may already be here, in some ways – when AI will be able to operate independently. The embodiment of this technological consciousness is known, of course, as the AI agent.”

“For the first act, AI was a helper,” she quotes Bryan Ackermann, who leads Korn Ferry’s AI and Transformation sector, as saying. “We were calling it a talented intern.” But the intern kept getting smarter and smarter. Earlier this year, AI became contemplative, asking clarifying questions. It went, as Ackermann points out, from being a helper to a peer. And as AI pulls alongside the knowledge worker, responsibility is shifting from execution to oversight. In this role, the cognitive capacities most threatened by the technology, such as critical thinking and ingenuity, may become the most relevant.”

Walsh points out that Michael Gerlich, head of the Center for Strategic Corporate Foresight and Sustainability at SBS Swiss Business School, offers this analogy: Gen AI can help improve the candle so that it burns longer and brighter and is cheaper to make. But it won’t invent the light bulb. “The step from candle to light bulb is what the human does,” Gerlich says, “and that process is not linear.”

Walsh explains that while the first studies of gen AI’s impact on cognitive function were self-reported, “neuroscience is now using EEGs to show what’s taking place inside the brain. A study out of the MIT Media Lab, titled ‘Your Brain on ChatGPT,’ found that those who used the app to write an essay had significantly less neural activity and fewer connectivity patterns than those who performed the task using just their brains or a search engine. (Remember, neurons that fire together, wire together.) The brain-only group showed stronger activation of networks linked to creativity, memory, and semantic processing. Anecdotally, they also took more ownership of their work and could better recall it. And, of course, their writing was more original.”

A plethora of other studies have had equally dreary findings, she writes, “showing that over- or misuse of gen-AI tools blunts critical thinking, motivation, and satisfaction. Perhaps most concerning is that AI creates the illusion of learning. Users aren’t aware of the gaps in their knowledge, a phenomenon known as digital amnesia. That leads to developing a false sense of competence.”

“We’re seeing that people, like professors, who previously said they were not, are actually offloading,” Gerlich says.

Who is most vulnerable to being seduced by ChatGPT’s allure?, Walsh asks. “Those who are underprepared, overwhelmed and stressed out. Particularly prone to such a trifecta are older professionals, who may rely on AI to compensate for cognitive decline, and young workers, who may be developing learning skills. On the other hand, those who are calm, capable and confident are more likely to delegate tasks with discretion, a finding that holds true across generations. Like so many of the ills that plague modern corporations and those who work for them, the risks of AI to human functioning are linked to onerous demand.”

How leaders are approaching AI, Korn Ferry’s Ackermann says, generally falls into one of three categories: 1) those who lean into the efficiency play; 2) those who are frozen; and 3) those who are thoughtfully transforming. “Leaders who want to avoid a future workforce unable to think outside of the box, he says, must train employees in best practices and set manageable workloads, which, by all accounts, isn’t an easy task in today’s world. AI is advancing so quickly, it’s hard to keep up. Meanwhile, there is tremendous pressure to do more with less in half the time.”

Ultimately, says Walsh, “AI’s impact on human cognition is a collective challenge that requires a collective response. It requires investment from educators, tech developers, business leaders, the professions and individuals. Companies – and leaders – that fail to enter this new frontier with foresight and empathy may find themselves ill-equipped to steward AI into the future.”

For considerably more, see [AI and IQ: Can Leaders Have It All?](#).