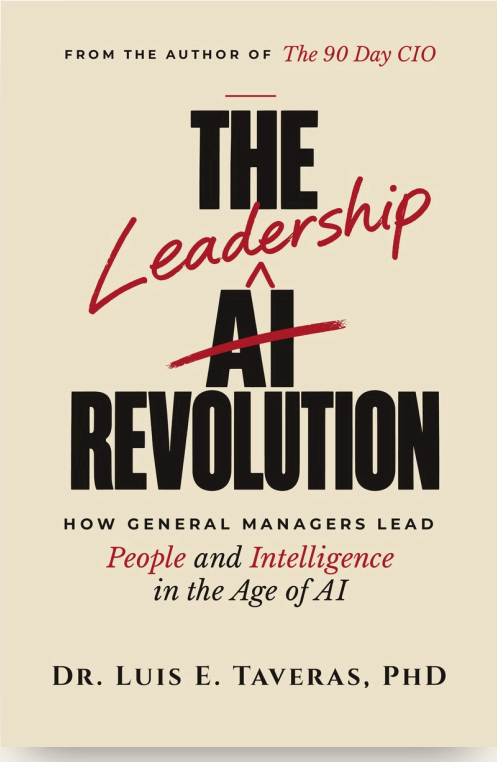
A FREE CHAPTER



The Leadership Revolution

How General Managers Lead People and Intelligence in the Age of AI

CHAPTER 1 · THE SPEED OF AI

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PART ONE

THE LEADERSHIP CASE

Why artificial intelligence is a management challenge before it is a technical one, and what that means for the organizations we are responsible for.

Part One starts at the edges of the model and works inward: the leadership ring that holds everything together, and the processes and data at the core that AI will amplify.



Where Part One sits in the Leadership Revolution Model

CHAPTER 1

THE SPEED OF AI

Learn fast

~~WAIT AND SEE~~

When I first started working in technology, we typed records into massive mainframe computers with green and black monitors and printed the results onto green and white continuous-form paper. If you had a computer problem, you grabbed Dave from IT as you passed him in the cafeteria and asked him to take a look. Technology changed enormously over the decades that followed, but it changed at a pace an organization could plan around. The large systems I implemented took years to select, years to install, and years more before people truly used them effectively.

Then, at the end of November 2022, a company called OpenAI released a chatbot to the public. Within about two months, an estimated one hundred million people were using it (Hu, 2023), which made it the fastest-growing consumer application anyone had measured. No committee approved it. No one scheduled the training. People simply started using it, at home first and then at work. I had never seen anything like it in my career, and that speed is where this book has to begin.

Every major technology wave follows a familiar pattern. First, innovators become excited. Then early adopters experiment. Eventually, technology matures, costs decrease, and widespread adoption begins. Most technology transformations occur over decades. Artificial

intelligence is different. The timeline has been compressed. In just a few years, AI has moved from a niche capability discussed primarily among technologists to a boardroom priority discussed by virtually every executive team in the world.

Many leaders underestimate just how unusual this moment is. The internet transformed commerce, communication, and access to information. Cloud computing transformed how organizations consume technology. Smartphones have transformed how people interact with technology. Artificial intelligence is transforming how work itself gets performed. For the first time in modern business history, organizations have access to technology that can reason, summarize, draft, analyze, recommend, and create.

A large regional organization discovers that its employees are already using generative AI to prepare meeting summaries, draft communications, and analyze operational issues. If leadership waits for a multiyear strategy before responding, adoption will continue without consistent standards. A faster and more disciplined response would establish an approved environment, publish practical guardrails, select a small number of high-value workflows, and review what the organization learns every month. The advantage would not come from deploying the most tools. It would come from shortening the cycle between experimentation, evidence, policy, and scale.

Across Industries: The Code That Left the Building

In the spring of 2023, engineers at Samsung Electronics pasted sensitive internal source code into ChatGPT while trying to solve a problem. Samsung responded by banning generative AI tools across the workplace (Gurman, 2023; Ray, 2023). Amazon had already warned its employees not to share confidential information with chatbots, and several large banks restricted their use.

None of those employees set out to cause harm. They were trying to do their jobs faster with the best tool in front of them. That is the pattern this chapter describes: adoption arrives before policy, and the

first sign of it is often an incident. A ban buys time, but it does not answer the question the incident raised, which is how to give people a safe way to do what they were already trying to do.

This changes the economics of knowledge work. For more than one hundred years, organizations have focused on increasing the productivity of physical labor through automation. Factories became more efficient. Supply chains became more automated. Manufacturing output increased dramatically. The next productivity revolution is focused on cognitive labor.

The work performed by analysts, managers, accountants, researchers, marketers, attorneys, clinicians, customer service representatives, and executives is increasingly being augmented by AI. This does not mean people are becoming obsolete. It means people are becoming amplified. A high-performing employee equipped with AI can often accomplish significantly more than was possible just a few years ago. Tasks that previously required hours may now require minutes. Activities that once required specialized expertise are becoming accessible to a broader population.

This creates tremendous opportunity. It also creates significant disruption. Organizations often believe they have time to observe and wait. Historically, that was true. During the early years of cloud computing, many organizations waited. During the rise of social media, many waited. During mobile adoption, many waited. AI may not afford leaders the same luxury. Because AI functionality is delivered largely through software, adoption can occur extremely quickly. Employees can begin using AI tools almost immediately.

Departments can purchase AI-enabled solutions without enterprise awareness. Vendors are rapidly embedding AI capabilities into existing products. In many organizations, AI adoption is already occurring whether leadership realizes it or not. This creates a new responsibility for general managers. The central question is no longer "Should we adopt AI?" Instead, the question becomes "How do we adopt

AI responsibly and effectively before the organization adopts it without us?"

The organizations leading their industries over the next decade will likely not be the organizations with the most AI. They will be the organizations that learn the fastest. But speed alone does not create advantage. Learning at speed does. Every AI initiative creates new data, insights, capabilities, and lessons learned. Organizations that establish structured mechanisms to capture and apply those lessons will improve continuously. Organizations that treat AI initiatives as isolated experiments will move slowly despite investing heavily.

The speed of AI requires a corresponding speed of leadership. Traditional annual planning cycles are becoming insufficient. Five-year strategic plans are becoming too long. Three-year technology roadmaps are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Governance cannot become an obstacle. Risk management cannot become paralysis. Leaders must learn to create organizational structures that support rapid innovation while maintaining accountability and control.

Speed of leadership does not mean that every part of an organization can move at the speed of the technology. Annual budgets, procurement, legal review, workforce consultation, and dependencies on older systems all move at their own pace, and many of them exist for good reasons. The practical answer is to separate two kinds of speed.

Experimentation can move quickly inside approved environments, with limited information and time-boxed pilots that end in a decision. Production deployment, especially where the consequences are significant, should still earn its way through full review. Leaders who confuse the two either slow learning to the pace of procurement or rush consequential systems through a process built for experiments.

This is perhaps the defining challenge of the AI era. The organizations that master both speed and discipline will thrive. Those that choose only one will struggle.

What the Trend Lines Actually Show

A claim about speed deserves evidence, and this book has so far offered none. The most useful measure of AI progress for a general manager is not a benchmark score, because benchmark scores describe performance on problems that resemble examinations rather than work. A more relevant measure is task length: how long a piece of work an AI system can carry on its own before a person has to intervene.

In an analysis published in March 2025, the research organization METR examined models released over roughly six years and found that the length of task an agent could complete with fifty percent reliability had been doubling approximately every seven months (Kwa et al., 2025). Related trends point in the same direction.

The cost of a given level of capability has fallen sharply, and the amount of context a system can hold at one time has grown by orders of magnitude. If those trends hold even approximately, the capability that today handles work measured in minutes will handle work measured in hours within a planning cycle or two.

The same evidence makes the opposite case just as forcefully, and leaders should hear both. Fifty percent reliability is not an operating standard; no general manager would accept a process that fails half the time. At a threshold closer to what production work actually requires, the horizon of what an agent can complete unassisted shrinks considerably. Benchmarks are also not workflows.

The tasks these systems handle least well are sustained, interrupted, context-heavy, and dependent on institutional knowledge that was never written down, which describes a great deal of the work inside most organizations. And the enterprise evidence on financial return remains mixed, with many AI programs yet to produce results that survive scrutiny in a finance review. Any leader who cites acceleration as a reason to skip discipline is misreading the same evidence they are quoting.

Both readings are correct and holding them together is the actual management task. The direction of travel is fast and the present relia-

bility is limited. That combination argues for building the capability now while designing for capability that moves. Anything designed narrowly around what these systems can do today will be obsolete within a year.

Anything designed around what a vendor promises they will do next year will fail in production this quarter. The organizations that handle this well will build operating models, governance, and workflows that can absorb a step change in capability without being rebuilt each time one arrives.

Leadership Sets the Pace

In the Leadership Revolution Model, speed is a test of the outer ring. Leadership determines how quickly an organization can learn, and whether that pace is matched by discipline. Every other element of the model, from the AI Factory to the people who use it, depends on leaders who are prepared to build capability now while expecting the technology to keep moving beneath them.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Questions for Your Leadership Team

01 Where in our organization is AI already being used without our knowledge, and how would we find out?

02 If the systems we are evaluating doubled the amount of work they could complete unassisted twice in the next eighteen months, which decision would we make differently today?

03 Which of our planning cycles — annual budget, strategic plan, technology roadmap — is now too slow for the pace of this technology?

04 What mechanism do we have for capturing what we learn from one AI initiative and applying it to the next?

05 If a competitor moved twice as fast as we do for the next eighteen months, where would we feel it first?

> *The organizations that master both speed and discipline will thrive. Those that choose only one will struggle.*

UP NEXT

CHAPTER 2

AI IS NOT THE SOLUTION TO YOUR PROBLEMS

CONTINUE READING

The Leadership Revolution

How General Managers Lead People and Intelligence in the Age of AI

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