A Strategic Imperative for Anticipatory Leaders Is Cognitive Performance

AI and cognitive computing have grabbed headlines. Yet, anticipatory leaders know that the elevation of cognitive performance among teams is key to maximize results. Leaders need to help their teams of professionals improve how they envision opportunities, manage downside risks and achieve greater results. Cognitive computing has to do more than deliver data-driven insights to their minds. It must help teams shape outcomes, act on implications and professionalize role-based, cerebral processes in the form of software processes. That's where cognitive performance is front and center.

Cognitive performance involves how well professionals perform their cognitive work. Specifically, how they:

- establish vision
- identify problems
- ask questions of uncertainty
- arrive at critical thoughts
- analyze situations
- synthesize information
- reason
- judge
- solve problems
- communicate
- collaborate
- define follow-on actions

They perform these cerebral activities with their thoughts and their communications. These mini processes in their minds are nondeterministic and lead to decisions within organizations. As machine learning and deep learning move into organizations, professionals who want to increase their cognitive performance must step up their game at the same time. They must center their attention on addressing uncertainties and advance their abilities to identify and create greater certainty. In doing so, they must raise their levels of quality in decision-making processes and stakeholder communication processes that take place in their minds. Their stakeholders, customers, suppliers, employees and their industries depend on it. The status quo of gut-based decision making and misunderstandings among viewpoints leads to operational inefficiencies and monetary waste in downstream activities.

Change is accelerating in business, which creates more uncertainties that find their way into enterprises across all functional responsibilities — in strategies, integrations, operations, supply chains, human resources, research, engineering, finance, process management, product management and consulting, to name a few. Today, cognitive performance is based on role-based experience, learning, frequency, recency and luck — all of which vary from role to role and person to person.

The cognitive activities in the minds of professionals are ripe for optimization. Optimization is possible by learning anticipatory skills and applying cognitive performance technologies.

The human mind is limited when it is engaged to:

- structure decision data
- process situational information
- store organized knowledge
- recall situations with specificity
- understand alternative viewpoints
- engineer outcomes with greater clarity

Although these are human limitations, the mind is extendable through the use of computing, which does a very good job of augmenting the mind for these activities. In today's era of cognitive computing, the human mind can benefit from a digital extension to achieve the cognitive capabilities it cannot — and does not — realize on its own.

At work, professionals who think for a living formulate how to execute their work in their minds. They've built their cognitive expertise over time through on-the-job experiences and homegrown cerebral processes.

Business operations are both transactional and cognitive

Before transactional software systems codified the operating processes of transactional work into the business infrastructure – i.e., ERP, SCM and CRM processes – organizations created homegrown processes and systems to manage their transactional operations. ERP, SCM and CRM systems optimized task-oriented processes before, during and after a customer transaction within organizations, in supply chains and in demand chains. As a result, the transactional side of the operating model has become relatively frictionless.

Today's friction exists within the minds of professionals on the cognitive side of the operating model. A key to future success is to eliminate this friction. That's where anticipatory skills, combined with cognitive performance software, comes into play.

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