

Module 3: Set It and Forget It: AI + Automation

Lesson 6: The Future of AI and Workflow Automation

The Future of AI in Workflow Automation

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to revolutionize the automation of business workflows. Within the next decade, experts predict that AI will take over a wide range of repetitive, predictable responsibilities in the workplace. From document creation to customer service interactions to data analysis, machines are becoming capable of handling many of the routine tasks that underpin white-collar work.

This transformation could allow workers across industries to focus their time and energy on more rewarding and meaningful work. By leveraging the tireless capacity of algorithms to perform time-intensive yet limited-scope tasks, humans can devote more of their efforts to creative problem solving, relationship building, and analytical thinking. The future of work lies in harmoniously combining the respective strengths of humans and machines.

However, realizing this future will require changes at both the individual and organizational levels. Companies will need to thoughtfully manage the transition and provide support for adapting to new roles. And workers will need to embrace new skills and ways of thinking to thrive in an AI-powered world.

Current Applications of AI

While still narrow in scope, AI is already demonstrating the capability to automate repetitive tasks. For example, chatbots now handle between 30-50% of customer service inquiries at companies like T-Mobile, freeing human agents to deal with more complex questions. In finance, JPMorgan Chase uses machine learning to review commercial loan agreements in seconds, compared to the 360,000 hours needed to review documents manually.

Additionally, natural language generation allows computers to create first drafts of reports in a fraction of the usual time. The Associated Press uses AI to autowrite nearly 3,000 earnings stories per quarter.

The Future of Work

Over the next decade, experts predict AI will automate a wider range of workplace responsibilities:

- Virtual assistants like Clara at Bank of America will schedule meetings, book travel, file expenses, and take notes. This provides constant administrative support.
- AI will create customized drafts of documents like reports, presentations, and emails tailored to different audiences. Grammarly already offers an AI writing assistant.
- Enterprise search functions will enable workers to get company information instantly without searching through files.
- Predictive analytics will allow AI to flag potential problems proactively rather than reactively. Utility company PG&E uses this to detect wildfire risks.
- RPA software will enter data into spreadsheets, dashboards, databases and other systems automatically without human input. An estimated 65% of large organizations will have adopted RPA by 2024.

The Future Role of Workers

As AI takes over repetitive tasks, workers will shift into more strategic roles. They will focus on creative and analytical thinking rather than data processing, and will spend more time on strategic problem-solving, innovation, and customer service.

Roles will involve more collaboration with AI and cross-functional teams. Developing social and emotional intelligence will become increasingly important.

The promise of AI is to automate monotonous work and empower humans to do what people do best: imagine, create, connect, and care. With the right strategy, companies can harness AI to augment human capabilities and create more meaningful and satisfying work.

The automation of repetitive tasks by AI has the potential to fundamentally transform the nature of business workflows. As algorithms become more sophisticated, they will take over a growing share of responsibilities that are routine, rules-based, and predictable.

For individual workers, this shift will allow more time to be dedicated to creative, analytical, and complex challenges. Rather than spending the majority of each day on data entry, reporting, communicating information, and low-level problem-solving, workers will be empowered to tackle more strategic issues. With AI automating the predictable "busy work," roles will become more dynamic and collaborative.

Workers will need to develop skills that are uniquely human. This includes imagination, empathy, relationship building, and complex communication. Tasks that involve social and emotional intelligence, such as leadership, coaching, and advanced customer service, will become increasingly important. Rather than competing with emerging technology, human workers will need to learn to collaborate effectively with AI teammates.

For organizations, there are abundant opportunities to use AI to improve productivity, decision-making, and innovation. But thoughtfully managing the transition will be critical. Change management strategies, career development planning, and retraining programs will allow workers to adapt to changing responsibilities. A spirit of experimentation and openness to new ideas will help companies flourish.

The future of work will involve humans and intelligent machines working together in complementary ways. By embracing AI's automation capabilities while cultivating uniquely human skills, organizations can create more engaging work environments. The promise is that technological progress will not displace human workers but rather remove the drudgery from jobs and provide opportunities for more meaningful and fulfilling work. With the right vision and preparation, the future of workflow automation looks bright.