

Introduction

Let me start by saying: you know your business best. Trust your business knowledge and your own logical thinking. I see too many executives FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) into AI because of:

- insecurity about the topic since they are not an AI expert;
- their board pushing for “doing something with AI”;
- suppliers who are promising the world within a week.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. That to me is a super valid principle still to this day and especially with new technology.

As CEO you can not be the expert at every new innovation that comes along. But you can always embrace your business knowledge and logical reasoning and challenge any supplier from that perspective. Because nobody knows your business better than you.

You know what challenges you are facing. Let those suppliers come up with relevant solutions to those problems. And don't let them get away with tech savvy talks: if they can not explain to you how it works, they disqualify themselves. You need to get sufficient information to assess if the solution will indeed be worth the investment and experimentation time for your company.

As a reference why not to FOMO: how many chatbots do you see being implemented that are just a super bad customer experience? Yes, that company can now say we are also “doing something with AI” (although 90% is just workflow automation), but they are not enhancing their business.

OK, enough for my context on how to look at AI and innovations from your perspective as a CEO. Now let me demystify five strongly held beliefs around AI and CX so you can focus on true business impact with AI instead of AI gimmicks that many suppliers are trying to sell to you.

Belief	Misconception	Reality
1. Workflow Automation = AI	Everything that automates a workflow is labeled AI (e.g. bots routing calls, LinkedIn auto-replies).	Workflow automation follows strict rules; AI interprets data.
2. AI Is Extremely Fast	Headlines suggest AI adoption will transform businesses overnight.	Development is fast, but large organizations face legacy systems, poor data, privacy restrictions, and slow adoption; just like internet and CRM before.

3. AI Should Be Designed for Efficiency	AI is implemented mainly to cut costs or speed up processes.	Poorly designed 'efficiency bots' frustrate customers and destroy trust. AI must start with clear design principles and experience goals.
4. Customer Needs Are Changing	AI is needed because customer needs evolve constantly.	Human needs are stable (respect, attention, clarity, feeling valued). What changes is the complexity of delivering them within outdated systems.
5. Removing Friction Matters Most	Making things faster, easier, and more accessible is seen as the key to great CX.	Frictions are hygiene factors—necessary but not differentiating. Differentiation comes from enhancing human experience, not just fixing transactions.

Table 10. Summary of the Five Beliefs on AI and CX Demystified

Belief 1: Workflow Automation is the same as AI

Recognize posts like these on your LinkedIn feed?

I spent 100 hours a month replying to 4000 responses to my LinkedIn posts. Guess what? Thanks to AI it's taking me less than 1 hour! Reply "teach me!" in the comments and I will share with you in the video exactly how it works!

This is not AI. This is workflow automation. Yes super helpful, super efficient, just not AI. Have you ever called a contact center where you had to share your question via voice instead of choosing option A for Invoicing, option B for Sales etc.? Maybe you are using this in your own organisation?

Same idea. Yes, super relevant for efficient routing, but also here, predetermined workflows based on scenarios of customers dictating their questions. But it's not interpreting, it's following very strict rules.

Why does it matter to distinguish between what is AI and what is workflow automation? Because just like nowadays everything seems to be labelled Customer Experience, labelling everything AI is just not helping to actually make a difference. It makes people confused and that slows down the impact you want to make.

If we want AI to add the value we see for the world - enhancing both the customer as well as the employee experience - then we need to understand what's what and how to apply it.

Belief 2. AI Is Extremely Fast

Yes, the developments in AI are going super fast. I don't disagree with that. But what's not going exponentially fast?

The large organisations that need to integrate AI in their processes, let alone in their legacy systems. To not even talk about the privacy restrictions that limit true personalized experiences or the low quality data of the CRM and other systems. That data quality is crucial for AI to build on and learn from if you want more than a generalized ChatGPT version of your company's chatbot.

Remember the development of the internet? This also took several years before it really started to make profound business impact and innovate the world as we know it today. In the early 1990s, most companies only had static websites, and it wasn't until a decade later that broadband and e-commerce began to take off. Another decade passed before mobile internet reshaped consumer behavior at scale.

And consider the challenges CRM implementations are facing still to this day. CRM has been 'the new standard' for 25 years, yet many companies still struggle with adoption. AI will face the same reality: outdated systems, fragmented data, unwilling users, and privacy concerns slow down what appears to be an overnight revolution in the headlines.

Companies needed to reimagine their processes, train their workforce, and often completely restructure their operations. Just as having internet connectivity didn't automatically transform businesses, having access to AI tools doesn't guarantee immediate transformation.

So yes, the developments in AI are going really fast, but the corporate world should take some more time to really figure out the business value of AI and not just adopt shiny new projects. And even when you've identified genuine AI opportunities that align with your organizational constraints, design decisions determine your success or failure.

Belief 3. We Need To Design AI for Efficiency

Of course you are also thinking about how AI can add value to your business. And you should. Let's assume you have identified some challenges where AI might be a valuable solution and you are getting to the point of designing this solution. This is where you need to tread very carefully.

Let me share a recent personal experience to make my point.

Needing early hotel check-in for a night flight to Oman, a simple call turned into a stunning journey through an extremely slow voicebot named "Tim" that was silent a lot and could not properly answer my question. After hanging up to email instead, an actual person immediately

called back claiming "I was just in the middle of answering your question, why did you hang up?" as if it was him I spoke to and not the voicebot.

This personal experience illustrates how disconnected AI implementations don't just fail to solve problems, they actively insult customers' intelligence and destroy trust rather than creating seamless, helpful interactions.

To prevent this from happening in your own AI experiments, step out of your organisation system. Check some of these design principles:

- What problem are we looking to solve (ie. reduce preventable calls)?
- Do we have sufficient data quality to teach the AI and build the model?
- Do we need AI or workflow automation?
- When will this pilot be a business success (not just PR)?
- What should the experience feel like for our valued customers?
- What should the experience feel like for our valued employees?
- Where can we transparently share that this is an experiment?

Find data to have a baseline measurement and track some data on your design principles to keep learning and tweaking as you experiment with AI. That's how you will prevent unwanted outcomes as the one this hotel had designed and actually get AI to add value to your business from a holistic perspective.

These design failures also stem from a fundamental misunderstanding about what drives customer experience.

Belief 4. Customer Needs Are Changing

As you know by now, I'm a big believer in human centricity and I also believe that AI will help accelerate this if used properly. Both on the customer as well as the employee side. That means we need to demystify another widely held belief about the ever changing needs of customers.

They are not. They are still the same humans with the same needs as they were 100 years ago. They still like to get personal attention. They still like to know what the status is of something they bought. They still like someone to give good service if something is wrong.

What is increasing though? The complexity of the organizational context for meeting those needs. The context in which you need to deliver these expectations is what is changing at a super fast pace. Not the needs of the humans who function in those systems.

Not of customers, not of employees. Employees still want to feel that they are making a difference. Employees still want to feel valued for what they do. Employees still want to be facilitated to help their customers or colleagues in the best way possible.

This is where almost zero innovation has taken place in the last 100 years. The organization system. Almost all organisations are still organised around the same Taylor-like principles: small tasks, separate departments, KPI steering, control based.

This 100 year old system and the super fast changing context is what is clashing now most. Not the needs of the customers or employees. We need to bring back the human aspect into the transformation. And use AI to strengthen the human experience.

This brings us to the core technology question in transformation: how do you use AI to remove the barriers preventing your people from delivering what customers actually value?

Belief 5. Removing Friction Matters Most

From part I of this book, you know that the human aspect was the key driver for customers across our 250+ driver analyses. There is a reason why CIO/CTO/CDO's love these statistically proven insights. Because most CIO's I meet are strong believers in human centered design and human centricity. Yet they are struggling to make this measurable and tangible and as a consequence, most technological implementations are focused on removing frictions.

Make it easy. Make it fast. Make it accessible. Many companies are overly or even solely focused on these topics. They believe this is the most impactful way to better customer experience. They are not. Yes, they are hygiene factors that need to be solved. But fixing frictions is not the same as enhancing differentiators.

Frictions tend to focus on the transactional side: speed, ease of doing things, network, etc. Highly relevant of course, because for example if my network as a telco is very bad, customers will leave. But if your network is amazing, customers will not rate you an 8, 9 or 10. For this 8+ experience, you need to design for the human experience.

It doesn't always mean that a human needs to deliver it. The same holds true for a better human experience for employees. There is still so much time wasted by employees on non value adding tasks.

For this part, I still think most of your win is in workflow automation, not necessarily AI. Technology in general, still needs to do a lot more heavy lifting of repetitive tasks that are not inspiring for employees and don't add a lot of value to customers and thus the business.

Conclusion: Use AI To Enhance Human Flourishing

If technology would really remove all these non-value adding tasks from a human perspective, can you imagine how much valuable time would we unlock for people to spend with each other.

Think of those nurses who spend over 50% of their time away from patients to do admin.

Think of those teachers who spend over 50% of their time away from students to do admin. Think of those recruiters who still need to admin vacancies instead of talking to candidates to really understand their needs and find the best match. Think of parents being able to spend more time with their kids because instead of a 40+ hour workweek, they can now manage a 24 hour work week adding the same value to the company.

That to me is where the biggest potential still lies for technology in the coming years. Not the sexy AI pilots, but the unsexy removal of repetitive, admin tasks so people can thrive and add value to each other.

Consciously designing your AI pilots will prevent reputational risk from implementing too fast due to aforementioned FOMO. You have probably heard about the risks of bias or just creating a very bad customer experience because the AI solution fails to deliver on the promise. Maybe it's helpful to think about your pilots in two stages:

- First, experiment with solutions that enhance efficiency and free up time, *without harming the experience* of customers and employees
- Second, take your design to the next level and see how you can *elevate the experience*, both of customers as well as employees by designing for the human drivers

This in the end brings us back to systemic transformation. The same principles that guide successful CX transformation apply to AI implementation: start with understanding what matters most to customers and employees, design solutions that enhance rather than replace human connection, and build organizational capability systematically rather than chasing technology trends.

Remember, this isn't about adopting the latest technology; it's about using technology to enable the human-centric organization you're building.

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