

Who is The Master?

A technology leader at an international conference stated that everything we do should be turned over to computers because humans were responsible for every mistake we suffer from. *Do you agree with him?* By the way, I was the only person in that conference who argued with him that computers should be considered assistants to and not replacements of humans.

The seemingly promising vision that computers will replace humans has been publicly presented to our leaders and investors again and again. It gives the business executive the idea that there is some type of free ride available, as he thinks "I need to buy more technology to replace my people!"

Be careful with the pronouncements of technology visionaries and gurus. They may claim that people are important. But if you look closely, you will usually find training and process design at the heart of their proposal that are nothing more than turning people and their processes into a mechanical device, which is expected to be efficient and make no mistakes, carrying out the vision set by the top. This is a vicious cycle produced by a narrow vision and there is no place for humans that act human.

This has been a typical pattern of thinking, and a strong support for corporate downsizing, outsourcing, reorganization, reengineering, TQM, and knowledge management. All these buzzwords share one common theme - That it's okay to treat the humans the same way you would treat machines. The joke here is that humans are not the equals of machines since machines are fixed costs in the accounting books while humans are variable costs by head count. Whenever it is possible, the number of humans is reduced first. Do you see how this logic conveniently marginalizes the humanity of the team members?

You may ask me, "What has gone wrong?" I have to say this *is* a people problem, which includes that technology leader I met during the conference. It is people who are trying to protect their investment and promote their business. Did you know that W. Edwards Deming, the founding father of Total Quality Management (TQM) warned us again and again in the 1980s that facing global competition, blind automation and devaluation of humans would make American industries decline? None of today's TQM gurus mention this.

When IBM arranged the chess games between the Deep Blue computer and the Russian Chess Master Garry Kasparov, IBM quickly declared its computer could beat the most powerful human chess player in the world. But were you aware IBM had a strong team that included both computer scientists and chess champions? That team studied the world champion Kasparov but refused to provide any information back to him about the champions who were leading the programming of Deep Blue? After a series of games lost, the IBM computer finally won one game and then IBM immediately turned down the request for a rematch, ever.

After the game, an IBM chief scientist provided one important clue. He mentioned because too much computer memory will be needed, even the most powerful IBM computer is not able to play *go*, which is another type of chess. As a matter of fact, many technology gurus don't tell you about a mathematician called Kurt Gödel, who in the last century won the highest mathematical award for his *proof* that computers can never replace human thinking, because human thinking represents *infinity*.

Scientists and technologists who overlook Gödel's proof believe that in our world everything should be physical: our reality must be 100% *objective*, outside our minds. Therefore, they think they will sooner or later discover a physical law, *objective*, scientific, for everything - including our thinking. One of the leading computer scientists under this *object* school has openly declared that computer science has to be empirical (experimental) only. His argument, if I may translate into our everyday language, is that if you drive from New York to San Francisco, you will not need a road map or road sign. All you need is a fast car. As long as your car is fast enough, your attempts by trial-and-error will eventually lead you to San Francisco. Would you like to be that driver?

More importantly, do you know now how to answer if someone intends to replace you with a computer? All you have to do is to find one exception that is not recorded in the rulebook stored inside that computer.

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