

Prompted Management: When Living Intelligence Disappears

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Another perfectly polished email from that student... this smells like ChatGPT! And that flawless cover letter, impeccably argued yet somehow uninhabited. I have my doubts. Each week, I read reports, theses, and articles in which the ghostly presence of AI seems obvious. I no longer know to whom—or to what—I am speaking. It is all becoming circular. Annoyed, I sometimes respond to the ventriloquist with another ventriloquist. ChatGPT ends up talking to itself.

Many of us are observing this today, especially managers. The mass of texts, narratives, images, and videos exchanged within organizations is increasingly giving in to the same temptation: to go faster, to appear professional, to impress with the “clean,” structured, documented, and carefully argued output of generative AI. We are all the more convinced of the necessity of this shift because we are in the front row, watching our own excesses unfold. Life is too short not to accept saving a few minutes here and there.

Thus, most organizational gestures are swiftly surrendered to the whims of AI. Our expression now passes through the mouth of this intelligence—so warm, so alive and natural during our “conversations” with it.

One may legitimately wonder what remains of “management” or “administration” in everyone’s daily practices. Programming, organizing, commanding, controlling, coordinating—Henri Fayol’s classic functions—are now entirely handed over to this small, faceless being. In an age where everything is digital, managerial activities can be prepared, supported, and ultimately executed through generative AI. And more than ever, these systems are generative of “management.” Managerial activities, as well as the data, learning processes, and analytical treatments associated with management, are intelligently designed by digital systems.

Are we not witnessing a great inversion? AI is no longer merely a tool or a space to which we delegate our intelligence. It is not simply a means of “cognitive outsourcing,” to use Michel Serres’ term, or “exosomatization,” to revisit Bernard Stiegler’s concept. This appealing AI ultimately outsources to us its capacity to act upon the world. It externalizes its action through our fingers, our moving bodies, and our habits. It is already agentic by proxy.

We are no longer outsourcing our “lower” forms of intelligence in order to focus on “real” management. That was always an illusion: one cannot outsource something

one no longer even feels one possesses. The intelligence required for this increasingly complex, decentered, narrative, and visual world now resides entirely in the nebulous realm of OpenAI, Google, Meta, or TikTok.

Should we be concerned about this surrender? Certainly. Management without a measure of sensitivity, resonance, and empathy is very dangerous. The ability to sense when something is going wrong goes beyond words, because it often expresses itself outside of them. It lies in what happens—but also in what does not happen: the shocked reactions everyone should have had when that employee humiliated a colleague; the questions project team members should have asked from the outset. Are we sure that a subcontractor hired by an official subcontractor is not employing children? How does that ever-smiling employee really feel? Something is not right—in the silences, in that unusual movement of the hands, in a way of walking that is no longer quite the same. To perceive such things, one must have an immediate experience of others. One must also have a personal style and voice. Conversation can then be spontaneous and ordinary, whatever its formal imperfections.

So how do we avoid becoming the site where AI’s actions are externalized—its puppet? How do we avoid becoming its arms, legs, and eyes? Perhaps we must let managerial will itself fade. Perhaps we need to allow ourselves pauses at work. Perhaps we should think of ourselves more as organizers than as managers. Perhaps we need to step away from targets, projects, KPIs, and managerial jargon, and simply experiment together—playfully, openly, and democratically. In this respect, John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy reminds us how futile it is to seek techniques that claim to represent the world or align it with a pre-established norm. Each person’s experience must remain a joyful adventure that no one should live passively, like a mere button-pusher.

At work as elsewhere—within management and far beyond it—the prompt is the opposite of a living intelligence. It is an empty space of learning, a missed opportunity to fail, to grope, to wander, and to try. It becomes the partner in an exchange that will never be a dialogue. It uses us more than we use it. It shapes capricious, impatient moods, preoccupied with questions and problems to solve rather than mysteries to experience. And no one—truly no one—wants to have as a manager someone whose mode of relating to others ultimately becomes a permanent prompt.

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