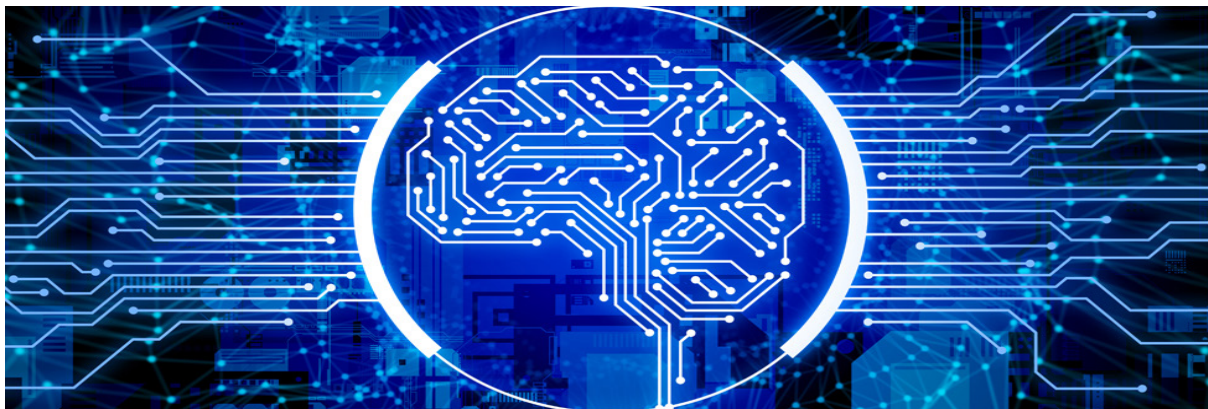# The Importance of Generative AI and How Education Is Getting It

Educators are concerned about the impact of Chat-GPT, the latest and arguably best AI text generator, but are they missing an opportunity?

ChatGPT, one of the latest and arguably best examples of generative AI, is on fire with a valuation that has gone from nothing to tens of billions of dollars seemingly overnight. ChatGPT falls under a category of generative AI that now encompasses things such as creating art, blending images (putting your face on a realistic cartoon or 3D-printed character), and even generating music. As these tools gain in quality, the ability to work effectively with them may someday be a required skill, much like working with a word processor or a spreadsheet was critical decades ago.

The Disruption of Generative AI

Educators don't always seize on technological advancements, sometimes to their students' detriment. For example, students were forbidden to use a calculator in my math classes even though the schools were teaching the use of sophisticated ones scant years after I graduated. Schools still won't let students use the web when taking a test even though, in real life, you're more likely to do that now than you are to go to the library to research a topic prior to doing a report for your boss.

Admittedly, educators have to look at the skills that may be lost when teaching a new technology, but let's talk about how education and industry need to quickly embrace generative AI to increase the value of their employees and students.

It has long been argued that due to humans' creative natures, we have an advantage over AIs which can't create. AIs can only do what they are programmed to do. However, this same argument could be applied to many, if not most, people who do repetitive work. Even if we look at creators who write ad copy and report news and business events (accounting, internal audit, operations, manufacturing, iterative design), they are generally bounded in the way AIs are currently bounded -- they accept defined input from clients and create outputs based on that. The difference is that AIs don't need salaries or benefits and can work 24/7 at machine speeds.

This means that a lot of jobs over the next five to 10

years are going to become obsolete. Future jobs will increasingly be tied to working with generative AIs to help create and train them, or oversee, interact with, and maintain them -- so knowing how to use generative AIs such as ChatGPT will be critical to future employment.

More important, companies that have a critical mass of people who know how to work with generative AI will be far more competitive and will have lower staffing requirements and massively improved productivity. They'll also be better able to create customized offerings at scale with related tools such as 3D printing and robotic manufacturing than those that aren't so staffed and equipped.

This will undoubtedly be similar to past waves where firms that aggressively evolved to embrace concepts such as the web or streaming largely wiped out firms that didn't. Take Amazon, for example. It started as a little online book seller and now dominates world retail, eclipsing Walmart (which was thought to be invincible but wasn't as aggressive at adapting to the new digital world).

Education and Industry

Today, education looks at generative AI much like it looks at paper farms (organizations that sell term papers to students so they don't have to write them) -- as an ethical threat to the system of assigning papers to be written as proof of understanding of a topic. However, they aren't the same.

With a paper farm, a student buys a paper that is generally written and submitted by another student. With generative AI, the student who needs the paper still must create and refine an outline based on the assignment so that the AI will create a result that is successful. If the professor accepts the use of AI by writing an assignment that challenges the ability to work with it rather than resists it by emphasizing skills that the student may never again use, the project be a successful exercise that will better train them for the world they'll graduate into.

Often, the reasons schools don't like new technology is because professors don't understand it. They think of it as cheating if the work of learning isn't approached in the same way that most students did previously. This approach harms students who are being prepared for the world the way it was, not the way it will be when they graduate.

Final Thoughts

Generative AI -- and AI in general -- promises to be the most disruptive technology wave so far and may eclipse later waves such as quantum computing. Sadly, like it was with the web, I expect many enterprises will not see this AI wave coming and will become a footnote in history along with CompuServe, AOL, Blockbuster, and the thousands of other firms that missed the last big technology waves.

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT represent the future of work. Employees with the skills to work with these ever-more-advanced AI tools will be more valuable and their firms more successful than those who don't. Much as firms two decades ago embraced the web and outperformed those that didn't, generative AI will be an even more rapid disruption of the current status quo and result in greater and faster disruptions overall.

Rather than fighting the tools, make sure education, both formal and informal, is encouraged for both students and existing employees so they will better understand the tools' advantages and limitations. Education can make the difference, ensuring that workers and their companies are better prepared for the disruptive technology wave that is likely to dominate this decade.