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AVOIDING AUTOMATION OVERLOAD WHERE AI BELONGS - AND WHERE IT DOESN'T

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WAYS OF WORKING

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Avoiding Automation Overload:

Where AI Belongs – And Where it Doesn't

Presented by: Sam Drauschak

Agenda

1. **The Automation Paradox**: Why “more tech” doesn’t always mean more progress;
2. **Where AI Belongs — and Where It Doesn’t:** A simple lens for balancing automation and human judgment;
3. **Interactive Design Challenge:** Apply the framework to a real-world workflow;
4. **Building Readiness for Smart Automation:** How to align people, process, and technology for sustainable results;
5. **Your Playbook for Balanced AI**: Practical steps to enhance—not erode—team performance.

The Automation Paradox

Customer Service: The Great Automation Experiment

Then: ‘Press 1 for Support’ →

Now: ‘Talk to a Human’

Déjà Vu: The Internet All Over Again

Every revolution starts with the same promise: "Technology will make everything easier."

But what we learned with the Internet is that 'faster' doesn't always mean 'better.'

If you were around for the early 2000s tech boom, you'll remember the same energy we feel right now with AI. The sense that this new wave would make life faster, cleaner, and simpler — that we could automate our way to efficiency.

The Lesson

Automation isn’t the enemy -- misalignment is.

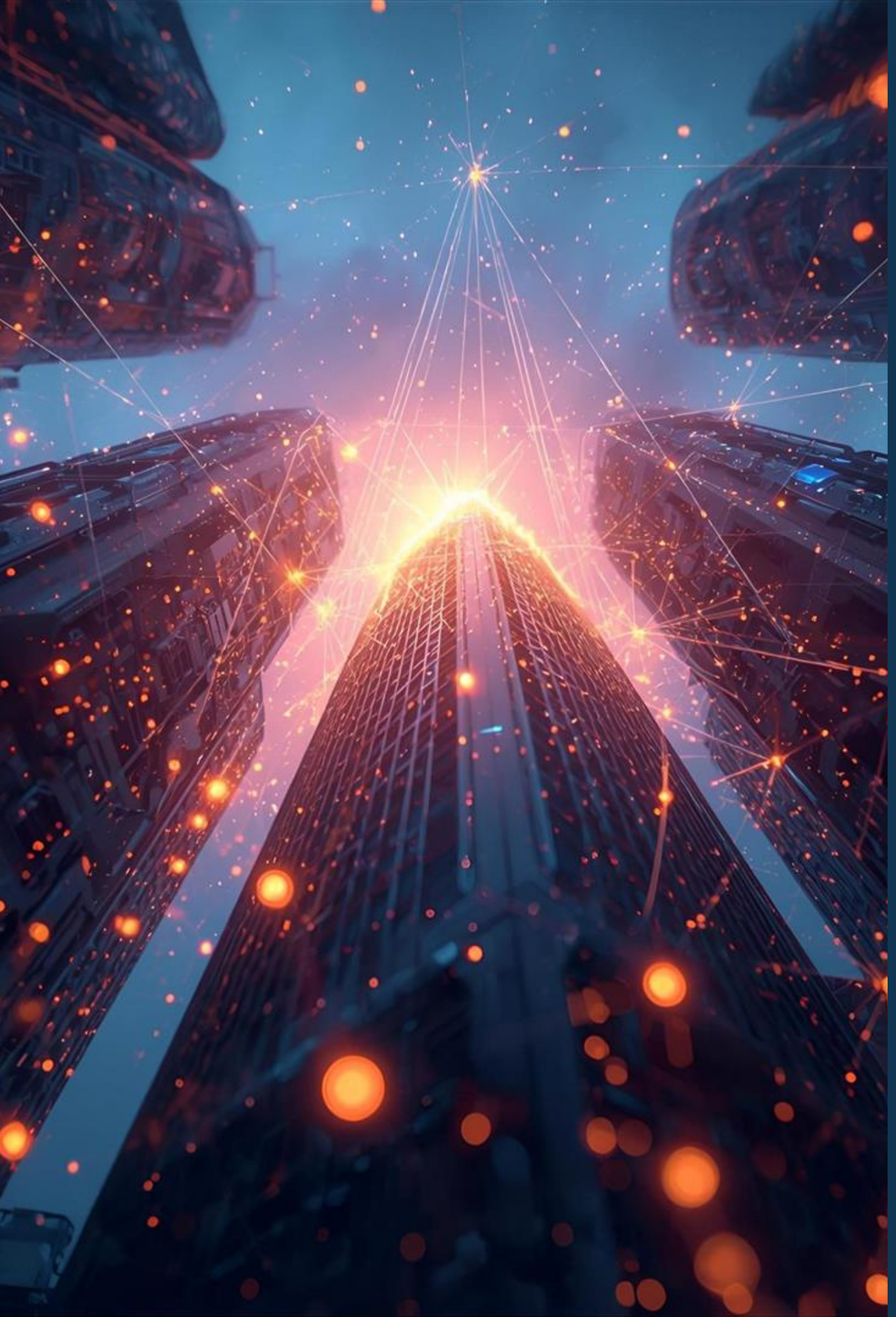
Automation is the future of work — but only when it’s designed around how humans actually create value.

Tools don’t fail; processes do. When you automate a broken or unclear process, you just make the chaos faster.

Success starts with understanding. Before adding AI or bots, you have to know how the work really happens — where the decisions, handoffs, and bottlenecks live.

Smart automation amplifies strength. The best use of AI enhances clarity, consistency, and human decision-making instead of replacing it.

In short: **Map it before you mechanize it**. Technology can’t fix what you don’t understand.



The AI Rush is On

Everyone's Automating — But Not Everyone's Improving

- Organizations are racing to adopt AI tools — from chatbots to copilots — often driven by fear of being left behind rather than a clear purpose.
- But speed ≠ strategy. Moving fast without understanding what's being automated just transfers complexity from people to machines.
- Automation has to solve real problems. The goal isn't to "use AI" — it's to make work simpler, clearer, and more human.

Where AI Belongs

(And Where it Doesn’t)

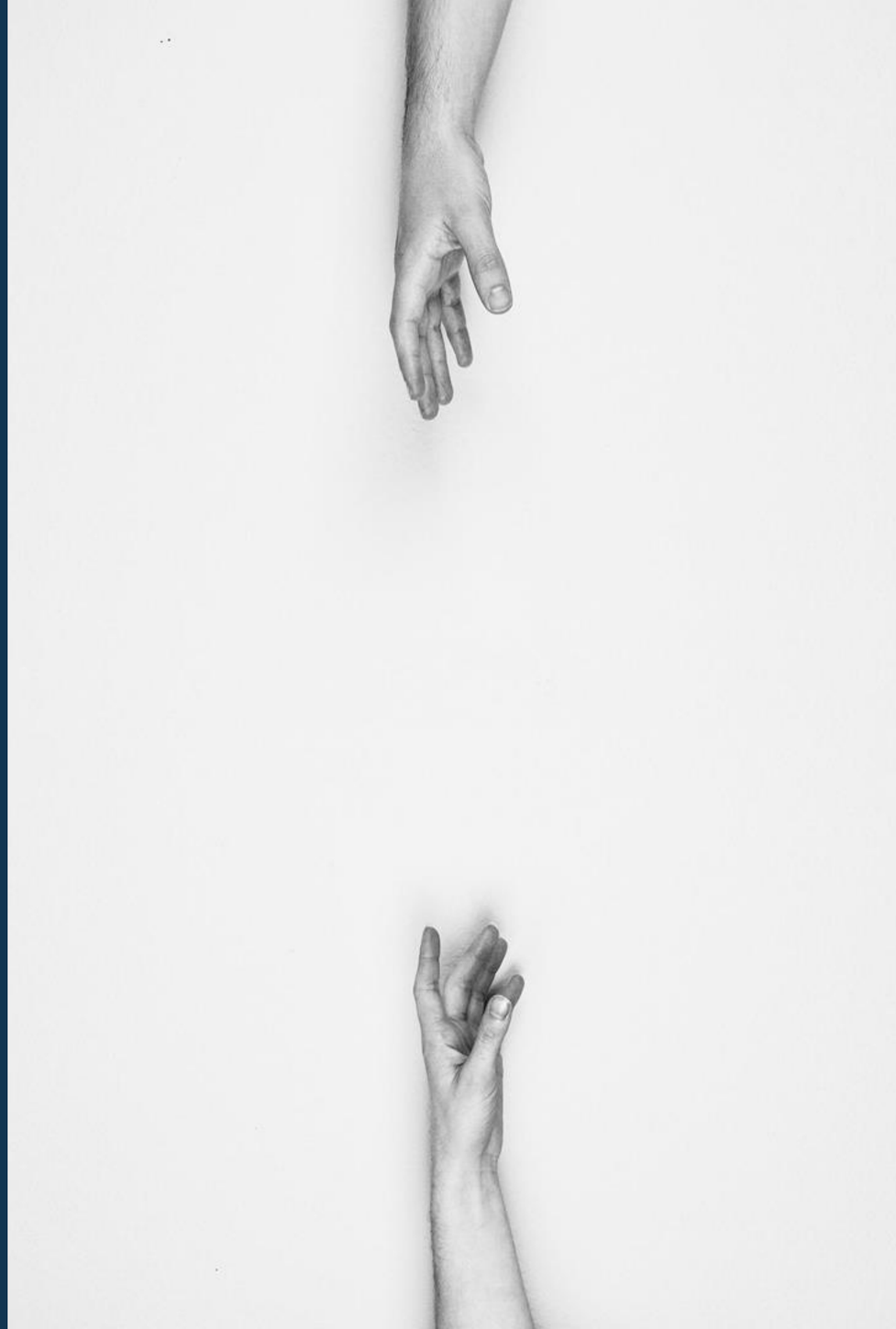
A Better Question

Not “How can we automate?” but “Should we?”

The value of AI depends on context:

- Some tasks are ideal for automation;
- Others for augmentation;
- Others still require a “human touch”.

We need to view all of our processes on a spectrum, in order to determine when and how to automate (if at all).



Automate

What? Repetitive, rule-based, low-judgment work that follows clear, predictable steps.

Key principle: If a process is stable, standardized, and clearly defined — it's ready for automation.

Risk if overdone: Automating without standardization amplifies chaos instead of reducing it.

Augment

What? Analytical or semi-structured work where AI supports (but doesn't replace) human thinking.

Key principle: Let AI handle the heavy lifting so people can focus on insight and creativity.

Risk if overdone: Teams lose confidence or stop thinking critically because "the model will tell us."

Preserve

What? Work rooted in human empathy, creativity, or ethical judgment — where connection and meaning are the outcome.

Key principle: Technology can assist, but the essence of these interactions depends on human nuance and trust.

Risk if overdone: Relying solely on people limits scalability and speed.

Balance isn’t about choosing humans or machines — **it’s about knowing when to let each lead**

Automate

Example

The mechanical, repetitive parts of the process — like formatting, file management, and visual generation — were perfect for automation.

- Used AI to generate personalized, high-quality images for this presentation instead of finding them online (or creating them).
- Let AI tools (in Canva) design and format the layout of the presentation.

Augment

Example

AI helped speed up thinking and sharpen communication, without taking over the creative direction.

- Drafted bullet points and examples with ChatGPT, then refined and restructured them for tone and clarity. (It helped write this slide!)
- Used AI phrasing suggestions to test different ways to explain complex ideas.

Preserve

Example

The strategy, storytelling, and emotional tone—the “why” behind the presentation—stayed fully human.

- Defined the key narrative, audience journey, and big takeaways to ensure the message aligned with my ideas.
- I’m here giving this presentation in person - so you can learn from a “real” person live.

Current Practical, High-ROI Use Cases for AI

Email Drafting: Auto-generate replies, follow-ups, and outreach based on a few prompts or past examples.

Meeting Summaries: Summarize Zoom/Teams calls into bullet points or action items using transcripts.

Content Rewriting & Tone Shifting: Instantly adjust internal or external messaging for clarity, tone, or audience fit.

FAQ & Help Content Generation: Turn common questions into clear, searchable support docs for staff or customers.

Slide Copy & Headline Suggestions: Generate headlines or bullet points from raw notes to jumpstart presentations.

Social Media Post Creation: Quickly draft branded, engaging posts from blogs, press releases, or rough ideas.

Document Summarization: Condense long reports, contracts, or policies into digestible summaries.

Job Description Drafting: Create polished job postings from bullet points or similar role templates.

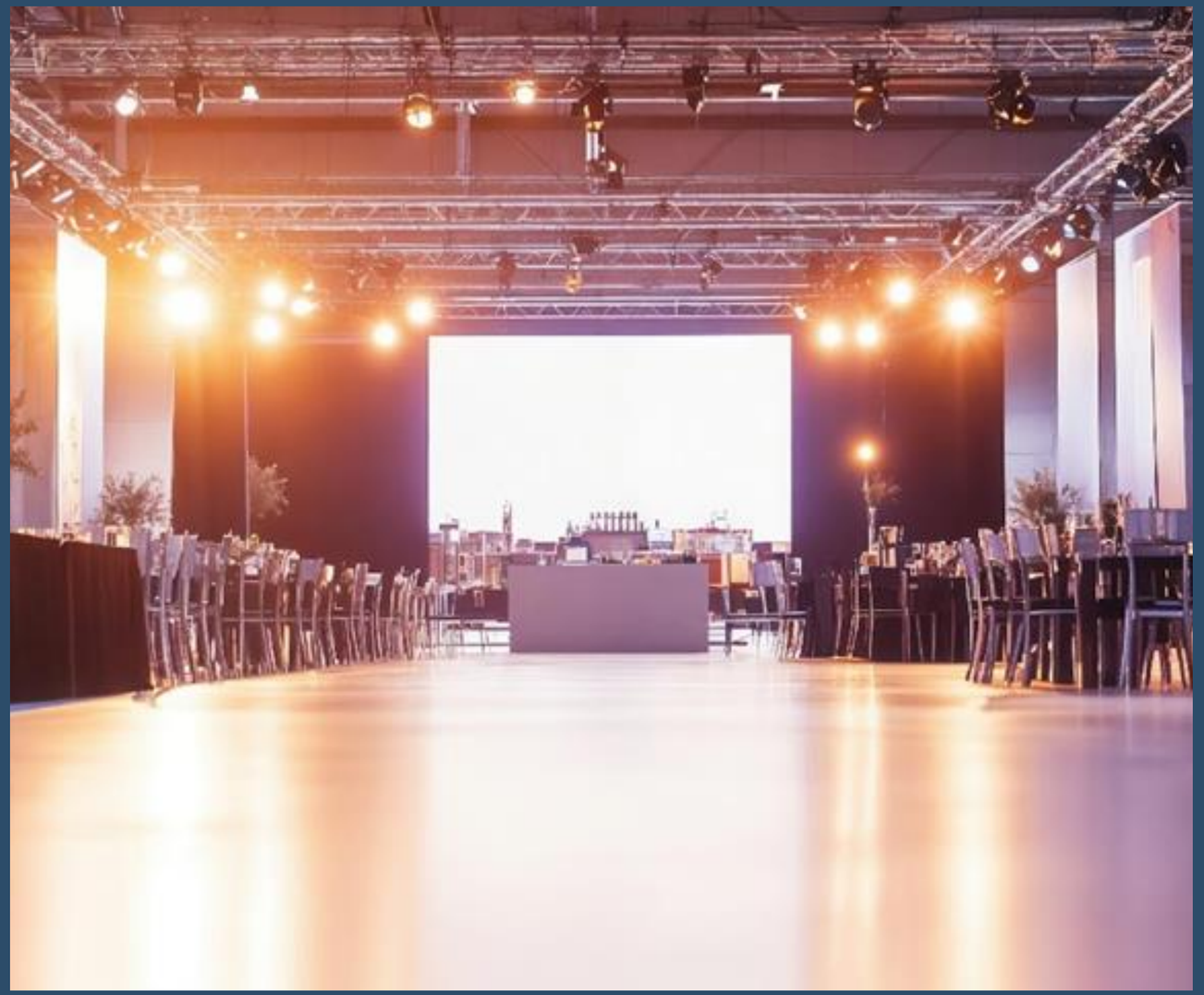
Design Challenge

Design Challenge

Design Task: Preparing for a Large Company Event

Scenario: You’re planning a 1-day company summit for 200 attendees — including check-in, breakout sessions, meals, and an evening celebration.

Your team is small, so efficiency matters — but you still want a warm, personal experience.



What can we **automate**?

What can we **augment**?

What needs a **‘human touch’**?

Hosting Your Event

- Send initial invites and track responses;
- Send reminders and final confirmations;
- Decide on speakers;
- Assign rooms based on session size and A/V needs;
- Generate a printable and digital version of the schedule;
- Write welcome signage and session descriptions;
- Build name badges with correct titles and companies;
- Set up check-in tables, signage, and name badges;
- Greet guests and manage registration flow;
- Send thank-yous; and
- Identify improvement themes for next year.

Discussion

- Where/When is it hardest to decide?
- What trade-offs surfaced between efficiency and connection?
- What risks did you notice when automation was applied too early or without structure?
- Which steps gained the most value from AI assistance (speed, accuracy, consistency)?
- What parts of the event would feel wrong or lose trust if handled entirely by AI?

Building Readiness for Smart Automation

(How Ready are you for AI?)

"If AI adoption were a road trip, which best describes your journey so far?"

Still at the gas station – AI sounds exciting, but we haven't started yet.

Just hit the highway – We've started exploring AI but are still figuring out the best route.

Cruise control – We're actively working with AI and seeing results.

Pit stop – We've started, but we're facing challenges and need to recalibrate.

Full-speed ahead – AI is deeply integrated into our strategy, and we're optimizing for scale.

AI Maturity is a Journey

Four Stages of Enterprise AI Maturity

AI STAGE	Experiment and prepare	Build pilots and capabilities	Develop AI ways of working	Become AI future-ready
PERCENTAGE OF FIRMS	28%	34%	31%	7%
ATTRIBUTES	• Educating the workforce on AI • Setting up acceptable-use policies • Working on making data accessible • Ensuring that decision-making uses data • Identifying where humans need to be in the loop	• Beginning to simplify and automate processes • Creating use cases • Sharing data via APIs • Leveraging a coach-and-communicate management style • Using LLMs – both out-of-the-box traditional and generative AI models – to augment work	• Expanding process automation efforts • Changing to a more test-and-learn way of working • Architecting for reuse • Incorporating pretrained models into work and investigating the use of proprietary AI models • Exploring autonomous agents	• Embedding AI into decision-making and processes • Creating and selling AI-augmented business services • Combining traditional, generative, agentic, and robotic AI
FOCUS	Exploration and education	Business cases and pilots	Scaling AI platforms and dashboards	Continuous innovation and new revenue streams

 Source: MIT CISR 2022 Future Ready Survey (N=721) and interviews in 2024 with 16 executives at nine enterprises. Respondents were grouped into four stages using a measure of Total AI Effectiveness, the equally weighted combination of three measures: effectiveness of AI to (i) improve operations, (ii) improve customer experience, and (iii) support and develop the ecosystem. On a 0%–100% scale of Total AI Effectiveness, Stage 1 AI Capability=0%–49%, Stage 2=50%–74%, Stage 3=75%–99%, Stage 4=100%.

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You Can’t Automate Chaos

Map it before you Mechanize it

- **Automation only amplifies what exists —** if the underlying process is inconsistent or unclear, automation simply scales that chaos.
- **Variation is the enemy of efficiency —** every team, template, or timing difference introduces waste, rework, and lost trust in data.
- **Standardization first, automation second —** alignment on ownership, inputs, and outputs reduces friction and ensures automation delivers value.
- **The goal isn’t uniformity, it’s predictability —** when processes run the same way every time, automation can enhance speed and quality.
- **Reducing variation pays twice —** fewer errors upstream, and higher ROI when tech solutions are applied downstream.

Foundations for Readiness

Do you have people, process, technology - in that order?

Successful AI Adoption Requires a Strong Foundation In the Following Capabilities:

- Process Management
- Project Management
- Change Management
- Technology Expertise
- IT Management
- Data Management
- Legal and Compliance Expertise

Key Risks and Hurdles in AI Adoption

Data Protection & Privacy

- AI increases privacy risks via mass data use.
- Data protection requires strong security, anonymization, and privacy-by-design.

Transparency & Governance

- “Black box” models reduce explainability.
- Governance frameworks — internal and external — are crucial to manage risks.

IP & Privacy Rights (IPP)

- Legal uncertainty around AI-generated content.
- Clear data use policies and respect for IP rights are essential.

Compliance

- U.S. and global laws (e.g. FTC, HIPAA, GDPR, EU AI Act) evolve rapidly.
- Organizations must ensure auditability, risk documentation, and legal alignment.

Summary

The Balanced Automation Mindset

1. **Maximize AI's Benefits—Don't Chase Every Tool:** AI is most powerful when it strengthens what already works. Start with your goals, not the technology.

2. **Recognize Automation's Limits**: Not every process needs to be—or should be—automated. Focus on where automation reduces friction, not where it removes judgment.

3. **Map Before You Mechanize**: You can't automate chaos. Process clarity and standardization are prerequisites for meaningful AI integration.

4. **Design for Human + Machine Collaboration**: The future isn't human or AI—it's human with AI. Build systems that amplify creativity, empathy, and critical thinking.

5. **Lead with Purpose and Balance**: True progress comes from leaders who see automation as a tool to empower people, not replace them.

Thanks!
Questions?

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THE HUMAN ADVANTAGE: STRATEGY, TACTICS, AND LEADERSHIP IN AI-POWERED PROJECT MANAGEMENT
-ANY BURNS

TRACK 2: WAYS OF WORKING

THE AUGMENTED OFFICE: INTEGRATING AI WEARABLES INTO YOUR BUSINESS WORKFLOW
-HAIDAR BIN HAMID

TRACK 3: POWER SKILLS

LEVERAGING GENERATIVE AI FOR ENHANCED PROJECT EFFICIENCY
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