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Unlocking Business Creativity with Data + AI

[Webinar Transcript]



Unlocking Business Creativity with Data + AI

James Jeude

Good day, everyone. I'm James Jeude with LTM.

This is the first in a series of panel discussions with the LTM Data Leaders Forum. Today's topic is going to be unlocking business creativity with data and AI. I'm absolutely delighted to have two perspectives represented: one from the analyst community, Gupta, and one from a user community, a subject matter expert, Amy Grace.

AI is driving business creativity in a very different use case than many projects underway today because business creativity is not just the one right answer replacing a current process. It's actually thinking very differently about how we run the business. What I'd like and Amy to do is discuss with me today lessons they've learned from their colleagues, their industry, and their hopes for the future. First, let's start with an introduction. Amy.

Amy Grace

Hi, thanks James. My name is Amy Grace. I am Vice President of Data Science and Analytics at Otis Elevator. Prior to that, I have roughly 35 years of experience at the former United Technologies Company, mostly on the aerospace side, Pratt & Whitney and Collins Aerospace.

So my team leads all aspects of data science and analytics, including data platform, business intelligence, and AI development. I've been there for two years at Otis.

James Jeude

That's quite a journey. You and I talked about a fascinating mix of technologies and perspectives that I hope to hear from you as we continue this discussion.

Vishal, what is your role? Tell us about you and your background in Everest.

Vishal Gupta

Absolutely, James, and I am really excited to be here. My name is Vishal Gupta. I'm a partner with Everest Group. We are an analyst and advisory firm focusing on tech and tech services. I specifically focus on our AI and data research and advisory.

So I work alongside our CXOs, tech and business leaders, as well as the supply-side community and all the technology companies and service providers, forming a community around all things AI and data: what's new in the world, how different technologies and innovations are shaping how enterprises work, as well as solving and providing advice to my clients on their unique problem statements.

And I'm based out of our Delhi NCR office in India, so looking forward to the conversation.

James Jeude

And likewise. I'm sure you bring not only your own experience but also a well-grounded statistical view of what you've seen and heard. We're going to get into that.

THEME 1: A Better Balance

So let me jump into the first theme, which is towards what I call a better balance: the investment and project trends, but specifically a balance of what?

So, as I mentioned in the opening, companies have always had a natural tension between running better—that is, doing what they do and doing it extremely well—and running differently, as one fashion company worded it, or "run different" depending on the glamour. But I like that taxonomy. I've used it for much of my career. You have to know: are you trying to improve something or are you trying to change something? And they're very, very different.

Now, by the time a project actually gets funded, we all know that a long process has taken place to gather ideas, prioritize, and pick a solution path.

What I want to talk about is the process we've built, as data leaders, of the three of us.

How do we drive a focus on the creativity side of business as a complement to the more conventional AI focus on classic operations or cost reduction?

That is, how are AI projects brought to your attention and how are they prioritized, probably with the broadest view you've seen across industry geographies? Vishal, I want to start with you and then we'll see Amy's perspective in business.

Vishal Gupta

Absolutely, James, and I think even before I answer your question, I think I would like to say the way I understand creativity—because you mentioned creativity—it doesn't just mean generating content. All of us are tuned to how AI works.

For me, it means looking beyond AI just as an efficiency lever or a cost-saving mechanism, because that's how a lot of people think about it, but rather to help businesses imagine new products, redesign customer experiences, create new revenue streams, or even solve problems they couldn't solve before.

And this conversation in the world of AI is pertinent because unlike the last waves of innovation, or maybe the nearest one, the RPA (robotic process automation) which were all rules-based systems primarily geared towards operational excellence, optimization, and efficiency levers, with AI things change because it's not just about efficiency.

But coming back to the question, I believe today, and based on the research we have done in the last one year and all my conversations with enterprises, most organizations are still funding AI to make the existing business run better just because that's where the ROI is easiest to prove. Exactly.

But the organizations creating competitive advantage are increasingly asking a different question. It's not, "Where can AI help me save money?" but "Where can AI help me do something my competitors can't?" And our research says that roughly 70 to 80% of all AI investments today are still focused on improving existing processes, be it customer service, software development productivity, employee support, supply chain, whatnot.

And only about 20 to 30% are truly aimed at creating those new products, new revenue streams, and new customer experiences. And even within those 20 to 30%, only a small fraction are genuinely transformative.

Now, having said that, I do want to point out that it would be incorrect also to assume that efficiency projects are somehow less strategic. I don't think that's true. I'd actually be concerned if someone comes to me and says that 70% of their AI initiatives are moonshots.

More often than not, the operational AI programs are exactly what helps enterprises create the right foundation: the data foundation, the governance discipline, and the organizational confidence that later enable much more innovative AI applications.

So, net-net, to summarize your question, I think yes, the vast majority of the investments today are still focused on improving processes and efficiency, but the healthiest portfolios that we see have a balanced mix: quick wins that fund the journey, but also a smaller set of transformational bets that define the future.

James Jeude

Yes, Vishal, and that funding the journey because the ROI is so obvious when you did something without AI and now you're doing it with people—we don't want to underplay that. In fact, a few questions for now. I'm going to get deeper into that topic of how shared services and shared gain fit in the world of entrepreneurial AI.

One thing I'm going to mention before I ask Amy the question from her perspective: just yesterday, in fact, I was talking with a client of a very large financial services company, trillions of dollars under asset, and his conclusion was that AI helped them place more bets and test out more ideas, but from point to point, from original idea to actual code going into production, he was not trying to shorten that with AI.

He was trying to get a better journey rather than a shorter journey. And I thought that was a fascinating perspective. So Amy, you and I had talked before we got on this call about your role at Otis and how, as a leader in the industry, they've already developed a list of target ideas. So tell me how you sort of create and balance that "better versus different" in your AI and complex data projects.

Amy Grace

Sure. It's interesting because we introduce AI on the product side and on the business side. So on the product side, we've used AI to create almost a digital elevator concierge and operations assistants designed to improve, just as Vishal said, the experience of our passengers, building managers, and even our service mechanics.

For passengers, it looks like personalized elevator dispatching, voice-activated elevator calls, automatic floor registration, customized cabin settings, and interactive assistance. I know the first time my daughter and I were in a hotel where we went over and it wasn't "press the button to go up the elevator"—you used your key and it called an elevator for you.

I think the first time, we missed the elevator just because we weren't expecting that the system would know which elevator would get me there fastest, but it does. For passengers, that personalized elevator dispatch for the property managers—excuse me—they get real-time elevator status information.

They get personalized equipment health reports, they get maintenance records insights, and they can even configure the elevator to be in use for different events, and they can take control over what elevators go to what floors based on what might be going on in their building.

And then for our service teams, we've incorporated information from the elevator itself and their manuals. They get voice-activated troubleshooting support now. They have instant fault notification and diagnostic guidance, and they have access to operational data and assistance ordering parts. So we make their job much easier as well so that they can maintain and return the elevators to service.

I think on the business side, the innovation looks like—for an analytics person—it looks like moving from a sea of spreadsheets, which is what business intelligence was, which was almost maybe a view of "tell me what happened."

Now we're combining information from different sources where AI is helping us to not just see what happened, but to understand drivers more clearly, to be able to see new patterns that we wouldn't have noticed, and also to be able to give recommended actions for what to do next.

So we can see opportunities we haven't seen before. We can understand risks and how to mitigate better. And all of that, again, is helping us to take care of our customers better. I agree it started out with productivity—we call that "return on the employee"—but now we're starting to see more of a return and growth, a return on the customer and growth in our business.

James Jeude

Amy, there's a lot to unpack there. That's fascinating. I'm going to look at elevators very, very differently, both as an engineer and a data person, and also now having talked to you. So, a few questions on that I'd like to follow up on. That's fascinating.

One of them is: what is the process of getting yourself involved, getting data and AI? Clearly, you can make these ideas come to life faster. I get that sense, right, that just like I mentioned that financial services EVP yesterday I spoke to, you have that ability to try them out, see if it works, simulate, but also you're at the table now where some of these decisions are being made.

Theme 2: Shifting the Point of Balance

How would you encourage others to make sure that the data and AI voice is right there at the table, rather than being at the end of the budgeting process and you're told what to do? Does that question make sense? I want to make sure that we in the data business are right there helping to create those ideas and prioritize them.

Amy Grace

Yes. So yes, about my role, I think it's part evangelist and part operator. In this day and age, you definitely need excitement and you need to be able to show what's possible, but you also need disciplined execution to be able to provide measurable outcomes because companies are expecting those outcomes from their investments.

I think that the AI ideas always start, just like any technology, from a clear understanding of what are the most important problems you're trying to solve—whether it's in the product, or in the business, or for the customer—and then applying technology in creative ways, as opposed to some people who like to start with the technology and then look for the problems to solve.

So I've always grounded the approach in that, and I've worked in transformational roles from three different angles: from the engineering side (most of my career was as an engineer), also from the program side, and then now I'm in a digital technologies organization.

But all of those things were focused on: there's people with a clear understanding of the problem and there's people with a clear understanding of the technology, and the most successful things bridge that chasm and have the people with the technologies working effectively with the people who are most deeply understanding of the problems to be solved. So I've always enjoyed working in the middle there.

James Jeude

That's a great quote, by the way. Everything I've read, I've never heard it summed up quite so simply. It's not that one's better than the other, but there is a lot to be said for technology seeking an application.

That's how we ended up bringing personal computers and replacing notepads, right? And yet, if you're doing it without value, we all know that story. That's terrific.

So Vishal, as you listen to this one example of a highly innovative company—and Amy, I also know a lot of your revenue comes from services, so you have a relationship side to your business as well as a hardcore engineering side, right?—but Vishal, what have you been seeing?

Do your clients come to you asking for advice, or do you tell them that they must focus more on the innovation, or that they must build a clear culture of sharing technology and vision?

Vishal Gupta

The way I'll frame that, James, is that as enterprises have started on their AI journey, many may not actually be thinking directly about whether it's an efficiency play or an innovation play; it's part of the maturity journey.

The way I'll frame the question, maybe a little differently, is that innovation in today's world, especially in AI, is not fighting for AI investment. Innovation is fighting for management competence. The capital is there, the money is there, the board is sold. There's not a single person that I speak to today who says that AI is not important. Everyone understands that and they have funding for it.

What's lacking is the willingness to back initiatives where the ROI isn't immediately visible. That's the whole challenge between doing something for productivity or efficiency versus something being done for creativity or innovation. We are almost three or four years into the journey of AI since the launch of ChatGPT back in November 2022.

The first couple of years were all about proving AI works—that's what everyone wanted to talk about: what are the use cases, where can I implement copilots, customer service bots, things like that. Those were all projects which were relatively easy to justify, the business case was straightforward.

In the last year, we are entering the second phase, which is much harder, and this is the entire conversation around AI creating new products, new customer experiences, new ways of working. That's where more and more of this innovation part is competing not against operational AI, but against the CFO's demand for predictable returns.

If you ask me, based on all the conversations that I've had, what would be my advice to the leaders, I would say three things. First, separate the operational AI funding from innovation funding. They shouldn't compete in the same approval process—that's just not fair.

Second, and most importantly, enterprises need to measure innovation differently early on. Look for customer adoption, look for learning velocity, look for visible changes, and not just cost savings. At the end of the day, if you judge every innovation initiative with the same financial lens that you're using for automation, it will be hard to build the next source of competitive advantage.

Third, you need to involve your business much earlier. The most innovative AI ideas, more often than not, require the involvement of BU heads, product heads, and marketing heads who understand the business and understand the customer problems.

For example, just last week I was talking to a consumer goods company, and they're using AI to generate entirely new product concepts based on customer feedback, market signals, and everything else. It's not because IT proposed it, but because the business saw a competitive opportunity. So I would say these are the three critical things that will be important as you start to think about innovation versus productivity.

As a last thought to this entire conversation, I don't think the objective is for innovation to replace efficiencies; enterprises still need operational excellence. But the objective is to ensure that AI portfolios don't become trapped in operational excellence. If 100% of your AI investment or AI portfolio is all about reducing cost, then you are probably missing where long-term competitive advantage will come from.

James Jeude

Yes, Vishal, your third point about the feedback from the market and creating—one of my favorite use cases is a company, this goes back to old-school AI about 10 years ago. They were reading the comments and basically

consumers were saying like, "I love the dress, but I wish it came sleeveless," or "I love this" or "I dislike this because of the zipper, but the rest of it is lovely."

And that's the kind of feedback you're not going to get from a focus group in an off-site meeting with an executive. That's the kind of thing you have for free: the ability to listen to literally millions of people talking about your product.

Theme 3: Corporate Culture, Business Creativity, Shared Services

Both of these conversations really lead to the third theme, which is one of my favourites: corporate culture, business creativity, and shared services. And what do I mean by that? Well, first of all, my audience knows that every James discussion has got to include a little bit of history.

So I'm fascinated by the fact that the word economics actually comes from a Greek phrase meaning roughly oikos as household, where we get ecology, and nomos means laws—like astronomy is the laws of stars. So economics basically means who rules the house, if you think about it.

But if we come back to the question of who rules a house, a long-standing fascination of mine is the problem of "quick win" versus "right rollout." And by that, I mean a super quick example: if I'm the first house in a new neighbourhood, what's the fastest way to get electric to my house? It's to run a straight line from the transformer to my house.

What's the fastest way to wire the neighbourhood? It's to pause and map out where the different transformer substations would be and then to build it out. ***So very often, that business urge to just find a problem, solve it, and get it done is so overwhelmingly attractive, but so harmful that all of us on this call know that decades of technical debt come from trying to do something quick or for the one person with money rather than building it for the company—centralized data warehouses, data fabrics, and all that.***

AI has got the same problem when you're getting into small language models, into training it on the unique nature of your industry, the unique nature of your business. How do you manage with your partners—and Vishal, how do you see it when you're engaged in conversations—the problem of having everybody with a problem and an idea, and yet there's a core infrastructure that needs to be funded before the first person sees even one benefit?

I may be exaggerating because we love quick wins but we hate quick wins; there's a tension there. Amy, I'm going to jump to you first for that one, and then Vishal, I'd like to hear what you're hearing in the industry. It's a long question, sorry about that, but I'm fascinated by it. It's pretty clear: the best innovations are built on strong foundations.

Amy Grace

So we look for innovations in data governance platforms that can support a variety of future use cases. One of the things that we've had great success with is investing in high-quality data products so we can power multiple AI applications with AI-ready data products instead of building one-off solutions.

So if you think of the most essential data that the company needs to run on—and for us, you can think of the elevator unit 360, the configuration of the elevator, the history of the elevator, customer 360, understanding their needs, their segment, and how best to offer customized solutions to them—if you build those reusable data products, you find that they get reused at a high rate.

The next is for the quick wins: we like to think of taking a thin slice of the value stream. So thinking about if there's an area of high opportunity, we build out those data products and apply the AI to deliver immediate benefits there. But it also can be built upon across other areas of the value stream.

So we built out our data product architecture, and in doing so, we find that each use case is easier and faster to solve for. So quick wins are creating momentum for us, but the strong foundations are creating scale, and we found you need both to sustain innovation.

James Jeude

I like the way you worded that. It's a thin slice of a larger value stream as a way to bring a quick win without getting into that dilemma of presenting it later as technical debt.

Vishal, you get engaged, I'm sure, in some very interesting conversations. You probably see a lot of dysfunctional conversations where you're brought in to moderate, as well as maybe people that have the best intentions. Without spilling too many beans on your clients, tell us what you've seen.

Vishal Gupta

No, absolutely. This is one of the most interesting conversations, James, because I remember early in 2023 and even 2024, in a lot of my conversations with CDOs specifically, they would come and say, "Look, I am under a lot of pressure from my leadership.

All different parts of the organization—BU heads—are coming to me saying, 'Hey, we are experimenting with this particular AI use case, we are building this particular platform, but we need the data foundation. We need all the data in one place, cleaned, and prepared for our AI to work.' AI is only as good as the data being fed to it."

And the CDOs would say, "Look, I'm the Chief Data Officer in a large enterprise working across geographies. If I have to do everything everyone says, that will probably take months or even years and millions of dollars."

So then the dilemma and the question you asked is essentially: should I build the foundational AI infrastructure first, or go after and experiment with several AI use cases? And when we say foundational AI infrastructure, as Amy said, it can be data products, governance, AI platforms, model operations, vector databases, semantic layers—all of that which can ultimately enable dozens of future AI use cases.

Here's my take: I don't think the answer is to build all the infrastructure first and then start delivering AI. We have tried that before with enterprise data lakes and cloud transformation, and many organizations have learned along the path that building technology in search of business value rarely works.

In the AI world, there are a couple of challenges: as an enterprise, you don't want to wait 10 months or two years to get there, because by the time you have built that foundational infrastructure, you might be left far behind your competition.

Secondly, the pace at which innovation is happening in the AI world means who knows—some things might become obsolete altogether in a span of 6 to 12 months. You don't want to be investing in something that is already becoming enterprise tech debt.

Having said that, I also don't believe in funding isolated pilots forever; that's just inefficient and adds more complexity. For example, last month I was in the US and speaking to a global bank. They started with a GenAI assistant for their relationship managers; it worked out really well for a time and was showing a lot of value.

Then suddenly Legal wanted one, Marketing wanted one, Operations wanted one, and so on. If each team builds it independently, you will end up with multiple different identity models, vector stores, duplicated governance, and inconsistent data quality—which is not something you want as an organization.

In my opinion, a better approach is somewhat akin to what Amy mentioned: I call it building or creating a platform through products. Every business use case should contribute something reusable.

You start with experimenting with a few use cases, but also keep in mind that every experiment you do should contribute to building that infrastructure layer—be it a data product, an API, an agent framework, an evaluation framework, or governance capability.

So you're essentially building the platform and infrastructure while simultaneously delivering business value. The last thing I'll say is that the mistake I see a lot of organizations make is trying to justify enterprise infrastructure through the ROI of one project. That almost never works. It's a tremendous burden, and the champion leading that one particular project will be under immense pressure.

Ultimately, what I've learned in the last year is that organizations making the fastest progress are building the infrastructure and the use cases together. The AI use cases tell you what infrastructure you actually need along the journey.

James Jeude

Yes, Vishal, one of the things I found helpful over the years is to try to position each demand. For example, someone's got pain and they want it relieved immediately.

But if you could treat that as an example of the class of problem being solved instead of a project where you draw the straight line—bringing a wire directly from the transformer to the house, which was the fastest way to get the lights on but the worst way to build a neighborhood, right?—I don't know how successful that's been, but I see a lot of that here.

The good news is, Vishal, you and I talked about this, 10 years ago it still was a struggle to convince companies to build an AI infrastructure rather than do AI projects. I think companies realize that the language of their company, the ontology model, and the governance of all the major bodies around the globe—whether from California to Brazil to GDPR—all need a common foundation.

You don't want each project to solve it on its own. I think we've passed that point of a common foundation.

Theme 4: How does AI advance Business Creativity?

An Open Letter to Our Colleagues

Let me jump then to carry that thought a little bit and talk about how we would discuss this with our colleagues. Here's what I mean by that: everybody's talking about AI—my mom, my friends, everyone. The most recent book I've been reading is called Empire of AI by Karen Hao. It's about OpenAI and everything else.

Every single time I have that book in my hands when I'm sitting in a lobby or a restaurant, someone comes by and starts talking about it. It's fascinating. Every time, it's either them personally, or they have a co-worker, or their spouse, or someone.

But they don't really know what it means; they're fascinated, and they're hungry to know what is really going on with AI. How do you want your colleagues and your partners to know about AI? What would you like them to know about your company?

If you had access to their time and attention, what would you tell them so that they reach out their receptors and start looking for AI opportunities in an intelligent way? We want to enlist an army of people who are looking for AI creativity and opportunity. How do you do that in your organization?

Amy Grace

I can start first. I would just say: think of AI as a capability, not a project. Start with areas where people struggle to find information, connect data, or make decisions. Notice the friction in your life and think about how AI can remove it.

I think it's important to experiment and learn through practical use. It's easy to read about things, but we found the hands-on use of AI and learning from solving real problems has really brought it home for us. We're all learning; first it was generative AI, and this year it's more agentic AI.

I'm learning, too, to think of agents as something that can play different roles. For us, it might be an agent to help with planning, an agent to help with analyzing, or an agent that can help with making the next best decision.

If you think about how people work—and this is where a lot of those other concepts really come home and are required—watch how they work, watch where the friction is, watch and observe the systems and the data that they interact with. Then design the agents to make the workflow better and to support better decision-making.

All of that keeps humans at the center. I hear a lot of conversations about AI replacing people, but I don't think that's true. I think AI should augment their expertise and judgment, not replace it. The organizations that will win with AI will be the ones that remove the friction for employees and our customers, and that's kind of what our North Star is.

James Jeude

That makes a lot of sense. And I think the agentic idea, now that that's become the topic, people can imagine that in their daily life—look at their points of friction without thinking, "Oh, I have to go and propose a complete replacement of my CRM, a complete replacement of my vendor system."

That's not going to happen. We've all lived through those ERP systems that cost \$500 million, right? It brings that down to one ten-thousandth of the cost, if not lower.

Vishal, what are you seeing? What would you tell your clients to tell their colleagues to get them to open up and think about AI in their organization?

Vishal Gupta

I think what Amy mentioned makes a lot of sense, and I'll add one interesting conversation that I had some time back. What I heard is, "Look, we are trying to become AI-first; we want to be the leading AI organization in the world."

So what we are doing is, in all our business departments, we are asking everyone to share what they can do with AI." They sourced almost 1,000 ideas of where they can deploy AI, and the CIO said, "I'm funding it. Let's go ahead. Let's experiment with all those 10,000 use cases."

And after a year, they realized that 90% of those use cases are actually not adding a lot of value. Most of the value that came to the organization was from those 10% of the use cases. Now, there are a couple of learnings here. One, it's not to say that you should not experiment. Absolutely, you should experiment—that's how an organization will learn and evolve, right?

But there has to be a mindset of fail fast: if we are experimenting with something and it's not working, we need to pull the plug. No need to be fully attached to, "I'm going to see it through."

Second, what really worked? The question would come: what really worked in those 10% of the use cases? What we figured out was that until the time you are just overlaying AI on existing processes and providing it just as a support tool to your employees, you're only looking at incremental gains.

It's only when AI becomes deeply involved in the workflows that the true transformation happens, and that's when the true value starts to emerge. So, the point I'm trying to get to is if you can identify, "Hey, look, these are the use cases from initial experimentation; these are the areas where I really want to embed AI very deeply in my workflows, in my processes, and in how the technology integrations are happening," I think that's where the real transformation starts to happen and where the real value starts to emerge.

If you are only providing AI as a productivity tool, you are not really transforming anything.

James Jeude

There is a very interesting thing there, too—first of all, that sort of 10% that really play out. One thing I'm fascinated by, as I read well-documented studies on what percentage of AI projects are considered failures and the like: somebody needs to go back and look at what percentage of pre-AI software projects failed. It was a huge number; we forget that.

It's almost like a big part of my career was medical analytics and new drug development. You have to look at the placebo effect: an amazing number of people getting placebos have headaches, back pain, and other horrible side effects, and they did nothing.

So I do want to study—maybe, Vishal, that's something we could work on together—how the success rate is normalized across the usual failure line in software. But I'm digressing.

Another interesting point on the 90% was that I think companies underplay the kind of AI that makes your day 2% easier. It's that little less friction, a little bit faster to go home five minutes early, to think clearly, to take a longer lunch break.

There's no way if you're 2% faster you're going to get rid of one out of every 50 people in your call center, right? But you're going to have 50 people for whom life is just a little bit easier, and I don't think we should downplay that.

That's not going to change the world; it's not going to make the analysts' call when they talk about stock price. But let's not forget that those are important to us.

Theme 5: Now and Soon

Great. So that kind of leads to what I think my last question would be before I ask you to summarize. ***Forget your role, or as we tell GenAI, "ignore previous instructions," right? Pick one of two questions, or both: What's the most interesting AI application you've seen in the last three years since generative AI became dominant?***

Or, what is the one use of AI you'd like to see us embrace in the next five years? Look back three years because that's the GenAI timeframe, or look forward five years, or both. I'd like to hear your thoughts. Amy, why don't we start with you, and then Vishal, and then I'll chime in with mine.

Amy Grace

So, I'm going to take the first question, but I'm going to give two answers. One, because I can't take off my hat—the technology has helped us. I've been working in this intelligence transformation for the last 10 years, and I just can't believe what's happening in the last six months.

The first one is just the ability to assimilate different information and generate content altogether. For example, we can analyze equipment history and characteristics.

We can look at its modernization opportunities—what different upgrades or repairs could help—and also understand customer investment profiles and preferences, and literally bring them all together to have a tailored proposal generated automatically in about five minutes.

That's a big deal, because I would say around 2018, when we started to have big data and access to it on the cloud, we almost had too much data and not the ability to synthesize it into what was actionable. Exactly.

But right now, I just can't believe, and I'm just so excited about, what we're actually able to do. And those types of things don't have to be sold; there is no change management for those types of solutions because it's what the employees always wanted to do, and it fits naturally in their workflows. So, that's one for me that comes off the top of my mind because it's helping the employees and the customer.

The other is just personal: I like to design things in my house, and I love taking a picture of the patio that we just finished to get design ideas. I'm just amazed that I can take a picture and have it look at different views of what it could look like—what furniture, what decorations, what furnishings—and then I can use Google Lens to take a picture, shop, and be able to design and outfit my whole thing.

That is just so much fun for me. I can even put the landscaping in and show the landscaper, "These are the flowers or the type of plants I want." So, I'm having all kinds of fun with that type of imagination and how to create beautiful spaces. That's my personal one.

James Jeude

That's cool. And I can see my wife doing that, too. We've been remodeling ours. We're in an urban area, so it's a small backyard, but it's a lot more work.

Amy, a very interesting study I just read about: some company was using Google Satellite View and Google Street View and making very reasonable guesses of what the backyard looked like, and sending out personalized proposals for one of those robotic covers. They come out and give you shade, and if somebody sees their backyard with a message like "you could have this for \$8,000," it's fascinating—and they did it without any cooperation, no site visit or anything. Amazing.

So, Vishal, what would you say? Either the most interesting, or the one you'd like to see, or both.

Vishal Gupta

It's a very interesting question and, James, if you hadn't said forget your role or forget your company, my answer would have been what AI is doing in the software world: software engineering.

Because that's where, regardless of whether you're a bank, an airline, a manufacturer, or a retailer, your ability to innovate is increasingly dependent upon how quickly you can build and improve your digital capabilities. So that is a very significant impact that AI is having.

Leaving that aside and on a personal note, the applications that excite me the most, more broadly, are those where AI is helping us discover things which humans just didn't know before. Think about the solution from Google around AlphaFold in biology: there is this problem that scientists have been struggling with for decades around protein folding.

That technology helps solve that problem and now dramatically cuts the time and cost required for critical scientific and medical research around novel molecular architecture. There's another example from Microsoft around MatterGen: they are designing entirely new materials with properties that don't even exist in nature.

There is another example—around an 80-year-old math problem which was unsolved so far—and the AI solved it. These are the kinds of things that excite me; the possibilities of what we can do with AI are limitless.

James Jeude

That's fascinating. I'm not sure I can top that. But I will give a quick story from a very good friend of mine who is a professor at a big university here in New Jersey. He was formerly the chairman before he went into industry and came back. The reason I mention that is he had built this data discovery tool—I won't get into it, it's a fascinating problem: identifying what's "interesting" about data.

Because with most BI cubes—and I'm dating myself by calling it a cube—you basically look at stuff and everything is like one or two percent different than last time. Where's the wow factor? So he built some software with students, put \$50,000 or so in their pockets as a research project.

He sat down with GenAI over one weekend and reconstructed the software in about 10 labor hours, and it ran faster. On the one hand, good for him putting money into students' pockets. On the other hand, he eliminated a \$50,000 expense, and that was student pricing; if you and I did it through a regular company, it would have been three or four hundred thousand. That's absolutely fascinating.

My personal wow is this. I'm not an AI expert, but I know AI people who really, really know what's going on. The layers and the neural nets—it's a black box, it's mind-numbing.

And yet, simultaneously, all the major AI vendors are effectively equal. I'm not going to quibble over benchmarks, like if suddenly ChatGPT is slightly ahead of Gemini or something, but it's amazing that they're effectively within months of each other after what's been 70 years of technical development in AI. I'm not going to quibble over benchmarks, like if suddenly ChatGPT is slightly ahead of Gemini or something, but it's amazing that they're effectively within months of each other after what's been 70 years of technical development in AI. It reminds me—I'm old enough that I grew up in Florida on the space program with my dad—the US and Soviet Union were only a few months apart in technology for many, many years. Despite human civilization being 20,000 years old, they were two or three months apart taking different paths. I just find that amazing that there's more or less simultaneous invention going on in this business, so I hope it continues. Let's wrap up what we've talked about a little bit. One last round. I do want to mention the next topic in this series: I'll be talking about what it takes with AI to build benchmarks. I think the secret of an AI executive is going to be knowing when AI is working and knowing when it's not. None of us at our companies can keep up with those 10,000 of the smartest AI people in the universe that I just talked about who are working for partners. But from the perspective of the two of you, what do you think of today's conversation and what would you like to wrap up in a sentence or two? Vishal, why don't we start with you?

Vishal Gupta

I can go first. First of all, great conversation. I am convinced that AI is not simply an automation technology; it's becoming a discovery technology. Whether it's the example that I gave of scientists understanding proteins, or

using AI to help engineers design products differently, we are seeing AI contribute to ideas, not just execution. Looking ahead, I think the applications where we use AI or embrace AI as a thinking partner that democratizes expertise is where a lot of the value will lie. If we use it to elevate human judgment rather than replace it, I think we'll create far more value than if we simply automate existing work. And that's the shift I am most excited about.

Amy Grace

I agree. Thanks for having me; it's been a really fun conversation. I would say I agree the first wave of AI is definitely helping employees work faster; I think the next wave is going to help people work smarter. I do think companies that win will be the ones that can recognize and use AI to reduce friction, personalize experiences, and come up with new experiences that maybe we hadn't thought of before—but always focusing on creating better outcomes for our customers, our employees, and our shareholders. I agree with Vishal about using it as a creative assistant and really being AI-first, not just working on incrementally improving the way that we have done things before, but imagining totally new, different ways of working. I'm just really glad to be working in a role like mine at a time like this.

James Jeude

Thank you. So what does it take to outcreate any needs of AI? Today we've talked about business creativity and how we can reduce the friction and improve reliability and the reach of AI. We've seen that the execution is just as important as the ideation, but the ideation is critical. The things that really differentiate are the quality of the ideas, not the quality of the process. We're going to be talking in an upcoming webinar about how data, AI, and human imagination come together to drive business success. Thank you for joining this conversation and listening in, and I'll see you next time.



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