



HUMAN-CENTERED AI



MARIA BIELIKOVA
Founder and Director
Kempelen Institute of
Intelligent Technologies

Maria is a leading Slovak expert on artificial intelligence. A former Dean and Full Professor at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, she later co-founded and now leads the Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies (KiniT), a research institute that attracts and develops AI talent to connect ideas, people and institutions across academia, industry and society. Maria is a regular voice in discussions on trustworthy AI. She previously served as a member of the Board of Governors of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre and of the High Level Expert Group on AI.



AI is often discussed as a technological challenge. Is it increasingly becoming a human and leadership challenge as well?

Absolutely. AI is different from most of the technologies we have dealt with so far. Even AI experts still do not fully understand how it works, which makes the technical challenge itself unusual. But in many ways, technology is often the easier part. What is genuinely hard is to change mindsets, processes and roles, and build trust across the organization.

Leaders do not need to become AI experts, but they do need to understand AI well enough to ask the right questions. Without transparency in planned activities, real involvement of employees, and clear ways to track progress, AI will simply amplify whatever problems already exist in an organization and it will not fix them.

How can organizations introduce AI in a way that strengthens employee trust rather than creating anxiety?

About two years ago, I said in several interviews that within three years, every company would need an AI ambassador. Otherwise, it would not be able to keep up with progress. And it happened sooner than that. Even today, every organization needs AI ambassadors - people who actually use AI-based tools and whom their colleagues trust.

The more important question is not "what this AI tool can do", but "what real problem can I solve, or

what advantage can I gain thanks to what AI makes possible today." Trust is built through small, measurable steps rather than a single big-bang rollout, paired with genuine space for feedback and adjustment based on people's actual experience using the tools.



AI will simply amplify whatever problems already exist in an organization; it will not fix them.

Many employees fear being replaced by technology. What should companies do to turn AI into an opportunity rather than a threat?

Be honest about which tasks are changing and shift the narrative: the real risk is not using AI, it is failing to adapt while others do. Invest in reskilling and upskilling, so that people genuinely see and feel the change, not just hear about it. Most importantly, try to get as many people as possible to be genuinely excited about the possibilities, and connect that excitement directly to career growth.

How can educational institutions and employers

cooperate more effectively to prepare people for the changing world of work?

Companies can offer students real challenges and problems to work on, backed by mentoring. It is equally important to ensure that teachers at every level are prepared to explain and help students understand how rapidly the world around us and the world of work is changing. This is precisely where companies can provide valuable support. Organizations that bridge the gap between academia and business - such as the Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies - can help even more.

What ethical questions should business leaders be asking before deploying new AI solutions?

Leaders need to think broadly about who could be affected by new solutions and analyze the impact thoroughly. The circle of impact is usually wider than it first appears. It is also worth imagining what the world looks like both with and without this particular AI solution in place. And any deployment should be checked against core principles: respect for human autonomy, prevention of harm, fairness, and transparency.

Can AI contribute to a more inclusive and resilient workforce? Under what conditions?

Yes, but only if diversity is considered from the very beginning. That comes down to two things. First, the AI tools themselves need to account for all relevant differences among

As artificial intelligence reshapes workplaces and societies, its successful adoption depends as much on people as on technology. Maria Bielikova discusses how responsible AI leadership, trust, inclusion, and collaboration across business, education, and government can help strengthen competitiveness while advancing the social dimension of ESG.

users and be actively tested for bias. Second, it's about how those tools are rolled out across the organization: access to AI tools and training needs to be equal for everyone, not reserved for those who are already digitally confident.



We should keep asking what makes us human and do everything we can not to lose the capacities that define us as humans.

What role should governments, businesses, and educational institutions play in ensuring that AI strengthens social cohesion rather than deepening existing inequalities?

All of us need to work hard to understand what is actually happening with this technology, its principles and its limits. We should keep asking what makes us human and do everything we can not to lose the capacities that define us as humans. Especially our ability to build relationships and trust. Above all, no single actor - government, business, or academia - should be allowed to leave this responsibility to the others.