

# 93-beyond-the-code-human-skill...-an-ai-world-with-eve-vleminck

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## SPEAKERS

Murielle Machiels

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Welcome to this podcast episode from rebel leader with a heart. Today we're talking about AI with Eve Vleminckx. She's an expert in strategy, and also at Harvard and Stanford. And we really talk about AI how it's going to disrupt the world of work, and why organisations are not ready for it, you might find it very interesting, because you'll learn the signs that you might not be ready for it, and how to prepare, it will probably not be at all how you think you need to prepare for AI. So let's dive into this episode that I found fascinating, where you'll probably learn a lot. Hi, Eve, nice to meet you. It's nice to have a fellow Belgian leader, woman leader on the podcast, but you have also ties with the US. So maybe you can tell us a little bit who you are.



So my name is Eve. I'm located in Belgium, born and raised in Belgium. But indeed, I do have international ties. I'm strategic board advisor mainly on innovation, transformation and leadership. But I also have a profound business school journey. And currently, I'm still affiliated to Stanford GSB, and a counsel at Harvard Business Review, also affiliated to Forbes. So those are my international ties.



Very impressive. And I wanted to invite you on this podcast, because I think it was last week we met each other. And we had a very nice conversation about AI and how it's going to disrupt the world of work, and especially why a lot of leaders and organisations are not ready for it. So how do you see how is AI going to disrupt our world? And especially world of work? Of course.



Well, there's a lot that can be said on that. Of course, when we talk about AI, it's a big topic, and a lot of a lot is possible. So AI will make things possible that currently isn't yet. So of course, there's a lot of disruption. But when I look at AI, I mainly see it as a catalyst for improving the way we are working. Actually, currently, if we look at our organisations, if we look at society, there are a lot of big challenges. If you think of wellbeing, burnout, engagement issues, only 70% of people feel engaged at work. That's pretty dramatic. So we do have a lot of issues and some look at AI like they're going to solve it like they're going to solve the war for talent, like we need less people. I don't look at it like that. I do think AI is a catalyst, that we have to rethink the way we work. And in rethinking the way we work, we can solve and tackle the challenges that we are currently dealing with. And as a result, make better organisations are genuinely and deeply believe is the only way forward. Because if we focus too much on AI, we see it happen already. Most change projects over 70%, they fail. So we focus very much on the technology. And we don't focus enough on what are we trying to achieve.



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I agree with you that technology, whether it's AI or another technology is only a tool. And we need to know why we want to use it how we want to use it. But it's still only a tool and not an objective as such. But this tool is going to be pretty amazing, with lots of upsides, lots of risks as well. And we talk a lot about it. But from my first experience with it. And of course, I'm only talking about chat GPT. But I've created my own G pts. And I now basically have two, almost three assistants that are helping me build content, but helping me also in my marketing and sales. And that's pretty amazing. And I think that's the biggest change that will happen is that we will all have like GPT or AI assistants or agents, we call them working alongside us. So we're going to disrupt almost our own work ourselves.



04:29

Yes. And as you probably also experienced yourself, you have to be very alert, you have to be very critical. As long as you work on topics that you are knowledgeable about, you get. You get the faults or mistakes out of it. It's not difficult. Once you go in topics that you're not as knowledge about it becomes very risky. So yes, it's a linguistic tool. So it's mainly for language and then it's very important because we all communicate and language is very important in our professional environment, it becomes tricky once we work on topics that we are not as knowledgeable about, and we think, Oh, this sounds good, so it makes sense. And then often, it doesn't make all that much sense. So we have to use the tools for what they are created. And we have to be aware, like, what am I trying to achieve with this tool? And on an individual level, you still have that control on an organisational level, it becomes much more tricky.



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Yeah, and we talked about this, but we both believe that leaders and organisations are not ready at all for it. So why do you believe it's the case?



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Well, for several reason, for one, everybody's very focused on tech, the tech part of it unless on which skills do we as leaders, or as our people need to be able to leverage the potential of AI so in that regard. will not rearet prepared. if we look at the diaital transformation proiects. over 70% failed. So

also there, we see we are not prepared. But if for example, we look at the list of World Economic Forum, the skills of 2024. Nobody pays a lot of attention to that. Well, that's just one year away. So if we

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do, what else? And what are those skills? Well,

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it's about critical analytical thinking. It's about all those emotional intelligence, those things while the list is is very public. So it's leadership is also when it data literacy, things like that. So if we have AI, yes, we don't have to all be become technical, equipped. But we do need other skills to be able to leverage the potential of AI to understand we're on one hand to work with AI. And on the other hand to work better, as humans together, that are those humans, our associates, or employees, or clients, or it doesn't matter. So we have to, we need skills to leverage those votes. And a lot, not not Not, not a lot of attention is given to that. Yeah, and

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for me, the biggest reason why leaders are not ready is because we're already in a world that is changing a lot. And this AI is gonna even exponentially change the pace of the current pace of change. So it's gonna be like it's tsunami of change coming at the organization's, which means a tsunami of opportunities, and a tsunami of threats. And a lot of leaders and organisations are already struggling with the current pace of change, are already having burnout, stress, don't manage to implement their plans, fast enough engagement issues, they don't manage to recruit talent, things like that. And that's only the beginning. And so I often say if this is what you're already experiencing in your organisation, you are not ready, you are not ready for the AI wave.

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Last week, I wrote an article on that, because I agree 100% with you. Currently, leaders, managers are very bad at dealing with change. However, there's a tsunami of change coming at us, it's already happening. And it's only getting bigger. But we have to rethink how we approached it change. Change is no longer a change project. It's no longer something recommended and limited. We have to move to a change culture, which is very different. And it's very distinct from the culture. We know now, when we call it a culture of innovation of a culture of change. I don't mean, it's a terminology, but there is a difference there. But it's very important to make it more part of the culture, because change is everywhere. And it's only getting bigger and more important. So yeah, I agree 100% with you, we have to rethink the way we approach change.

 09:26

Yeah, and how do you think imagine you're an organisation, you hear this podcast or you're a leader? You hear this podcast and you think, okay, but I have a problem in my organisation with the current

pace of change and the workload that is very high, and what can I do? What do you think they can do?

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I would say just call us. No, I think there are several things you can do. First of all, we have to understand culture. And we have to understand change. Those are different things and we have to bring them together. The problem with culture often is, culture is that outer layer, it's a symptom. It's a symptom, the outcome of everything else that happens in the organisation. And most of the time, when we try to address our culture, we focus on that outer layer. It's a symptom, it's not working well to address and change the culture, we have to understand why the culture is what it is. And then we can turn it around. If you want to go to change culture, you need different ingredients, so to speak. Currently, we're very much in that performance, knowledge culture, and that's in lifelong learning culture, we are more in that judgmental culture. While we need more that curiosity, we need that psychological safety. While that's not working in a critical culture where we're constantly blaming each other and or we need more feedback culture. So if we talk about the change culture, if we dive into the other different things, ingredients, so to speak, that we need to have that outcome.

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Yeah, and I like to say that, for me, the culture of an organisation is the sum of the habits of everyone in that organisation. And currently, the habits of the people or the conditioning, how people have been conditioned, I like to talk about that, because it's a little bit like Pavlov conditioned his dogs, we have been conditioned a certain way. But that conditioning was very useful in slower, more predictable times when knowledge was more important and rational thinking was more important. And, of course, that is still very important. But it's like you said, and the World Economic Forum was it's that that you said, it's all those soft skills and emotional intelligence that become so important, because that's how you can implement all the AI. But that's also how you can differ how you can make a difference versus AI. Because such

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alone, yeah, it's just not sufficient. knowledge alone. Yes, we need knowledge. I mean, without knowledge we've definitely lost. But it's like just that one pillar to make it happen. It's no longer enough. But if you look at history, while you're not going to make it a history lesson, then it makes sense, the way our organisations are still, but we we didn't adjust yet. And currently, the digital train is coming there. And we don't have the skills to jump on it the way we can. And to unleash that potential.

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Yeah, exactly. And, and I like to say, because sometimes we hear people asking the questions, and because AI is evolving so fast, in fact, it is evolving faster than the pace at which we can adapt to it. So a lot of these giant tech companies, they are waiting to release some of their AI because they say we are not ready for it. And of course, how long will that last? Because they're competing towards each other. So they still probably we leave things before we are ready for it. And people ask the

questions. The question how conscious are will AI be conscious one day because it's getting closer and closer to the human brain and now it's a language model. But it you we will have AGI so general intelligence, and then we'll come even to what they call singularity when it's equal to the human brain or even superior. But my question is, why shouldn't we as humans become more conscious again, because currently, a lot of human beings are becoming unconscious are becoming are being zombified, I like to say, by the technology and a lot of leaders, a lot of leaders are not at all conscious. They are just running all the time being busy going from one meeting to the next one and without barely having time to think or feel. to really look at what is my my willing next step to be successful, impactful and happy not just successful, but also happy. A lot

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of what you say it's like, we are passive. We are reactive, we're looking at AI like oh, what AI will do and what? At this point, I think we have no idea what the world will look like on an AI level. Within five, let alone 10 years. Yes. Not a problem. The problem is we're so focused on AI that we don't focus on what when can we do how to be proactive? How to be reskill? upskill? What do we need to stand indeed be more conscious or whatever we want to call it to take matters in our hand to anticipate on an ever changing environment, that that's not going to change. I mean, there's no way going back. That's not happening. If I look at Silicon Valley, and all the AI tools that are happening, that are launched every day, often they don't make it to Belgium. And it's incredible. And then unlike we're asleep, like, it's like your sleep, yes, you call it conscious is counted. Because we are sleeping like having the ground, we ignore reality. And we don't take mothers in hand and anticipate on what we can do to make the change we need happen to be proactive.

 15:56

Yeah. And that's, and that is because most leaders and workers are currently just overwhelmed already by the change that is coming just from the digital technology. And so they're definitely not ready for the AI wave.

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Yes, but overwhelm doesn't happen by accident. So on one hand, it's very much driven by that busy culture, we are very into day to day interactions, losing that oversight, losing that strategic thinking, like, why are we doing this? What are we doing? How do we mean, the bigger picture focus they're also overwhelmed often comes from because we never had the skills or competencies to deal with certain things like change for one. Like how are we fostering resilience in our organisation adapting to changes all those things? Well, if you ask the right questions, more skills, less on the day to day business, but also focus on the bigger picture than that overwhelm, will feel different overwhelm often comes from that reactive, passive, like everything happening to me, and I have no control on what's happening. But you have the skills and you become proactive and you become active, you take matters into your hands, and you feel less overwhelmed.

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Yeah, and you say you have no control, it's, for me, it's an irony there. Because on one hand, if we want to have more control and become proactive, it's also about letting go. And a lot of BS, and a lot

want to have more control, and become productive, it's also about letting go. And a lot of BS, and a lot of leaders, it's because they need to control everything, which is impossible. And they try to do it, it's only trying to get control. And at the end, they are overwhelmed, like you say, and they have no control over anything. Well, when you decide, this is what I'm going to control now. And this, I'm going to let go, it's gonna create chaos, it's gonna, I'm gonna disappoint people, I'm going to ignore things and that chaos is okay, I'm going to let it go because I choose to focus on these things now. And again, this is not a skill that many leaders have learned that just they have been taught to jump on everything to deliver everything that comes on on their plate. And that has become impossible for a couple of years now. Well, the workload is going to further explodes. And so they are not ready for it. And I like that you say that people are in a reactive passive mode. It's not really passive, because I think a lot of people are running all the time. Most people have never worked this hard. But they are in reactive mode because they haven't transformed themselves for this AI disruption.

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And I don't mean with passive that people don't work hard. They work. But you say on control. That's why we have so many micro managers. And that's the negative ripple effect throughout the whole organisation because people feel micromanaged and that's when they become more passive. They don't feel they have autonomy in their job or, you know, it's like very well, micromanagement is just the opposite of what good leadership looks like. So it's Yeah, empowering people so they can unleash their potential. And it requires a very different approach and different competencies and skills. And we're so building on actually starts from the industrial revolution where people just had to execute their job, then we became the knowledge industry. And we started, we kept doing things the same way. And sometimes we adjust the things very minor, but not fundamentally. And now, it's really time to rethink things more on the fundamental thing, because the way we are working is no longer working. And that's why we have all those challenges. Yeah,

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exactly. And it starts with reinventing yourself. And, and it's pretty counterintuitive, because a lot of qualities and skills that we need from future leaders, and then the workers as well, it's not just the leaders, but of course, they need to lead by example, are very counterintuitive. They go against what has made them successful in the past. And that's also very hard, because a lot of those leaders, they have built like confidence, and that confidence is going to be shattered, when they have to reinvent themselves and learn new skills. They're gonna be like beginners again, in the beginning, and they have to accept that. And that's why I think there is so much resistance from the leaders, because of the same confidence and, and there was a book and an article ads from Harvard, about a tough topic, a lot of leaders are chosen, because of their confidence. And that's exactly why they aren't the right leaders, because their confidence is undermining the success of the team and the organisation.

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Yes, there is a lot, there's a lot that I can say about this, but unborn, what got you here will not get you there. Exactly. But also, I also think we have to retain that because what we see a lot in most organisations, people are an expert in something. And because they are an expert, they get promoted. Yes. And the better expert they are, the more they get promoted, if I come from the legal industry, and look there, the partners are amazing, legal, technical experts, but that doesn't make them good managers, let alone the leaders is very different skill sets, you did so much other

competencies and skills. And I really think we have to distinct that. It's not because a person is good expert, that they're capable to lead an organisation. And we have to be more intentional about what are the skills and competencies we need for this, train people come down and get the right people in those position. Because it's not because because you're a great expert, that it will make you a great Managing Partner, those very different things. And we have to really separate that.

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Yeah, and I'm sure that our leaders out there listening and thinking, so I don't need confidence anymore. And I still believe you need confidence. But another kind of confidence, confidence doesn't mean, I know everything. And no confidence is just having trust that in the end, we will make it as a team. For me, that's the new confidence and accepting that doubts are parts of the journey, not knowing is part of the journey, because not knowing means that you are open to learning new things. Well, if your confidence is like I know everything, you are going to fail massively because you don't know everything, and you will never know everything anymore. And that's something we need to accept, we will constantly continuously need to learn new things as we move forward or accept that all the knowledge isn't in us anymore, but in our teams and in the technologies we use.

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I don't think it's per se about confidence. I think it's about maturity. And I mean, with maturity if we weren't mature organisations or organisations were the mature culture, we need mature managers and leaders. And if you're in that fake competence from ego driven, that's not maturity. That's opposite. That's immature behaviour. Yes. And while if you you can have confidence in like, I know, I'm good at this. And I know I suck at this. That self knowledge. So it's and it's also maturity. And asking the right people for advice is also maturity. Well, we see a lot of organisations with immature cultures and immature organisations really immature management. So I think it's that's that's what we Need, and then people have the maturity to say like, I need advice on it. And they don't have the problem to go look for that advice, because they have the awareness and maturity to know like, this is where I need input on. Yeah. And there are others opinions, because that's what we need to move forward.


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And so if somebody would listen to this podcast now, what is the first thing as a leader that you should start doing?

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Reflect, like, really start with that reflection, like, often we always have great ideas about what others can do? Or what should what they should be doing to do things better. And I wouldn't start there, I would really start with reflection, like, what is my contribution in it? How can I do better, but what is my blind spot, and that blind spot is very likely something you don't see yourself, you might need input from others there. But you need the maturity to be able to absorb and receive that inputs. So it's, I was put start small, but very intentional, like, Okay, I want to do this better. What do I need to

be better? And what should I stop doing? Because a lot of the times leaders do a lot of things that well, like micromanagement is something people should stop doing. And it might be easier to stop doing something than starting something new.

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Yes, but the micromanagement, I don't think a lot of leaders are consciously aware that they're doing it, it's often a lot of leaders, they know they need to create psychological safety and grow mindsets and empower people, and that we need to make mistakes to grow. They know it. But as soon as they are under pressure, something shifts in them the fear kicks in fear of failure, or anger or impatience. And that's when they micromanage and become dominant. Again, without being aware of it, they're not aware of it, because they're not conscious in that moment.

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That's why you need input from others. And most are not aware that they're micro managers. But most are aware that they have a need for control, definitely under stress. Now, if you have a need of control, reflect on how does that look like? How does that impact my people and my team. And if you don't, you know how have a simple exercise, it's as simple as you take a post it, post it, sticky notes, you put it on your laptop, every time when you hear a bad idea, you put a mark, if by the end of the week, you don't have any marks, you don't have psychological safety, if you don't hear the bad things, you don't hear the good things. And to hear the good things, you need to hear the bad things. So if you don't get that inputs, then you don't get have psychological safety, and you don't have the information that you should know. I always say everything that should be told gets taught somewhere, but most of the time not towards the person who's responsible to change it. Yeah.

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Yeah. And it's not only the bad ideas, but it's like the feedback. Every something is not gonna work. It's yeah. That's in the bad news. Also.

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It's like everything you know. So it's not just bad ideas, but it's about more than that. But if you don't get that you can do for sure. There are issues there. Yeah, people don't bring the information, feedback, whatever it is on the table.

 28:59

Okay, so very, yeah, very amazing what is coming at us so it can be wonderful. On the one hand, it can be terrifying for others. It's definitely going to disrupt our society, not just the world of work, but everything and and we better work on ourselves. If we want to keep up with that as human beings because the way we're going now is not the best way to move forward when we look at statistics on well being engagement, mental health and so we need another way forwards.



 29:46

Absolutely. And also they're the words we used smother, like yesterday, I saw something. It was on the website and they were all hot skills. And then there was soft skills and trivia out. If that's how we label something, then we cannot expect people to take those things serious. While the real power moving forward isn't, is exactly in those human skills. I never call them soft skills. But But I just did. But normally I don't do that. Because it's, it's not about hard skills and soft skills, it's about what are the skills we need to achieve something to accomplish something, and those we need a very balance of both. You will never get as far with your hard skills without those human skills. So you need both. And then we can make things change and move forward.

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Yeah, especially since most hard skills are going to be replaced by AI, and some soft skills or human skills, as well. So but it all starts with the intellectual and rational things. Yeah. And the knowledge,

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the more important AI and tech will become, the more important those human skills will become, too. So we really have to speed up that train to be able to augment, augment the other train. Yeah.

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And I believe that's also our next step in evolution in our evolution, it's to really increase that consciousness level, becoming more aware of what is happening inside of us become more in control of our own thoughts, so that we then can control the environment. But a lot of people are not in control of their own thoughts that know overthinking is really a design a disease of,

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of the leech into the art, their emotions, they are their dogs. Well, you really have to make that distinctions. Emotions sing or something, but we are not an emotion. Yeah. And it's the same with our thoughts. So that's already a good way to start. Start there.

 32:07

Yeah. And so where can people find you if they want to listen to you or read your newsletter, or

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they can find me online. I'm pretty active on LinkedIn. Also, all my information is on LinkedIn. I also have a website so where they can find me just [www my name.com](http://www.myname.com) that they can find me. Okay, we'll



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put the links in the show notes. Thank you very much, Eve. It was a nice conversation.



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Likewise, thank you for having me to great conversation. Thanks. Bye, bye.



32:45

Yeah, you finished another episode of rebel leader with a heart. If you want more, go to rebel leader with a heart.com For show notes and past episodes. If you love the show, subscribe, leave a review and share it with a friend the more the merrier. Thanks for tuning in and have a great week you rebel leader with a hearts Hello there. How adapted are you to the fast and busy times? Before diving into this subject? Let me ask you a question. Do you see yourself working like this? until you retire? If yes, congrats you probably find a way to drive in today's fast and busy times. But if your answer is no, don't worry, because this five minutes quiz on how adapted are you to the fast and busy times might help you because if you're still working with the slower time habits and mindset, you might end up working really hard for too little impact. This quiz will show you how adapted you are to today's crazy fast times. And it'll give you your score on the five principles you need to master to better navigate your heavy workload while still having a life. So go to key leader.com/fast times to start the quiz. Maybe it's time to kickstart your slower and more impactful life. Key leader.com slashed Fast Times Qi leader.com/fast times. Now let's dive into today's podcast episodes.