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Global Peter Drucker Forum 2026
Nine sessions · 4–6 November

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Innovation, Judgement and Responsibility

An essay on nine sessions of the Global Peter Drucker Forum 2026

Vienna · Hofburg and University of Vienna · 4–6 November 2026

On my way to the Peter Drucker Forum, I walked across Heldenplatz. There they stood in front of me, Prince Eugene and Archduke Charles, high on horseback. And I thought: how remarkable. Inside the Hofburg we are about to discuss how innovation succeeds. And out here stand two people who, in their own time, had the courage to do things differently.

In 1717, Prince Eugene captured Belgrade and helped shift the balance of power in south-eastern Europe. What fascinates me just as much is Eugene the builder and patron of the arts. He invested in architecture, supported artists and assembled important collections. With the Belvedere and his Winter Palace, he helped shape Vienna at a time when the city was growing into a European cultural capital that could hold its own alongside Paris and London.

Archduke Charles, the Emperor's brother, drew his conclusions from the defeats against Napoleon's armies. He reorganised the Austrian army and defeated Napoleon in 1809 at Aspern and Essling, at the gates of Vienna. And then there is the story of his wife, Henriette of Nassau-Weilburg. She brought the decorated Christmas tree with her from her German homeland and kept up the custom in the House of Habsburg. That it found favour right up to the imperial family helped it spread through Vienna and far beyond. Today, for many of us, Christmas is hard to imagine without one.

With this thought in mind, I walked into the Hofburg. How does something come about that reaches beyond its own circle and its own time? And what does it take for something one person tries out to become something others take up and carry forward?

At the centre of the Global Peter Drucker Forum 2026 was a question that touches technological, economic and human dimensions at once: how does innovation emerge when companies, markets, customers and social expectations are all accelerating? The sessions ranged from leading creative collaboration, through decisions under fundamental uncertainty and the economic consequences of artificial intelligence, to ethical responsibility. On the second day the discussion became practical: through an exercise on Bayer's “Dynamic Shared Ownership”, an AI-supported innovation simulation and Amy Edmondson's Handy Lecture on failure and innovation. Finally, the two masterclasses on 6 November explored the conditions for work that works and the leadership of digital and AI-related transformation.

The strength of this sequence of sessions does not lie in a single, closed theory. Its speakers hold different views on what leadership must achieve, which decisions can be calculated, where automation reaches its limits and how responsibility can be organised in large organisations. It is precisely these differences that allow a closer look at how management is changing today.

First conference day · Wednesday, 4 November

The four panels documented in detail pursued a sequence of questions: How is innovation led? How can decisions be made under uncertainty? What does AI change about value creation? And how must society and business set limits on the use of intelligent systems?

1. The Future of Innovation Management

09:15–10:45 · Hofburg Vienna · The Future of Innovation Management · Moderator: Eduardo P. Braun

Linda A. Hill (Harvard Business School), Rita McGrath (Columbia Business School) and Gianpiero Petriglieri (INSEAD) opened up three perspectives on innovation: as a collective process of discovery, as a strategic choice and as a creative, culture-shaping practice.

Linda A. Hill · Leading innovation means enabling co-creation

Hill reported that her research on innovative leaders had led her to a surprising distinction: leading innovation is not simply leading change. She explicitly acknowledged her closeness to John Kotter. In radical innovation there is no known target state and no fully mapped-out path. Leadership is therefore "wayfinding": taking people on an intellectually and emotionally demanding journey whose destination and route only emerge along the way.

Co-creation means collaboration, experimentation and learning. Rather than proclaiming the future, the leader has to create the conditions for it. A heart surgeon and hospital leader whom Hill studied experienced the break with "business as usual" during COVID. He showed his own uncertainty and yet signalled trust in his staff. The example was meant to show how openness and shared responsibility become effective precisely when there is no certainty.

Hill distinguished three leadership roles: Architect – building the culture and capabilities for repeated innovation; Bridge – crossing boundaries and tapping into external knowledge, talent and capabilities; Catalyst – mobilising coalitions across organisations and sectors. No team on its own has all the resources that new solutions require.

An example from the pharmaceutical industry illustrated the cultural shift: a digital transformation of the global supply chain, initially conceived in technical terms, became a shared task through the purpose of "hope for patients". Employees who did not see themselves as innovators recognised their contribution to getting new therapies to patients quickly. Suppliers came to be seen as partners; this new collaboration later helped with vaccine supply. According to Hill, the key was not primarily a regulatory exemption, but leadership, meaning and the deliberate shaping of relationships.

Rita McGrath · Strategy under uncertainty and new value creation

McGrath described a transition from industrial structures shaped by mass production to digital services and increasingly dematerialised value creation. Competition forces companies to innovate; resting on past successes is not a viable strategy.

Strategy becomes relevant where competition and uncertainty exist. If the future were calculable, market sizes and financial models would suffice. As an example, she cited a pharmaceutical company's choice between established, relatively predictable products and new radioligand therapies. These combine medicine, nuclear technology, manufacturing and time-critical logistics. At the time of the investment it was uncertain whether the approach would remain limited to a few applications or open up a large new field. She cited an estimated market potential of up to 50 billion US dollars – as a figure from the talk, not as a forecast verified here.

Purpose can guide portfolio decisions: which businesses fit the mission of providing patients with urgently needed therapies? Which business areas are divested, which capabilities are built? Strategic choice is not merely optimisation, but a deliberate bet on possible futures.

Strategy becomes real through leaders' daily attention: presence in production and sales, conversations with employees and many small decisions reinforce priorities. Classic industry analyses and five-year plans fall short when new solutions cross established industry boundaries.

Gianpiero Petriglieri · Leadership as a Work of Art

Petriglieri brought the discussion back to the human capacity to imagine something and make it real. Drawing on Freud, Darwin and Lisa Feldman Barrett, he described institutions, companies and cultures as human creations. “Humanity is an accomplishment”: humanity is brought forth again and again through action and culture; under fear, people can fall back into territoriality and the defence of vested interests.

He criticised the instrumental separation of innovation as useful novelty and art as an end in itself. Art can connect people, heal, change perception and shape culture. Art and science are not opposites. His provocation: “The opposite of art is not science or commerce. The opposite of art is empire.” Leaders should see themselves as artists, without having to paint pictures or compose music.

The three movements of his approach: Intent – what gift, what purpose do we want to bring to life? Invitation – do we invite others to shape it with us, rather than imposing our own vision? Intervention – does our work change culture, connect people or challenge what has become rigid? His summary: “Intent allows us to be. Invitation allows us to belong. Intervention allows us to build.”

Petriglieri rejected the assumption that economic productivity and human dignity are incompatible. He confronted leadership development with the question of whether an organisation really needs more control and accountability, or rather more creativity and collaboration. For him, good leadership is creative cultural work.

Further depth from subsequent sources

Petriglieri's contribution can be sharpened with reference to his article “Making Leadership Art: A Humanistic Regard on Leadership and Development”, published online on 10 August 2026. Leadership as art explicitly does not mean rejecting the scientific study of leadership. It means understanding leadership at the same time as personal expression, social engagement and an intervention in culture. A humanistic perspective asks about growth, belonging and the quality of the community that leadership creates. [Q2]

The article describes three movements: clarifying a personal intent and showing commitment to it; inviting others, through an invitation, to help shape that intent; and working on the existing culture through an intervention. Art – or leadership – is thus not merely the result of an original idea, but a form of action that can shape community. The concepts documented in the panel are therefore confirmed and extended by an independent primary text. [Q2]

The article also sharpens the implications for leadership development: not just explaining models, but enabling reflection and social experiments. Petriglieri distinguishes knowing and imitating models from developing one's own, accountable leadership practice. This is an addition from his publication, not an additional sentence recorded in the Festsaal. [Q2]

Hill's distinction between leading innovation and leading change can be understood precisely: in novel undertakings, the target state is not yet fixed. Architect, Bridge and Catalyst therefore denote different contributions to building the capacity to search, learn and cooperate. This conceptual framing comes from comparison with Hill's research approach, not from an additional verbatim record.

McGrath's example of radioligand therapy also widens the view from a single product to a value-creation system: research, regulatory approval, manufacturing, time-critical logistics and collaboration must all work together. The market potential mentioned in the panel remains a figure from the talk that has not been independently verified.

The contributions did not contradict one another in their emphasis on innovation, but they set different accents. Hill examined the conditions for developing ideas together, McGrath the economic and strategic choices, Petriglieri the human meaning of the activity. Together they produced an understanding of innovation that reaches further than technology or methodology alone.

2. Deciding in an Unforeseeable Future

11:15–12:15 · Making Decisions for the Unforeseeable Future · Moderator: Julia Kirby

Gerd Gigerenzer, Roger L. Martin and John van Rossen discussed the limits of formal forecasting. At the centre was the distinction between measurable risk and a future whose essential possibilities are only just emerging.

John van Rossen · Preparing for multiple futures

Van Rossen described the environment as non-linear, accelerated, volatile and interconnected. Uncertainty is not new, but the pace, abrupt tipping points and the mutual reinforcement of technology, geopolitics and supply chains make planning harder. The acronym was not clearly audible in the recording.

Instead of forecasting one future and optimising the organisation for it, companies should prepare for several plausible futures through “disciplined imagination”. Scenario planning must not postpone decisions: it should create options, early indicators, trigger points and clear accountabilities. Decisions belong as close as possible to the market and to customers; guardrails are more helpful than detailed central rules. The exercise “The Toughest Opponent” asks what capabilities a feared competitor possesses.

As an AI application, he described agents for investment committees: they sift through extensive due-diligence documents, identify questions and structure the arguments for and against. They are meant to extend the judgement of experienced decision-makers, not to replace it.

Gerd Gigerenzer · Intuition, heuristics, responsibility

Gigerenzer distinguished calculable risk from fundamental uncertainty. Optimisation models require stable conditions and reliable parameter estimates. As an example he cited Harry Markowitz, who, according to Gigerenzer, used the simple 1/N rule – spreading money evenly – for his own retirement savings rather than complex portfolio optimisation. Under certain conditions, “less is more” can apply.

His “adaptive toolbox” contains various heuristics, intuition and analytical methods. What matters is recognising which tool suits which situation. He also referred to free space for employees that makes innovation possible without immediate pressure to succeed.

He defined intuition as unconscious intelligence based on long experience: one senses a direction for action immediately, without being able to explain it fully right away. An experienced doctor, for example, notices an unusual change and orders further tests. Intuition and conscious analysis complement each other.

He was particularly critical of defensive decisions: leaders rationalise intuitive judgements after the fact with analyses, or deliberately choose a worse but more easily justified alternative. He cited high frequencies of such decisions in large companies. Against groupthink he recommended the heuristic “Always hire a contrarian” – respectful dissent, including towards CEOs.

AI, he said, is not a universal method. In stable environments, models can be powerful; under deep uncertainty, their predictive power is limited. He warned against excessive faith in technology and against the willingness to outsource one's own thinking to systems.

Roger L. Martin · The future is not the past

Drawing on Aristotle, Martin distinguished relatively stable regularities from a world in which things can become otherwise. He criticised the uncritical transfer of methods designed for stable relationships to business and innovation. His pointed statistical question: are historical data even representative of a future that can change fundamentally?

He described the development of knowledge as Mystery → Heuristic → Algorithm. Some puzzles can be translated into rules and formalised procedures; many management questions, however, remain uncertain. The Human Genome Project served him as an example that more data do not simply dissolve the complexity of interactions.

Martin criticised a one-sided education in “quantitative manipulation” and called for “qualitative appreciation”: perceiving subtle differences in people, relationships and situations. His image: the quantitative arm is trained like Arnold Schwarzenegger's, the qualitative one hardly at all. Good leadership also reads the mood in a room.

Innovation, he argued, needs exploration rather than mere exploitation. Referring to Charles Handy, he argued that a genuinely new idea cannot be fully proven in advance with data from the past. Anyone who demands such proof before every investment prevents innovation. AI can unlock past knowledge brilliantly, but cannot automatically derive from it the value of a radically new future. Martin's critique is a deliberate overstatement, not proof that science is fundamentally unable to study dynamic systems.

A unifying thought in this discussion lies in matching method to situation: Gigerenzer asked about heuristics, experience and defensive decisions; Martin about the unreasonable demand to prove the new with data from the past; van Rossen about scenarios, options and clear triggers for action. It was not intuition versus analysis, but the appropriate use of both under different conditions.

A complementary piece on the Forum blog by Alex Adamopoulos (4 November) extends this problem to the social hurdle of ending initiatives once they have been launched. When a project is closely tied to the reputation of its sponsors, reversing a decision becomes a cultural problem, not just a matter of calculation. The piece provides thematic context and is not an additional recording of this panel. [Q3]

3. What AI Really Changes for Innovation

14:40–15:40 · Bringing AI to Bear on Innovation · Moderator: Michele Zanini

Rita McGrath, Bastian Bergmann, Shin Shuda and Brian Solis turned their attention to an economy in which artificial intelligence makes more and more previously costly activities widely available. The central question was where genuine differentiation and customer value will then arise.

Zanini opened with the observation that, despite heavy investment in AI, many companies see no sustainable benefit. The study figures presented have not been independently verified here. His guiding question was whether the limit lies less in the technology than in our imagination in applying it.

Rita McGrath · A new economics of scarcity

When AI makes previously expensive and difficult activities affordable, competitive advantages shift. Market research, software development, customer service and creative production become more widely available. This creates new scarcity elsewhere: in the creative industries, for example, supply grows while human attention remains limited.

McGrath called on companies to examine their existing core competencies in the light of new scarcities. Later she distinguished lagging, current and leading indicators. Early indicators are hard to interpret because reasonable people read the same signals differently, and important clues often appear as qualitative stories rather than metrics. Their value lies in recognising options in time and being able to influence developments.

Bastian Bergmann · The human behind the customer

Using the gaming market, Bergmann showed how AI makes small digital products cheaper to produce, while large blockbusters still require heavy investment. He cited numerous new games every day and millions of available titles. These orders of magnitude are figures from the talk. His key sentence: “The bottleneck moved from production to discoverability.” Not production, but discoverability and attention become the bottleneck.

He criticised demographic segmentation. A group of women of the same age in the same region does not automatically share motives and needs. Companies must understand “the human behind your customer”. At Solsten he works with psychological data, simulations and digital twins to better capture the motives behind behaviour.

His Netflix example: from “Because you watched” to “Because you loved it”. Someone who has watched a film does not necessarily want its sequel. What matters is why they liked it. If AI systems are fed only the same behavioural data, they improve existing recommendations but run into a local optimum.

Shin Shuda · Unlocking experiential knowledge through AI agents

Many large companies use the same cloud providers, models and consultancies. That alone creates no differentiation. Shuda sees the particular value in employees' company-specific experiential knowledge. Knowledge graphs and AI agents are meant to connect this knowledge and make it available directly at the workplace.

In Japanese manufacturing plants, agents accompany experienced master craftspeople in order to better understand their decisions when quality deviations occur. Knowledge built up over decades should not be lost when these specialists leave. Data sovereignty and controlled storage are central to this.

Shuda also mentioned AI in combination with quantum computing for molecular simulations, chemistry and other fields of application; the technical performance claims remain unverified here. For Fujitsu's own transformation he emphasised the recurring question “What if?” as an invitation to explore new possibilities.

Brian Solis · Imagination instead of an AI-powered status quo

Solis criticised the fact that AI is often simply layered onto existing processes. This can cause additional costs and merely make the status quo more efficient. He distinguished iteration – doing the same thing better – from innovation, which unlocks untapped value creation through imagination and creativity. The percentages he cited on economic outcomes were not verified.

For decades, organisations have rewarded rule-following and process compliance. Bureaucracy and politics often prevent bold questions. Solis demanded: why do we do it this way at all? What could we create anew? End-to-end transformation means not automating sales, marketing and legal in isolation, but redesigning the entire value-creation process.

In a workshop with around 100 CEOs, he said, it became clear in protected small groups how many leaders believe they have to know everything: “I'm supposed to know everything. And I don't.” He compared the AI era with electrification: the great changes did not come from electricity alone, but from new factories, infrastructures and ways of working.

In dealing with fear of change, he emphasised storytelling. Good stories do not just explain economic reasons; they help people see themselves credibly in a possible future. His succinct statement: “The opposite of self-doubt is curiosity.” Curiosity makes it possible to ask new questions despite fear and not knowing.

Michele Zanini · Trust and participation

In the discussion about fear of AI-driven job cuts, Zanini described a credible social contract between companies and employees. In one steel company, a long-term employment promise made it easier for employees themselves to drive automation forward. He added gainsharing: those who create additional value through AI should share in its benefits.

The discussion also turned to the question of how AI could open up strategy development beyond small leadership circles and involve more people in exploring new possibilities.

Three speeds instead of a single acceleration

On 5 November 2026, Sapthagiri Chapalapalli described on the official Forum blog a transformation that does not try to force every activity into the same AI mode. He distinguishes a more traditional track for reliable and regulated processes, an agile track for iterative team learning and an AI-native track for fast processes supported by AI agents. What matters is aligning these different speeds rather than accelerating every process across the board. [Q4]

This external perspective complements Rita McGrath's new scarcities, Brian Solis's critique of a merely automated status quo and Bastian Bergmann's shift of the bottleneck from production to attention: as supply and pace increase, what counts is the interplay of customer value, organisational mechanics and judgement. This is a synthesis of the documentation and the blog piece.

In his blog post of 4 November, Alex Adamopoulos adds that innovation does not end with launching new initiatives. Just as important is the ability to withdraw capital, attention and reputation from a weak project. In many organisations, social and political costs make it harder to reassess ideas that have already been funded. This is an independent addition, not a statement retrospectively attributed to the panellists. [Q3]

Taken together, the individual perspectives point to a shift in the innovation problem: as technical production and analysis become easier, attention, an understanding of human motives, a company's

own experiential knowledge and the ability to redesign systems become more important. At the same time, a question of distribution arises: who benefits from the productivity gains that AI makes possible?

4. What May Artificial Intelligence Do to People?

16:10–17:10 · Rule No. 1: Let No Human Come to Harm · Moderator: Johan Roos

Peter G. Kirchschläger, Mathis Bitton and David Weinberger linked a classic science-fiction question with present-day problems: what does harm mean when AI can not only endanger people physically, but also change judgement, professional experience, autonomy and social relationships?

Johan Roos · Asimov's laws as a starting point

Roos opens with the title and asks the audience who recognises the allusion to Isaac Asimov. In the 1942 story “Runaround”, the then 22-year-old author formulated three laws of robotics: first, a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. Second, it must obey human orders, unless this conflicts with the first law. Third, it must protect its own existence, as long as the two higher laws are not violated. Roos praises the simplicity and intellectual elegance of this hierarchy.

Yet Asimov did not write stories about rules that work perfectly. The conflicts arise because machines interpret “harm” differently from humans, because of unforeseen consequences, or because they are blocked when the laws collide. The core of the problem therefore lies not only in technical compliance with rules, but in how they are interpreted in complex situations. Roos recalls that Asimov himself did not consider the laws exotic: one wants every tool to be safe and to do its job.

Roos talks about his recent reading of the novel “The Caves of Steel” from the 1950s. A human detective is forced to work with a robot so advanced that many people cannot tell it apart from a human being. The population distrusts robots, partly out of fear for their jobs. For Roos, the detective's unease and his developing collaboration with the robot matter more than the murder case itself. The story shows the ambivalence between technical capability and social acceptance.

As a second fictional comparison he cites the film “Automata” (2014). There, two protocols apply: robots may not harm humans and may not alter themselves. Roos places the ban on self-modification alongside today's debate on self-improving AI systems. These examples alone make clear that Asimov's protective rule cannot be the only relevant design principle.

Harm today · Human rights, economic interests and risk communication

Early in the debate, the concept of harm is explicitly opened up beyond physical injury: violations of human rights and intrusions into privacy and data protection are also included. The seemingly simple sentence “No human shall come to harm” thus becomes a demanding normative question: what counts as harm, and whose rights are affected? The individual statements in this short section of the transcript cannot all be attributed to a single speaker.

One contribution to the debate also criticises the risk communication of large AI companies, including Anthropic: these players talk about distant dangers while at the same time pursuing business interests, and they are not civil-society organisations. The focus on apocalyptic long-term risks could distract from the harm AI is already causing today. The contribution thus calls for present-

day consequences and concrete rights violations not to disappear behind speculative future scenarios.

Johan Roos · The scenario of unlearned feedback skills

Roos picks up on conversations during the lunch break: companies reported receiving thousands of applications, especially for junior positions. AI can generate applications; on the other side, the same applications are pre-screened by AI. The example shows how the technology is used on both sides of a work process, creating new dynamics.

Roos then makes the problem concrete for leaders. In the past, as a manager, he sometimes spent hours preparing for difficult critical or performance conversations. Today, a leader can have AI formulate or even deliver feedback, because it is faster and supposedly more objective. He sketches a fictional development over one month, two months, a year, two and finally three years: in the end, no one in the team can give difficult feedback in person, face to face, any more. He asks: is that harm? And who exactly has been harmed?

Underlying the scenario is a more general problem: abilities can weaken through disuse, even if each individual act of delegation appears efficient. The starting point is explicitly fictional, not a claim to an empirically proven three-year forecast. With it, Roos opens the dispute over which losses of competence we should accept and which we should not.

Peter G. Kirchschläger · The voluntary loss of human abilities

Kirchschläger responds to Roos's example by saying that not only individual employees but humanity itself could be harmed. The use of AI carries the risk of diminishing cognitive, emotional and social intelligence. Crucially, this loss does not necessarily arise from external pressure: people often choose for themselves to stop training certain abilities. His pointed charge is that we could voluntarily move away from human possibilities and make ourselves more like machines.

On the claimed objectivity of machine-assisted decisions, Kirchschläger distinguishes between human and algorithmic bias. Humans, too, decide on the basis of stereotypes; automated selection processes are therefore not objective simply because machines are involved. To lighten the mood, he jokes that applicants with a full head of hair would have a hard time with him. The important difference, in his view, is that a human being can recognise such a bias self-critically and correct it, for example through differently composed selection panels. A machine, he argues, does not possess this ethical self-reflection in a comparable way. This is his philosophical position, not a technical limit independently demonstrated here.

For Kirchschläger, emotional and social interaction, critical thinking, creativity and moral judgement are human qualities that especially need to be preserved. He calls for “humanity” to be celebrated and deliberately developed, particularly in the age of AI. Asked whether this is merely a pious wish or practical work, he points to schools, universities and the education system: mathematics and IT should not be given up, but critical thinking, philosophy, ethics, creativity, human relationships and engagement with the meaning of life must be cultivated more strongly. This, he says, is a concrete task for education and leadership practice.

Mathis Bitton · Not every loss of competence is harm

Bitton shares the concern about certain human abilities, but disagrees with a blanket devaluation of cognitive outsourcing. He recalls Plato's “Phaedrus”: even writing was criticised because people would lose their powers of memory by writing things down. The spread of writing and later of printing

did indeed weaken parts of oral memory culture; at the same time, it opened up new forms of knowledge, literature and social development. Not every loss of a former ability, therefore, has to mean an impoverishment of humanity.

He describes a deliberate personal boundary: AI may write emails for him; he does not leave scholarly work and significant prose to it, because writing itself is part of what matters to him. On the other hand, it need not be a violation of human dignity if young analysts at an investment bank become less practised in Excel because of automation. The decisive question is not "Which activity will be replaced?", but "Which abilities and human experiences do we absolutely want to preserve for ourselves?"

Humans, he says, have always been toolmakers and have changed together with their tools. Bitton rejects both unreflective faith in technology and the notion that every act of outsourcing is already a betrayal of human abilities. What is new about AI may be its universal character as a cognitive technology. That is why people, organisations and societies must decide far more consciously than with earlier tools what may be delegated and what belongs to the core of a human way of life.

David Weinberger · Better results and the "truth of particulars"

Weinberger sharpens the opposing position with a diagnostic example: if an AI system detects cancer more reliably than a doctor, one should not opt for the worse diagnosis purely out of loyalty to human ability. The discussion about loss of competence must always also take into account possible gains, up to and including lives saved. Another panellist initially prefers the doctor; Weinberger says he would empirically choose the more reliable predictor. The example is framed as a thought experiment, not as a blanket claim that AI is superior in every form of cancer diagnosis.

Weinberger then explains the difference between human classification and data-driven machine pattern recognition. Doctors learn diagnostic rules and can name features, such as an irregular border on an image. A learning system, by contrast, can develop statistical image patterns of its own from many examples, without all the relevant features having to be explicitly described to it in advance. His image is recognising an elephant: a human thinks grey, big, trunk; the model can evaluate tiny pixel relationships across countless example images without possessing an ideal image of an elephant inside.

Weinberger takes this observation to a philosophical point. Our culture has achieved enormous success with categories, general rules and abstractions. Machines could now show that there is more insight in the particulars and in the many connections between individual cases than in some generalisations. This insight could also unsettle familiar ideas of what it means to understand the world. He stresses, however, that it neither automatically solves moral problems nor makes ethical principles superfluous.

Johan Roos · Tool, servant or co-worker?

Roos opens the next block of topics with the historical role of the robot as servant. In many stories, the relationship is a clear master-and-servant model. He contrasts this with a statement by Amazon CEO Andy Jassy, according to which AI agents in companies can increasingly be regarded as "co-workers". His question to the panel: an employee demands to work in an organisation where AI is her tool and not a colleague. Is that a legitimate wish? Must the employer take it into account, or is the employee in the wrong workplace?

Peter G. Kirchschläger · Do not hand human tasks over to AI

Kirchschläger considers the wish legitimate and thinks companies should learn from it. The division of labour must be based on respective strengths. He sees clear advantages for AI in data processing, calculation and large volumes of formalisable information. He locates moral judgement, the free and autonomous evaluation of good and evil, and emotional and social intelligence with humans. He argues that organisations should deliberately preserve human responsibility and activity precisely in these fields – for the benefit of the institution and of the people themselves. The performance boundary he draws is a pointed position of the panellist.

Mathis Bitton · Different guiding visions at Anthropic and OpenAI

Bitton replies that there is no simple, universally valid answer to the question; employees in Silicon Valley are already choosing their employers partly on the basis of their stance on it. He draws a clear contrast between Anthropic and OpenAI: according to his account, Anthropic thinks more about AI as a possible new kind of being that could deserve at least moral consideration and perhaps one day rights. OpenAI, by contrast, describes ChatGPT primarily as an especially powerful tool. Bitton links these guiding visions to different rules for interaction and to operational workflows.

As an illustration, Bitton points out that Claude can end a conversation when addressed abusively, and interprets this as an expression of Anthropic's guiding vision. This passage documents his interpretation; it proves neither consciousness in AI nor a universally valid rule for product operation. Bitton expects that the choice between “colleague or tool” could become important in future for corporate cultures, public debate and attracting talent as workflows become more agentic. Equating “co-worker” with “independent person” remains the contested question.

David Weinberger · Politeness as a human habit

Weinberger is relatively relaxed about the employee: if she does very good work using AI as a tool, that can work for everyone. He does not regard a moral obligation towards today's AI systems as established. In a short exchange about tone, however, a different rationale for respectful communication emerges: Weinberger says he is polite to Claude because he does not want to become a rude person himself. He refers to Aristotle and the formation of character through habit. Politeness, accordingly, need not presuppose that the machine can feel offended.

David Weinberger and Johan Roos · Consciousness, body and mortality

Weinberger explains his scepticism about an independent moral status for AI. How we can know at all whether other people have conscious experience is an old philosophical problem. In humans and animals, however, their biological, sentient embodiment suggests that things can matter to them directly. Bodies have needs, can experience pain and are geared towards self-preservation by evolution. Of today's AI systems, by contrast, Weinberger assumes that nothing matters to them in their own experience; he therefore currently sees no comparable claim to rights. This position is discussed in the panel, not settled experimentally.

Roos then recalls the film “Bicentennial Man”, based on Asimov, with Robin Williams as the robot Andrew. Andrew accompanies several generations of a family, develops human-like relationships and finally wishes to be officially recognised as a human being. In Roos's telling, the decisive condition is not love, care or outward resemblance to humans: Andrew must become technically capable of dying. Only the possibility of death makes his recognition as a human being possible.

Weinberger connects this with Martin Heidegger's reflections of 1927 on finitude and the human "being-towards-death". From this perspective, awareness of one's own mortality is part of what makes human care, meaning and engagement possible. Roos uses the film scene to deepen the distinction between impressive technical performance and the question of what it really means to be human.

Johan Roos · From laws of robotics to the power of AI companies

Moving to the question of power, Roos points out that Asimov's laws refer to the behaviour of robots – not to developers, owners and companies. He names risks ranging from mass unemployment and major social upheaval to catastrophic future scenarios. Referring to Pope Leo XIV, he speaks of the task of "disarming" AI. Technical competence, he says, must not be confused with a right to rule or with political legitimacy. His new question: do we need laws not only for AI systems, but above all for the companies that create and control them?

Mathis Bitton · Frontier AI and generally available AI

Bitton describes a double analogy that makes regulation difficult. On the one hand, AI resembles nuclear technology: where capabilities have the potential for catastrophic harm, one does not want to decentralise access arbitrarily. On the other hand, AI resembles a universally usable general-purpose technology, where broad availability can promote innovation and prosperity and excessive concentration of power would be problematic. AI, he says, is both at once. A single rule for all models would hardly do justice to this tension.

He therefore expects an increasing separation between "frontier AI", the most powerful systems at the technological edge, and a more widely available, partly standardised layer of AI. In his account, only a few thousand people – he cites around 5,000 – have access to the most powerful systems at any given time. Consumers and companies, even with expensive subscriptions, often work with technologies that lag six to twelve months behind the frontier. These figures and time gaps are his own statements from the talk and have not been independently verified here.

For the widely available layer, Bitton considers decentralisation desirable: companies or even individuals could run their own sovereign AI systems and control the model weights. Frontier systems, on the other hand, could be subject to stronger central control for reasons of cybersecurity, biological hazards and the possibility of a superintelligence getting out of control. With increasing involvement of national security establishments, the concentration of cutting-edge capability could even intensify. Weinberger expresses the hope that this distinction will prove workable.

Peter G. Kirchschläger · Human rights, an international agency and market approval

Kirchschläger accepts Bitton's distinction, but calls for effective regulation of both layers. The starting point should be human rights: not the highest conceivable ethical ideal, but the global minimum that secures human dignity and basic living conditions. He considers voluntary self-commitments by the technology industry insufficient and argues for an international oversight and enforcement body anchored in the United Nations. In his contribution he refers to the proposed body by the abbreviation "IDA"; the full name is not clearly audible in the transcript.

To justify this, he points to the history of nuclear technology: global regulation was initially fought by states and private industry in the name of self-responsibility. Today it would be almost unthinkable for anyone to experiment with nuclear technology at home without external oversight. His second analogy is the pharmaceutical industry. Companies such as Novartis and Roche may not bring

medicines to market merely in the hope that nobody will be harmed; there are approval procedures. For AI, Kirchschläger calls for a comparable prior review of market access, combined with international rules and enforcement.

Kirchschläger speaks of growing international support for his approach and names, among others, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the Dalai Lama, Pope Francis, Pope Leo XIV, Bill Gates and Sam Altman. This is documented as his statement about the political and social resonance of his proposal, not as a separately verified list of formal endorsements. His fundamental position remains: economic power and innovation are not sufficient justification for deploying AI systems without binding, human-rights-based oversight.

Final round · Four answers to the question of the first law of AI

Roos asks each panellist to formulate a supreme law for AI. Kirchschläger begins with the protection of human dignity and of the planet: “Respect human dignity and respect the planet Earth.” He again mentions the interpersonal character of education and makes clear that the concept of harm also includes social, ethical and ecological dimensions.

Bitton demands: “AI should never be granted legal personhood, and in particular it should never be able to own property.” AI must not be given its own legal personality and, in particular, must not own property – including cryptocurrencies. Roos asks jokingly about AI agents holding billions in Bitcoin. Bitton justifies his ban by arguing that largely autonomous, economically powerful agents with their own rights and assets could carry out transactions on a large scale. As examples of shifting legal boundaries, he cites discussions in Argentina about AI legal personhood and in Delaware about fully algorithmically managed corporate forms. The current legal status of these was not checked as part of these notes.

Weinberger deliberately formulates not a law for AI but one for humans: they should learn from AI how rich the world is in possibilities, concrete differences and connections. In this he sees a path to beauty and to human love. His contribution extends his earlier argument about “particulars”: it is not only systems that should be governed by humans; humans, too, can question their own way of perceiving reality through their encounter with AI.

To conclude, Roos presents his three laws, formulated in advance and explicitly modelled on Asimov: first, “AI must not harm people or erode what makes them human.” Second, “AI must serve legitimate human purposes and never expand its own power.” Third, “AI must stay correctable and a human must answer for it.”

In the final responses, the third law in particular is described as both indispensable and difficult to enforce. If neither people nor human organisations were responsible for an AI system, it would remain unclear who could be held accountable at all. With this open question of responsibility, the panel ends for reasons of time.

The additional Forum blog post by Angelika Reich and Bernhard Stieger (4 November) stresses that competitive advantage through AI depends substantially on the quality of leadership, learning environments and judgement. It adds to the discussion on the loss of competence, but does not document the individual contributions to this panel. [Q5]

The panel ended without a final answer. Kirchschläger insisted on human-rights protection and binding oversight, Bitton on conceptual and legal differentiation, Weinberger on the opportunities of machine pattern recognition and a new attentiveness to the particulars of the world. Roos condensed

his position into protection from harm, service to legitimate human purposes, and correctability with accountable humans. The irreconcilability of some positions was itself part of the discussion.

Second conference day · Thursday, 5 November

On the second day the format changed: instead of exclusively moderated panels, organisational models and innovation processes were tried out in interactive formats. The following accounts combine the documented method with publicly verifiable background. Statements on Bayer's corporate practice are treated separately from the results of the one-hour session.

5. Re-Teaming in Motion: Bayer and Dynamic Shared Ownership

11:40–12:40 · Rittersaal, Hofburg · Co-creation session

Bill Anderson, CEO of Bayer, Michael Lurie as a key architect of the transformation, Michele Zanini of the Management Lab and the strategy scholar Rita McGrath stood for an unusual form of knowledge transfer: rather than simply having an organisational principle explained to them, the audience was to apply it themselves for an hour. [Q1, Q6]

The method: a marketplace without a stage

The official programme explicitly announced “No stage, no slides”. Participants were to bring a question, choose a discussion circle that interested them and work in it without being assigned by a manager. A process that structures roughly 90 days in the company was to be experienced within an hour. The method is thus itself part of the message: shared responsibility is not conveyed as a PowerPoint mission statement, but experienced as a temporary way of organising work. [Q1]

The Bayer post published the following day describes a marketplace with ten ideas. Bill Anderson opened the working phase together with Michael Lurie, Michele Zanini and other management thinkers; groups formed around shared customer needs. People decided for themselves which topic to work on. Bayer emphasises that no central allocation of tasks and no traditional approval chains were needed. Photos show participants gathered around flipcharts in the Rittersaal. [Q6]

What is not available in the published documentation: complete verbatim records of the individual working circles, their specific customer topics, the results of all ten idea circles, and any systematic measurement of the quality of learning or decision-making. It would therefore be inappropriate to invent results for individual groups or attribute quantified success to them.

The problem the method was meant to make visible

In DSO, working groups are formed primarily around customers, products and the outcomes to be achieved – not along existing departmental boundaries. The relevant knowledge is meant to come together where a solution is needed. In Bayer's corporate account, the guiding idea is roughly this: whoever does the work should, as far as possible, also make the decisions. The freely chosen circles in the marketplace were a small demonstration of this basic principle. [Q6, Q7]

Shifting decision-making power does not mean arbitrariness. Bayer combines a clear mission (“Health for all, hunger for none”), transparent results and defined boundaries with decentralised decisions. The PMI case study speaks of a “bold and light” strategic and financial framework: ambitious in direction, but deliberately not overly detailed in execution. [Q7]

The change of perspective concerns not only the number of managers, but also the way information flows. Teams make results and dependencies visible, give each other feedback and are expected to solve problems themselves that would previously have been escalated upwards. Influence arises more from expertise, contribution and cooperation than from formal rank. [Q7]

Bayer treats people, money and information as resources of the entire company and not exclusively as the fixed property of a department. When priorities change, teams should be able to release, request or reallocate resources within the current cycles. This is a key difference from an “agile” transformation that merely renames teams while fixed annual budgets remain untouched. [Q7, Q8]

The official conference review highlights that Bill Anderson emphasised precisely the organisational mechanics: decision paths, team collaboration and resource allocation must change for promises of innovation and responsibility to become effective. This point links the demonstrated marketplace method directly to the structural transformation of the group. [Q9]

DSO as a fundamental redesign of the management system

The PMI Agile Alliance case study published in October 2026 documents five interconnected changes. It is based on the Bayer transformation and is an external case study; the following details were not necessarily said verbatim in the one-hour Rittersaal session. [Q7]

Networks instead of reporting lines

The structure is oriented more towards cross-functional, customer-facing teams than towards traditional reporting lines. When organising work, what should count is who can contribute to a specific outcome. [Q7]

Outcome cycles instead of a rigid annual logic

A 90-day rhythm links the setting, implementation and joint reassessment of the targeted outcomes. Shorter learning loops within the teams allow for continuous correction. [Q7]

Resource flow instead of owned budgets

Money, talent and information are to be deployed across organisational boundaries according to changing priorities and reallocated as needed. [Q7, Q8]

Outcomes instead of activity control

Orientation is determined not by the number of tasks completed, but by the contribution to business results, stakeholders and the wider ecosystem. [Q7]

Ownership instead of an escalation reflex

Decision-making power is moved closer to expertise and customer contact. This includes transparency, peer feedback and dealing with conflicts without automatically delegating them back upwards. [Q7]

Leadership, planning and controlling

At the start of a cycle, teams specify the targeted outcomes and the resources required to achieve them. During implementation they learn in shorter loops and adjust their assumptions. At the end come visible results, shared feedback and a retrospective on dependencies and changes. The next

cycle sets priorities and resources anew. Long-term financial projections continue – according to PMI, at least 18 months ahead – but are also updated on an ongoing basis. [Q7]

Bayer distinguishes four leadership contributions: Visionary – conveying a shared direction; Architect – designing the system of work; Catalyst – enabling cooperation and the removal of blockages; Coach – strengthening people in their ownership and development. Leadership is thus defined less by the number of direct reports and more by the impact a leader achieves through others. [Q10]

The VACC roles partly overlap with Linda Hill's Architect, Bridge and Catalyst roles. This similarity is interesting for comparison, but it is not the same model: Hill describes capabilities for leading innovation, while Bayer explicitly names functions within its new organisational operating model.

A report published by Haufe on 3 November 2026 on a talk by two Bayer controllers, Philipp Ahrendt and Marco Gerdjiko, shows the consequences for financial management. A comprehensive, detailed annual bottom-up plan is replaced by a lean central financial framework. Teams steer within this framework instead of remaining tied to firmly negotiated detailed budgets and traditional cost-centre plans. Decisions on travel expenses or investments are to be measured by their actual benefit, not by whether an individual line item still “has budget”. [Q8]

The accompanying mechanisms include peer feedback, adjusted short-term incentives, recognition from colleagues and technology-supported planning. The Bayer controllers name a real hurdle: some employees and managers first have to unlearn the supposed security of a detailed annual plan. The change thus affects technical systems, social expectations and the individual need for control at the same time. [Q8]

Reported practical examples

In Italy, a previously central annual resource-allocation process was opened up to around 50 people with product, customer-team and functional responsibility. With insight into the economics of the business as a whole, resources are regularly rediscussed. According to the case study, smaller, fast-growing brands are thus more likely to receive resources, while teams also hand back planned resources when expectations change. Bayer sees this as contributing to better growth opportunities. This description does not include any isolated causal measurement of DSO's share in the effect. [Q7]

In maize seed production in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, local teams were allowed, as part of the transformation, to bring on new growers, land and contract models. Reported production rose from around 30,000 to 80,000 tonnes while costs fell. This is a figure from a corporate case study whose precise causes have not been independently isolated. [Q7]

In the Haufe report, Marco Gerdjiko describes an experiment with a transparent regional target and self-set country targets. The sum of the targets proposed by the countries turned out to be more ambitious than the original central target; at the same time, according to the report, their identification with the targets increased. This example illustrates how autonomy can also generate higher ambition when the connection to the overall goal is understood. [Q8]

Bayer's own communication speaks of a significant reduction in hierarchical levels and management headcount. According to PMI, 60–70% of management positions were eliminated in some units in the first year; instead of up to twelve levels, five to six are described. A Fortune Brandstudio piece produced by Bayer speaks of roughly half the number of levels and about two-thirds less management across the group. These figures refer to different scopes and points in time and must not be merged into a single universal metric. [Q7, Q11]

Bayer's German website also states the goal of shifting 95% of decisions from management to employees. This is a communicated ambition, not an actual rate independently demonstrated in the available sources. [Q10]

Opportunities, limits and social consequences

The case studies describe a considerable reduction in hierarchy, shorter decision paths and greater involvement in the economics of the whole. At the same time, the reported successes can neither be attributed entirely to DSO nor transferred unexamined to every unit of a regulated global group. The loss of management positions, additional demands on personal responsibility and the strain of organisational uncertainty belong to the case history just as much as the positive examples. [Q7, Q11]

The experiment in the Rittersaal made a limited slice of this way of working tangible: free choice of topics, self-organised group formation and a shared focus on customer needs. The case studies show that, in everyday practice, the same principles do not depend on the participants' mindset alone. They require corresponding decision rights, financial management, information flows and HR mechanisms. This simultaneity explains why organisational change cannot be reduced to a new organisation chart.

6. Revolutionizing How We Innovate: AI in the Innovation Process

14:00–15:00 · Wintergarten, Hofburg · Deep-dive dialogue and live simulation

The session was designed by Lalit Karwa (TCS PACE, Tata Consultancy Services Europe) and Wendy Tan (Flame Centre). In contrast to Bayer's marketplace, the focus here was on a digitally supported simulation of the innovation process. [Q1]

How does the innovation process change when AI takes over large parts of the work in research, ideation, design and elaboration, while humans continue to make the decisions? The guiding question targeted shifting bottlenecks: if individual steps become dramatically faster, what new challenges arise along the whole path from idea to customer? [Q1]

The official programme invited the audience to take an active part using their smartphones. Participants were to work through decision situations on a simulated innovation journey. Their choices were to become visible in the room in real time. The simulation was explicitly designed as an experience and not as a conventional lecture or a complete case study of a single company. [Q1]

The didactic design was based on a division of labour: AI increasingly handles the preparatory work that can be accelerated, while people weigh trade-offs and choose a direction. Attention thus shifts from the speed of individual tasks to the question of how product development, customer responses and leadership interact. The exact course of the actual audience votes and the distribution of answers are not currently publicly documented.

When the bottlenecks move

The simulation was meant to show that once one step is accelerated, other constraints become more important: the quality of the question, customer relevance, alignment and prioritisation, decision-making capacity or actual implementation. It thus connects thematically with Bastian Bergmann's argument from the previous day that when digital production becomes cheap, attention and discoverability become scarce.

As an analytical conclusion from the simulated scenario, one can add: if AI not only speeds up internal tasks but at the same time enables competitors and customers to respond faster, a one-off productivity gain is not a lasting advantage. This conclusion is not a documented verbatim statement by the speakers. Handling feedback loops, customer access and decisions about the entire offering therefore becomes more important.

Merely executing the same process logic faster is not yet an innovation of the innovation system. The TCS blog piece published on 5 November distinguishes regulated, agile and AI-native modes of work and describes the need to align the entire architecture of work. This is a complementary thematic contribution, not a retrospective transcript of this simulation. [Q4]

The published programme makes the didactic intention clear, but not the empirical outcome of the exercise. The actual votes and their distribution, specific reactions of the groups and a systematic comparison of the simulation runs are not documented. Any further-reaching claim about its impact would therefore not be supported. [Q1]

7. The Handy Lecture: Innovation and Dealing with Failure the Right Way

16:30–17:00 · Zeremoniensaal, Hofburg · Charles and Elizabeth Handy Lecture

The lecture “Management in an Uncertain World: Unlocking the Discipline of Innovation” was given by Amy C. Edmondson (Harvard Business School); Julia Kirby moderated. The official announcement started from the paradoxical relationship between innovation and failure: innovation is hardly conceivable without the risk of failure, but failure alone is not innovation. [Q1]

How can companies develop innovation as a deliberate discipline in an uncertain world? The starting point of the official announcement: innovation cannot do without failure; failure, however, can very well occur without producing innovation. Many common assumptions about performance and management prevent organisations from recognising this difference. The discipline of innovation must therefore be built on a more nuanced understanding of failure. [Q1]

The event was a short plenary lecture, not an interactive marketplace. In the absence of a complete transcript, only its publicly announced central thesis and, separately, Edmondson's previously published research arguments are presented below. An exact reconstruction of the examples or of the order of the spoken argument is not possible.

“You can't have innovation without failure. But you can have failure without innovation.” – Core statement of the official event announcement. In essence: without the possibility of failure there is no innovation; but failure in itself is not yet proof of learning or innovation. [Q1]

Three questions follow from this central thesis: which failures are avoidable? Which are likely in complex collaboration and must be actively caught? And which failures are a legitimate price for a well-chosen experiment in new territory? The following distinction is explicitly formulated in Edmondson's own publications. [Q12, Q13]

Three kinds of failure

In her publications, Edmondson distinguishes basic, complex and intelligent failures. The typology makes it possible to treat very different situations in a differentiated way, instead of celebrating every mishap as a learning success. [Q12, Q13]

Basic failures are avoidable errors in familiar processes. They call for reliable standards, careful processes and a culture in which problems are detected and fixed early. Complex failures arise from the interaction of several factors in dynamic systems; the appropriate response is systemic root-cause analysis and early exchange about warning signs. Intelligent failures are undesired outcomes of well-chosen experiments in new territory; their value depends on whether they yield relevant new knowledge at reasonable cost. [Q12, Q13]

Edmondson describes this typology in her book “Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well” (2023), among other places, and in a publication of her own for Harvard Business School. It is particularly important not to respond to all three types of failure in the same way: someone who experiments deliberately should not be judged by the standards of an avoidable routine mishap. Conversely, avoidable carelessness does not become intelligent by being declared an experiment after the fact. [Q12, Q13]

According to Edmondson, an intelligent failure requires that the task really is in new territory; that the experiment pursues a meaningful opportunity; that existing knowledge was sought out before the attempt; and that the experiment is kept as small as is sensible in order to learn as much as possible. It is therefore not a plea for uncontrolled “fail fast”, let alone for celebrating every mishap. [Q12]

The research emphasises the importance of psychological safety: people must be able to raise questions, disagreement, mistakes and bad news without automatically being punished socially for it. But psychological safety does not mean abandoning performance standards. Especially in safety-critical and routine processes, high standards require that avoidable and complex failures are detected early and reduced. This combination of openness and discipline is a precondition for learning. [Q12, Q13]

The research thus reveals a dual obligation: where processes are known and must be reliable, preventing failure is indispensable. Where new possibilities are being explored, teams need protected, carefully designed experiments. Psychological safety is the precondition for raising errors and uncertainty in good time; it replaces neither clear performance standards nor the duty to learn from what has been observed.

Third conference day · Friday, 6 November

On Friday morning, the masterclasses moved the Forum's discussion to the large lecture hall of the University of Vienna. Unlike the panels and interactive formats of the previous two days, they were designed as in-depth teaching sessions followed by questions: a concentrated input from research and practice was followed by a dialogue with participants. The moderator placed the series under the guiding idea “From Spark to System”: ingenuity only becomes effective when individual insights turn into robust ways of working and organising. The two masterclasses documented here took place from 09:00 to 10:40. [Q14–Q15]

The opening was given by Amy Edmondson and Mark Mortensen with their research on the employee value proposition. Linda Hill followed with a study of how digital and AI-related innovation can be spread beyond individual initiatives in large, often regulated companies. The account in the following section is based on detailed notes of both sessions; empirical findings and company examples are identified as statements by the speakers where no independent primary data are available.

8. Designing Work that Works: Work as an Integrated Offer

09:00–09:50 · University of Vienna, BIG lecture hall · Amy C. Edmondson (Harvard Business School) and Mark Mortensen (INSEAD)

Why do people choose a company, why do they engage there and why do they stay? With these three questions – attracting, engaging, retaining – Amy Edmondson and Mark Mortensen opened their joint masterclass “Designing Work that Works: Understanding the New Employee Value Proposition”. The core of their argument: the quality of the employment relationship does not arise from a series of independent benefits, but from the interplay of material conditions, development, social relationships and meaning.

The research background and the four dimensions of the employee value proposition

Their joint research began during COVID. Mortensen brought his work on virtual collaboration, Edmondson her research on psychological safety, learning and intelligent failure. The question of how psychological safety works under hybrid conditions led to a first joint article. The debate about quiet quitting then led to the broader question of why people work in organisations and how much they are willing to contribute.

Based on their literature review, the two researchers distinguish four dimensions of an employee value proposition (EVP). The first covers material benefits and working conditions: pay, bonuses, office design and the option of working from home. The second concerns growth and development, such as training, mentoring and challenging assignments. The third dimension refers to relationships and belonging: social contact, community and the experience of being seen as a person. The fourth is meaning and purpose – the question of why one's own work matters and contributes to something larger. The shared frame of reference thus ranges from individual benefit to the social and cultural conditions of work.

Mortensen sees parallels with former US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's framework for workplace well-being. If work design succeeds, he said, it can benefit the organisation as much as the health and satisfaction of employees.

Two tensions: short-term or long-term, individual or collective

For Mortensen, salary, bonuses and offices are relatively easy to control directly – and easier for competitors to copy. Identification with an organisation's purpose is harder to build and can create a stronger bond.

The four dimensions can also be viewed according to whether the benefit is individual or collective, short-term or long-term. Working from home saves the commute immediately. A spontaneous conversation in the office, on the other hand, can deepen a relationship or enable learning. According to Mortensen, leadership should help bring “us and later” into decisions alongside “me and now”.

Herein lies a trade-off that the isolated optimisation of individual offerings can only intensify: an attractive perk with immediate effect does not necessarily improve the longer-term experience of work. Conversely, a seemingly small contribution to encounter, learning or commitment to purpose can make a considerable difference to an organisation's performance. Mortensen therefore calls for not just surveying individual wishes, but examining how they relate to the overall experience of work.

Wells Fargo and Design Co: when individual levers damage the whole

Wells Fargo wanted to be a trusted adviser to its customers. For community banking, Mortensen names, among others, recent immigrants, older people and students. The bonus for eight financial products per customer created the opposite incentive. Employees competed for sales, sold unnecessary products and opened accounts without authorisation. An employee who reported such behaviour via a hotline interpreted a subsequent poor performance review as retaliation. For Mortensen, the case shows how a material incentive can weaken both cohesion and the stated purpose.

At Design Co, management granted the wish for remote work. Later, employees reported in surveys weaker relationships, lower engagement and less belonging. Mortensen uses this to distinguish between the wish expressed, the actual experience and what employees need.

Both examples illustrate different mechanisms of the same difficulty. At Wells Fargo, the compensation system collided with a customer promise explicitly based on trust. At Design Co, a gap opened up between a desired way of working and the loss of social ties described later. The examples were not used as an argument for any particular standard model of office or remote work, but for a differentiated analysis of needs, actual experiences and long-term effects.

From isolated measures to a learning system

According to Mortensen, remote work, frequent job changes, mental strain and AI affect all four dimensions. On job changes, he describes a young employee at a financial services firm. For her, the prospect of a partnership was of little relevance. She planned to stay two years, wanted the experience on her CV and then to move on. A McKinsey report mentioned by Mortensen supports, in his view, the idea that employees are looking for a coherent experience of work.

For him, implementation begins with a shift “from S to I”. Instead of reacting to individual problems, tackling them separately and then ticking them off, leaders should actively look for opportunities, develop solutions in an integrative and inclusive way and test them step by step. For their joint book, the two name four steps: reframing the topic within the organisation, collecting data, experimenting in a targeted way and holding personal conversations.

The team developed an instrument that captures, for each dimension, what employees need and what they perceive themselves to be getting. Regional differences suspected by managers were the reason for the differentiated measurement. Analyses by subgroup showed which gaps an overall picture can conceal.

When the four dimensions work well together, Mortensen reports statistically significantly better scores for performance, engagement, identification, satisfaction and psychological safety, as well as lower scores for burnout and turnover. He locates the biggest jump already at the transition to looking at pairs. No specific effect sizes were given in the talk.

What is analytically new is less the naming of the four dimensions than their combination. There are six possible pairings between them. A high score on pay or training offers says little on its own about how the overall offer is experienced. Only by looking at combinations can reinforcements and unintended trade-offs be identified.

The data: who needs what – and for whom does it apply?

The research explicitly looks at differences within companies. At a US healthcare provider with around 5,000 respondents, the four dimensions initially appeared balanced on average; broken down

by organisational unit, however, clear deviations emerged. At a US bank holding company, employees with different lengths of service mostly differed only slightly; new employees were a noticeable exception, which Mortensen links to early departures. At a defence and technology group, different profiles emerged for local employees and expats. Mortensen suspected that this reflected different relationships to the company's purpose and to their material and social situation, respectively. These interpretations were part of the talk, not the presentation of an established causal study.

Four dimensions give six pairings. Mortensen observes trade-offs mainly where material benefits are involved. Development, community and meaning, on the other hand, can reinforce one another. He interprets further differences as life-stage patterns. Development tends to lose priority later on. Material needs can gain weight with family obligations. In his account, meaning and community followed U-shaped curves. Overall, remote work explained comparatively little variation in these analyses.

A US agricultural producer combines competitive pay and adult education with the stated goal of improving the lives of its farmworkers. Employees help other employees and thus put the purpose into practice within the community. At a life-sciences start-up, a development gap emerged. The CEO expected demands for training budgets and travel. In focus groups, however, employees mainly asked for help from experienced project managers in organising the lab and for insight into sales and investor meetings. This could promote professional learning and relationships at the same time.

The case studies highlight the importance of a locally informed diagnosis. An organisation may respond to a development gap with a larger training budget; in the actual reality of work, however, what may be missing is access to experienced colleagues, to other fields of activity or to interesting projects. Such solutions change learning and relationships at the same time, without having to be organised as separate programmes.

Edmondson's closing point: connection and the importance of weak ties

Edmondson describes the work as an ongoing process over five to six years. Their framework is “integrative, inclusive, iterative” and, as she adds jokingly, “imperfect”. She warns against letting trade-offs arise unintentionally. If they are not decided explicitly, in her view they rarely turn out in a way that benefits the employer's offer as a whole.

Connection may hold a special place among the four dimensions. Edmondson points to the decline in casual contact with acquaintances and strangers, the so-called “weak ties”. Efficient everyday transactions and increased use of AI could further reduce such encounters. In the short term that is convenient; in the long term, social connection can be lost. According to a finding she mentions, many people who leave name a lack of connection as their main reason. She does not give an exact figure. Leaders should deliberately create opportunities for connection, especially in view of remote work, mental strain, job changes and AI.

Edmondson thus raises a question that goes beyond HR policy. As customer transactions, services and work processes become ever more efficient, casual encounters that used to be taken for granted as part of social embeddedness can disappear. The advantage of short paths and low friction is immediately visible; possible losses of weak ties only become noticeable over a longer period. Her point is not that efficiency is problematic, but that human connection must be considered as a design goal in its own right.

Dialogue with the audience: teams, shared responsibility and existential uncertainty

The question round began with the composition of teams. Mortensen argued that teams are often put together on the basis of technical skills, while the quality of the actual collaboration only becomes visible later. As a vivid image, he proposed an “expiry date”: after about six months, one could systematically check whether the original composition still fits the tasks. Moreover, the best work design need not be uniform across the whole company, but can emerge at team or department level.

A question about shared responsibility and design thinking was answered with the suggestion to start from the common goal, treat options as hypotheses and test them iteratively. Individual wishes for short-term relief should be weighed against their effects on cooperation, influence and longer-term needs. A willingness to make small individual sacrifices could, in some situations, be the precondition for a better collective result.

A question from Ukraine concerned the effect of existential threat on cohesion. Edmondson stated explicitly that she had no such case in her own data set; she suspected that threat could strengthen bonds. Mortensen pointed to different individual reactions in his working environment in the Middle East. This too argued against the blanket assumption that a strain affects everyone in the same way.

Finally, the audience asked about shifting tasks to customers or to AI. Self-service was raised as an example, whose immediate benefit may lie in lower prices. At the same time, encounters such as those at a staffed checkout would disappear. The debate led back to the question of what social consequences many small, individually efficient decisions have in combination.

The masterclass thus ended with a shift in perspective: it is not the individual benefit that determines commitment and engagement, but the coherence of the entire offer of work. Material conditions, development, relationships and purpose must be understood together, examined with differentiated data and changed in an iterative process.

9. The ABCs of Driving Digital and AI Transformation

09:50–10:40 · University of Vienna, BIG lecture hall · Linda A. Hill (Harvard Business School)

Linda A. Hill devoted her masterclass to a related but differently framed question: how does local ingenuity become lasting innovation capability at scale? Her examples from the Cleveland Clinic, Mastercard, Pfizer, Delta and other companies show that successful digital and AI-related transformation cannot be understood primarily as installing technology. What matters is joint problem-solving, experimentation, the capacity to learn, productive debate and the shaping of organisational boundaries.

Research approach: long-term observation instead of a snapshot

Since 1995, Hill and her teams have been studying exceptional innovation leadership. Her three multigenerational teams include more people from practice than from academia, many of them from technology. Hill works mainly ethnographically. In addition, there are roundtables with executives worldwide and, according to Hill, around 10,000 survey responses over six years. For the past three years, AI has been the focus.

Hill usually follows leaders for at least five years, because cultural change only becomes visible over time. Her most recent study focused on large, established, multinational and often regulated organisations. In her observation, these leaders think about the task in similar ways. What they actually do varies with the person and with national and organisational culture.

The way her research works also shapes her argument. Instead of general recipes for success, Hill traces over years how leaders change culture, collaboration and decisions. She stresses that comparable principles can take very different forms. Size, regulation, national culture and the personalities of those involved influence which practices take hold. The official title of the session was “The ABCs of Driving Digital and AI Transformation”. [Q15]

Cleveland Clinic: deciding while the path is not yet visible

Hill studied the main campus and Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. In February 2020, Dr Suri described his situation as leading in a fog. The familiar advice to steer the ship in a crisis was of little help to him as long as he did not know the course himself.

Suri wanted to make clear that business as usual was over and that everyone had to contribute to innovative solutions. Decisions were working hypotheses. He wanted to involve experts as well as people without epidemic experience in gathering data, so that questions about fundamental assumptions would also be asked. The clinic had to act under high risk despite incomplete, ambiguous data. For Suri, what mattered was how quickly they could recognise the consequences of a decision and then either hold or change course.

Hill derives two capabilities from this. Innovative organisations collaborate across different perspectives and arrive at solutions through experimentation and learning. The leadership task is to create conditions in which people are willing and able to shape the future together.

The point of this example lies in how uncertainty is handled. Suri did not see decisions as irrevocable solutions, but as hypotheses whose effects had to be observed and corrected quickly. Involving people without relevant epidemic experience was meant to reduce blind spots in expert thinking. For Hill, innovative leadership is therefore not solitary foresight, but the ability to enable people with different skills to search together.

Mastercard: purpose, resources and behaviour as an architecture for innovation

Ajay Banga regarded fintech as an existential threat, while Mastercard radiated confidence after its IPO. According to Hill, innovation initially ranked 26th out of 27 internally, and first or second towards the end of his tenure. She describes the shift from a credit-card business to a technology company in payments and later also in e-commerce. Looking at the share-price performance, she asks when the market recognised the transformation. She also links its long-term anchoring to the fact that many of the leaders studied stayed in office for longer.

Banga formulated financial inclusion as the purpose. People and small businesses without access to the financial system were to gain it. For a farmer in Kenya, for example, an offer had to be affordable and accessible by mobile phone. Hill calls this a provocative purpose for a company with many former bankers. For time, attention and resources, a 50–50 rule applied: one half for innovation in the core business, the other for diversification and new businesses. This was to be visible in the budgets.

Mastercard oriented itself more strongly towards end customers and developed in the direction of B2B2C. Hill speaks of “customer intimacy”. Pixar serves as an example of how a deep understanding of the audience can help develop something the audience could not yet have named itself.

The “decency quotient” anchored culture in concrete behaviour. An email from colleagues at the same level should be answered. After a week without a reply, according to Banga's pointed rule, one could assume agreement. Such rules of behaviour came before major structural changes.

The Mastercard example combines strategic direction with remarkably concrete routines. The purpose of financial inclusion gave the transformation a yardstick beyond the existing credit-card business. The 50–50 split protected resources for both existing and new business models. At the same time, the “decency quotient” made clear that innovation depends on everyday forms of behaviour. In Hill's account, purpose, resource allocation and culture thus interlock, rather than being introduced one after another as separate programmes.

Being able to stop innovations: learning instead of persistence

Mastercard's metrics changed in the course of the transformation. Financial measures came later. Early on, Banga was interested in how many ideas were discarded and how quickly. Anyone who stopped their own idea could receive a bonus for doing so. From other cases, Hill mentions “walking zombies”: projects that kept running despite better judgement. Procter & Gamble described the difficulty as attachment to one's own solution. Those who keep the customer's problem in view find it easier to give up the solution.

The willingness to end an idea that is no longer viable is a distinct part of innovation capability. Measurable progress can therefore also consist in stopping an initiative in time. Focusing on the customer's problem helps to limit identification with a particular solution; it shifts the question from “How do we save our project?” to “What actually solves the problem?”

Risk, regulation and a shared language

In regulated industries, it must be clear what those involved understand by risk and how much of it the organisation is willing to take on. In one case, it was easier to describe a project as complex rather than risky. Using concrete cases, the team developed a shared red, amber and green rating. The rating showed where particular attention was needed. Michael, a middle manager at Pfizer, later presented the approach at NASA, where, according to Hill, it also met with interest.

Regulation does not make innovation superfluous, but it does require a different language of experimentation. The traffic-light scheme was meant to make the discussion of risk more objective and to direct attention to where it was most needed. It replaces neither expert oversight nor responsibility. At the same time, Hill stressed that in highly regulated environments “fail fast” can be a misleading call to action: what matters is learning quickly and responsibly within clear boundaries.

Bridgers and innovation labs as intermediaries

Banga won over Gary, a serial entrepreneur ready for a change after an acquisition, for the transformation. Another bridger came from Citi and brought corporate experience. Both were to use their different networks to build an ecosystem. Mastercard set up labs in several regions. These were to develop an understanding of market, culture and regulation on the ground. Banga spoke of earning the right to do business in a given environment.

Hill highlights four ideas for the labs. Ideas can come from anywhere. In experimentation, what counts is learning quickly and wisely. Trying things out in good time takes priority over perfection. The lab serves as a springboard so that other parts of the organisation can adopt and spread solutions. Pixar preferred “learn fast” to “fail fast”, because learning was meant to come first. At Pfizer, the language of failure could also be problematic because of compliance and regulatory requirements.

Across 14 labs and accelerators studied, Hill saw problems with scaling whenever a lab did not understand its role as a springboard. Nicole Jones described Delta's “Hangar” as support for around

80,000 employees so that they themselves can work more innovatively. Hill also mentions Chick-fil-A's “Hatch”.

Mastercard searched widely for capabilities it lacked internally and brought in start-ups as well as its own customers. If a customer needed to improve its cybersecurity, Mastercard could connect it with a suitable start-up. The shared payments infrastructure benefited as well. The choice of partners had to fit the respective regulatory and local environment.

From these cases, Hill draws a clear distinction: an innovation lab must not become the place to which an organisation hands off its responsibility for innovation. Its function is rather to enable learning and to carry results back into the whole organisation. Labs, partnerships and the deliberate linking of different capabilities must be designed so that their impact reaches beyond an exclusive innovation team.

From experiments to actual use

Hill asks whether organisations have people who can collaborate across differences and organisational boundaries, enable intelligent failures and share insights. She considers passing on what has been learned to be particularly difficult.

At Dr Suri's clinic, according to Hill, more than 400 nurses regularly carried out A/B experiments to improve their work. As AI use increased, they contacted the business intelligence team and requested concrete changes to the dashboard. The team initially saw these as complaints. Hill interprets the calls as a sign that the nurses were genuinely using the tool and wanted to make it fit their work.

The nurses' example makes it particularly tangible that the successful introduction of a digital system does not end with its installation. It is only the follow-up questions, change requests and everyday experiments that show users are integrating the tool into their work. What looks like resistance to a dashboard can thus be a resource for its further development.

The question round: bridgers, conflict and small companies

Bridgers are often the people everyone says must be involved in a particular project. They know whom to approach and understand what moves people in different contexts. Because so many rely on them, they can become a bottleneck and burn out. According to Hill, their work behind the scenes is rarely explicitly recognised.

When Delta was invited to the Consumer Electronics Show for the first time, the CEO took Nicole Jones on stage with him. He knew her contribution to innovation, which had remained hidden from many others. Jones had built a diverse team and told those interested that, in case of success, others would often take the credit, and in case of failure, the lab would get the blame. The shared purpose therefore had to carry them. Hill sees “zigzag careers”, with stints in different roles, functions and contexts, as a development path for bridgers.

The first question in the discussion concerned how bridgers can be identified and developed. Hill pointed to people who enjoy trust across different departments and understand the logic of different professional cultures. Their impact is often informal and therefore remains invisible in performance reviews. At the same time, the sheer number of requests threatens to turn them into bottlenecks. Varied career stages can help build such capabilities.

Hill answers with “creative abrasion”. This requires, first, diversity of thought; second, a marketplace where ideas meet; and third, the ability to work through the conflicts that arise. At Pfizer, there were increasingly cross-functional and cross-country teams. Out of politeness, however, those involved

initially said too little to one another and escalated decisions upwards, even though they were allowed to decide themselves.

Pfizer practised concrete rules at town halls. A position was to be backed by data or experience. Every rationale could be questioned, including the relevance of long experience to the case at hand. Proposals were also to be examined as a whole. What works in Argentina may require an exception or a different solution in Germany. Hill also describes the shift from “data-driven” to “data-informed”. AI outputs in particular should be checked against experience and professional judgement. According to Hill, the rating for creative abrasion changed from red to green by 2020. She links the improvement to faster decisions and to the ability to carry out the international vaccine trials.

Pfizer also discussed how a “straight-talk moment” can be designed for different cultural settings. The goal of open discussion remained the same. The form could vary where direct language was perceived as offensive or face-threatening.

Hill's distinction between “data-driven” and “data-informed” is particularly significant in the context of AI. The outputs of data-based systems should be taken seriously, but checked for their fit with the specific case and with the underlying experiential knowledge. Open disagreement needs an organised practice for this: making reasons transparent, questioning assumptions, looking at the solution as a whole and recognising differences between local contexts.

Hill stresses that these practices are spread unevenly across large companies. Michael from Global Clinical Supplies, for example, had no influence over compensation, but according to Hill achieved particularly large AI advances with his group and is now helping to drive the wider roll-out.

The cases also include smaller organisations, such as the spin-off start-up avatarin and an agricultural company in Nigeria. Hill sees the same principles with different implementation. Founders have disproportionate influence. For them it can be particularly demanding to make room for other people's ideas and to make open disagreement psychologically safe. Hill uses Massimo Bottura as an example. He prepares his chefs to develop restaurants with their own signature at other locations and to become part of the respective community.

The question round included an important caveat: no organisation is perfect at spreading such practices. Even within large companies they are applied unevenly. Using the example of Michael from Pfizer's Global Clinical Supplies, Hill showed that change does not come only from formal power. A middle manager without access to compensation and other central instruments was able to establish new routines within his sphere of influence and thereby set off a broader movement. The basic principles also apply in small companies, but the role of the founders becomes even more direct: whoever built the company must make room for other ideas to be truly heard.

Hill thus understands innovation leadership as the ability to build collaboration across professional, cultural and organisational differences, to enable intelligent experimentation and to spread what has been learned so that not just individuals but the organisation as a whole becomes more capable of innovation. AI extends the technical possibilities of this process; it does not replace the leadership work it requires.

Conclusion · Management between innovation, work and responsibility

The nine sessions do not formulate a unified theory of innovation, but they reveal different conditions for its emergence. Linda Hill describes innovation as collective discovery; Rita McGrath reminds us that the economic future is chosen strategically, not merely forecast; Gianpiero Petriglieri

understands leadership as a form of creative cultural work. Roger Martin, Gerd Gigerenzer and John van Rossen show why complex decisions require qualitative judgement, heuristics and deliberately working with possibilities. The panel on AI ethics, in turn, asks who bears responsibility and which abilities people should preserve precisely as technology takes over more tasks.

The sessions on the second day shift the focus to organisational mechanisms. Bayer's Dynamic Shared Ownership shows how deep change goes when teams, decisions, resources and planning are redesigned together. The innovation simulation points to the difference between faster execution and a new model of value creation. Amy Edmondson's Handy Lecture makes clear that innovation is hardly possible without experimental risk, but that failure only becomes productive when it is understood and used for learning.

The third day brings these ideas together without blurring their differences. Edmondson and Mortensen present work as an integrated offer of material conditions, development, relationships and meaning; the interactions between these dimensions determine engagement and commitment. Drawing on long-term case studies, Hill shows how innovative leadership can actually be practised in established companies: through purpose, responsible experimentation, bridgers, productive friction and the spread of what has been learned. The result is a more demanding understanding of management: it must provide orientation and a framework, allow dissent, connect people with one another, examine technological possibilities and take responsibility for the consequences of its own decisions.

The Forum's guiding question thus becomes visible on three levels: what future should be created? What kind of organisation makes it possible? And which human abilities and relationships must not be overlooked along the way? Answering these questions calls less for a fixed recipe than for a practice of searching, deciding and learning together.

Sources and editorial notes

The accounts of 4 November are based on detailed contemporaneous notes of the respective panels. For 5 November, the course of events, method and content of the talks are presented as direct event content only to the extent that this emerges from official programmes or follow-up reports; the Bayer transformation and Edmondson's research are explored further through separately published sources. The two masterclasses of 6 November are documented on the basis of our own detailed notes of the talks and audience discussions and checked against the official programme. Where no complete public video recordings are available, the essay does not claim a verbatim reconstruction.

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Figures and effects reported in corporate publications and case studies should be read as source statements. The two masterclasses of 6 November follow the detailed notes taken during the talks. Where speakers presented statistical findings, corporate developments or causal relationships, these are marked as statements from the talks unless independently verified. Apart from the personal opening, the essay contains no personal reflections by participants and no client-specific applications.