Sentient Tools and the Future of Work

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People work and collaborate differently, so believing that there can only be one type of AI is too limiting.

FROM THE EDITOR
This month’s column is a science fiction prototype of a future work world in which machines are aware, cognitive, and social. —Brian David Johnson

M a’am, we need a decision,” Lucy stuttered, afraid to look at her boss. “Give me five minutes,” Nadya Winters replied calmly. As CEO of DJO Associates, Winters was used to such rapid decisions. The firm specialized in up-to-the-second and out-of-the-box financial analysis for the growing horde of AI-powered investment firms.

Winters strode toward her personal conference room—“The Chamber”—where she went to consult privately with advisors on decisions that could have ramifications in the billions of dollars.

The room lit up when Winters entered. “Call all five,” she commanded.

The walls came alive with communication protocols bringing up Winters’ five top advisors. Advisors had to always be on their toes. The markets moved fast, and an advisor who couldn’t keep up was traded for one who could.

“Hello, Ms. Winters,” the first advisor said with a smile.

“Archana here,” replied another.

“Jaiizhen here. Sorry I’m late. It was—”

Winters cut him off: “We have less than two minutes. Our analyst picked this up this morning, and I think it could be big.”

Outside, Lucy stared at the door, tapping her foot nervously. Her stomach was always in knots, but she loved her job.

“What’s the decision?” Rodgers’ voice boomed.

“She’s in the Chamber. With all five of them.”

“Five?” Rodgers shook his head, not hiding his contempt for Winters’ decision-making process. “Who needs five AIs?”

“You can’t argue with her track record,” Lucy spoke up. She wouldn’t stand for his dismissive attitude. “She’s made more money for this company than any other CEO.”

Silence dropped heavily over the two. Time was running out. The door to the Chamber slowly opened, revealing Winters’ relaxed face.

“What’s the call?” Lucy chirped, still tense.

“We’re good,” Winters waved away her concerns. “I sent the order to the team myself.”

“But what did we do?” Lucy asked. “We just made 5.1 billion dollars for ourselves and our clients,” Winters smiled. “Not bad for a Wednesday morning.”

Our future work days will likely look much like today—but you might have very different coworkers. Imagine sitting down with your five best collaborators to make a crucial decision. These people might not be your friends or even your favorite coworkers, but they’re the ones you want when the time comes to collaborate and make good decisions.

Now imagine that these collaborators are artificially intelligent. For example, five different AIs have been designed to collaborate with you and with one another. And now imagine that the goal isn’t solely efficiency, but to discover how each different AI can be used to make you more successful.

We often talk about AI as if there was only one type. But people work and collaborate differently, so believing that there can only be one AI is too limiting. In the future of work, we must optimize the technologies we collaborate with for a wider range of outcomes and reimagined success.