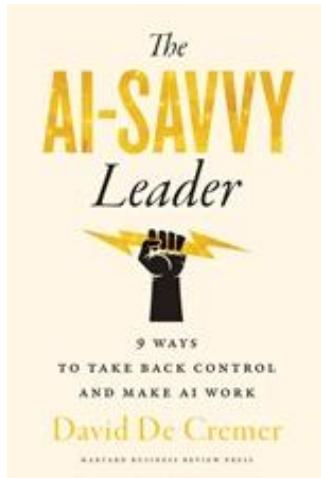


## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW <sup>1</sup>



Book Title: ***The AI-Savvy Leader: Nine Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work***

Author: **David De Cremer**

Publisher: Harvard Business Review Press

List Price: \$32.00 Format: Hardcover, 224 pages

Publication Date: June 2024

ISBN: 13:978-1-64782-623-9

Reviewer: **Anzar Ali Hasan**

Review Date: December 2025

### Introduction

David De Cremer's *The AI-Savvy Leader* critiques the belief that AI failures are purely technical, arguing instead that they stem from a **crisis of disengaged human leadership**. De Cremer demonstrates that many executives mistakenly embrace the "tech-driving-tech myth," deferring critical decisions to technical experts, leading to colossal, wasted investments. This perspective is vital, with experts noting that De Cremer "absolutely nails the key drivers behind AI failures," showing "how we need human leadership more than ever!"

Fortunately, the book provides "9 Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work. This text is an "excellent counterbalance to what has been an overwhelmingly technology-led narrative, focusing on applying core leadership skills like **emotional intelligence** and **communication**, to bridge the gap between people and technology. Leaders are guided to adopt a **human-centered approach** that uses AI to **augment** human capabilities rather than replace them, making the book a "masterful guide offering invaluable insights" and providing "clear answers" where other texts fall short.

### Overview of Book's Structure

The structure of *The AI-Savvy Leader* is built around the fundamental argument that successful AI adoption is contingent upon engaged, **human-centric leadership**. The book opens with an **Introduction**, titled *The next great leadership challenge*, which establishes the book's core premise: that AI failures stem from leaders'

<sup>1</sup> How to cite this work: Hasan, A. A. (2026). The AI-Savvy Leader: Nine Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work, book review, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue I, January.

disengagement and abdication of responsibility to technical experts, believing the myth that technology should drive the transformation. This sets the stage for the book's subsequent nine chapters, which are dedicated to specific leadership actions necessary to reverse this trend. Although the chapters can be read out of order, the material is designed to be **intertwined and build on each other** for maximum benefit.

The core of the book is defined by the “**9 Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work**”, which are nine key leadership responsibilities translated for the digital age. These chapters guide leaders toward adopting **Perspective 2 thinking** using AI to augment human intelligence and actively refuting the flawed Perspective 1 assumption that they should defer control to technology. These nine actions are: 1) **LEARNING** (*Get to know AI, and learn to use it as a leader*); 2) **PURPOSE** (*Use your purpose to ask the right kind of questions*); 3) **INCLUSION** (*Work in inclusive ways to drive human-AI collaborations*); 4) **COMMUNICATION** (*Build a flat communication culture to drive AI adoption*); 5) **VISION** (*Be visionary in how to use AI*); 6) **BALANCE** (*Adopt AI with all stakeholders in mind*); 7) **EMPATHY** (*Use a human-centered approach to AI adoption*); 8) **MISSION** (*Augment (don't automate) to create jobs*); and 9) **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE** (*Accept that soft skills are the new hard skills and practice them*).

Collectively, these chapters emphasize that the secret to adopting AI successfully lies in practicing and applying the **core leadership skills** that executives already possess, such as emotional intelligence, communication, and vision. By focusing on these human-centered responsibilities, leaders ensure that AI is deployed to enhance human capabilities and align with organizational values, rather than becoming a source of failure or job displacement. The book concludes with a final section, *Leading today for tomorrow*, which reinforces that these nine actions are crucial for leaders to **assume control** of the technological changes and successfully guide their organizations in the AI era.

## Highlights

The central highlight of “*The AI-Savvy Leader*” is its sharp diagnosis of why AI adoption efforts fail, arguing that the crisis is one of **disengaged human leadership**, not technological shortcomings. Leaders often fail by subscribing to the misleading “**tech-driving-tech myth**,” which causes them to abdicate control and defer strategic decisions to technical experts. To reverse this costly trend, the book compels executives to reject Perspective 1 (AI replaces people for efficiency) and adopt **Perspective 2**, which views AI not as a replacement but as a powerful tool to **augment human intelligence** and unlock greater creativity in the workforce.

The book translates this human-centric philosophy into actionable steps structured around the core program: “**9 Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work**.” These nine steps redefine traditional leadership responsibilities for the digital age. They cover crucial actions such as the necessity of **Learning** (becoming AI-savvy enough to speak the language), aligning technology use with the organization's core **Purpose**,

focusing on **Inclusion** to ensure human-AI collaborations are effective, and the strategic necessity of deploying **Vision** to rally the entire organization around the change.

Ultimately, *The AI-Savvy Leader* underscores that successful adoption depends on the leader's commitment to using AI in service of human objectives, particularly through the **Mission** of augmentation over automation. The book emphasizes that leaders must actively apply the core interpersonal skills they already possess, such as **emotional intelligence, communication, and empathy**, to bridge the gap between people and technology. By focusing on a **human-centered and inclusive approach**, the book provides the "clear answers" necessary for leaders to fully **assume control** of AI transformation.

### **Highlights: What I liked!**

What stands out immediately about "*The AI-Savvy Leader*" is its profound re-framing of the AI challenge, shifting the focus decisively from technology to **human leadership**. David De Cremer effectively "sees through the hype surrounding AI and absolutely nails the key drivers behind AI failures," which he identifies not as technical glitches, but as the consequence of leaders' **disengagement** and belief in the "**tech-driving-tech myth**." This realization that human expertise is the prerequisite for successful AI deployment, not an obstacle, is both essential and highly insightful. Furthermore, the book's clear commitment to the **Perspective 2** philosophy using AI to **augment** human intelligence and creativity, rather than simply replacing workers with efficiency, provides an optimistic and actionable core message that is particularly resonant for executives seeking to become "AI-savvy leaders!"

The greatest appeal of the book lies in how it turns this philosophy into practical, integrated guidance, offering "**9 Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work**." "This structure provides a rare exception to books that are "long on explaining problems and short on the solutions". De Cremer offers a **human-centered** and comprehensive approach, making the conversation "a deeper, more human, and actionable level. I particularly appreciate the emphasis on applying core **soft skills** like **emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication** to specific AI challenges. By emphasizing that soft skills are the new hard skills, De Cremer ensures that the book serves as a "masterful guide offering invaluable insights for business leaders" who need to seamlessly bridge the gap between people and technology.

### **Who might benefit from the Book?**

The primary beneficiaries of "*The AI-Savvy Leader*" are **business leaders** and **executives** who are navigating or preparing for the age of artificial intelligence. The book is explicitly framed as an "essential read for business leaders who want to thrive in the AI economy" and a "masterful guide offering invaluable insights for business leaders. This includes those who feel overwhelmed or "paralyzed by the introduction of this new worker called AI" and those struggling to translate massive technological

investments into tangible business value. The book guides leaders who are currently disengaged to reverse the failures stemming from the "tech-driving-tech myth" and take "back control" of their organization's AI adoption projects. Specifically, it addresses the fundamental question of "what leaders need to do" to ensure they are driving successful AI adoption rather than deferring to technical experts.

Beyond general business leaders, the book offers specialized value to those in specific managerial, strategic, and ethical roles. Leaders seeking to ensure the successful implementation of AI will find it an outstanding and vital resource. Executives in advanced leadership courses, who often wonder if they should replace interpersonal skills with coding, will benefit from the book's argument that soft skills are critical to success. Furthermore, any leader who "cares about turning your AI adoption strategy into a business value creator" and fostering a "human-centered and inclusive approach to AI adoption" will find this a transforming and essential resource. It serves as a necessary intervention for those needing an "ideal balance of theoretical viewpoints and real-world, forward-thinking perspectives" to become "AI-savvy" and lead effectively in the digital age.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of "*The AI-Savvy Leader*", titled *Leading today for tomorrow*, emphasizes that while the presence of AI in business is nonnegotiable, its success depends entirely on **engaged human leadership**. David De Cremer illustrates this through the story of an executive named George, who initially felt overwhelmed by AI and retreated from his responsibilities, fearing the technology's complexity. George ultimately reversed course by understanding the basics of AI and applying his business knowledge to decide when, where, and how his teams should use the tool. He took back control by fostering trust, ensuring transparency, and portraying AI as a useful, supportive coworker to his teams. This demonstrates the book's central revelation: AI adoption fails primarily when leaders retreat, believing the narrative that AI will change everything and render human leadership obsolete. The nine actions detailed in the book are, therefore, not new technical mandates but a necessary reaffirmation that "AI-savvy leaders are just **good leaders** who work on their core leadership skills" and apply them to the new technological context.

The book's final pages look to the future, asserting that these core human leadership actions will remain crucial even as intelligent technologies accelerate. De Cremer posits that even with rapid advancements and phenomena like ChatGPT, the fundamental *nature* of technology has not changed enough to displace the need for human guidance. AI's essential limitation is that it excels at analyzing behavioral data and predicting outcomes, but it cannot display or take care of the leadership actions rooted in **understanding the meaning behind human behavior**. Consequently, the ability of AI to display the necessary leadership actions such as vision, empathy, and motivating people is fundamentally limited. The work concludes by urging executives to be prepared to invest significant time and effort to guide technological

transformation, ensuring they participate, connect, and lead more than ever to create value in the AI era.

---

For more about this book, go to: <https://store.hbr.org/product/the-ai-savvy-leader-nine-ways-to-take-back-control-and-make-ai-work/10688>

---

## About the Reviewer



**Anzar A. Hasan**

Texas, USA



Summary: Human-in-the-Loop | Speaker | Author | IEEE Senior Member | Technology Leader Focused on AI Security & Governance

**Anzar A. Hasan** is a seasoned technology and cybersecurity leader with more than four decades of impact across telecom, energy, finance, and emerging technologies. His career spans national-level digital transformation programs, global banking security architecture, and cutting-edge AI governance initiatives that shape how modern institutions build trust in intelligent systems.

He has delivered keynote sessions at major international conferences, contributed directly to global AI standards such as ISO/IEC 42001 and 23894, and advised governments and Fortune 500 enterprises on secure, ethical, and resilient technology adoption. From modernizing Pakistan's national telecom backbone with World Bank programs to architecting quantum-resistant AI security frameworks in the U.S., his work consistently blends deep technical mastery with strategic foresight.

A former Vice President at Wells Fargo, he pioneered blockchain-based AI audit trails, enterprise AI risk quantification models, and large-scale analytics modernization. His leadership extends across academia, global policy circles, and executive boards, including IEEE, Gartner Peer Community, and the American Cyber Security Association.

Anzar is also an innovator at heart, holding a patent for a mobile AI-powered retinal diagnostic system and mentoring the next generation of cybersecurity and AI professionals through global workshops and advisory roles.

---

Above all, he stands out for bridging complex technologies with practical governance, helping organizations adopt AI responsibly, securely, and with measurable business value. Anzar can be contacted at [Anzar.hasan@arshi.ai](mailto:Anzar.hasan@arshi.ai) or on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/anzar/>

---

*Editor's note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the PM World Journal and the [PMI Dallas Chapter](#). Authors and publishers provide the books to the PM World Journal's managing editor; books are delivered to the PMI Dallas Chapter, where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. PMI Dallas Chapter members can keep the books as well as claim PDUs for PMP recertification when their reviews are published.*

*If you have read a good PM-related book recently and would like to publish a book review, or if you are an author or publisher of a project management-related book, and would like the book reviewed through this program, please contact [Editor@pmworldjournal.com](mailto:Editor@pmworldjournal.com).*