

Is AI coming for YOUR job? (Spoiler alert: No!)

By Dustin Armstrong, Data Scientist, Oversight



It seems endless. The talk of AI as a sinister and heartless job stealer. But, as Dustin Armstrong, a data scientist at Oversight, an industry leader in the application of Machine Learning to spend monitoring and financial risk reduction, argues, the reality is much more nuanced and way more positive.

'Be AfrAId'?

The 'Be AfrAId' theme has landed in the audit, finance, and accounting communities too. Professionals with rigorous qualifications, years of experience, and unique insights into how their businesses and their people really work, are nervous. Nervous about being 'replaced', sooner than later, by machines.

We've all seen those ruthless, red-eyed Terminators descend to earth and play havoc with their superpowers. But that is, and will remain, fantasy. It's time for finance professionals to embrace an infinitely more positive reality: AI and its applications are, in fact, their most powerful friends.

Is this optimism the predictable position of a technology company that leads in providing AI-enabled abilities to detect and prevent financial risk? No. It's a view based on real life experience. We've gained that experience supporting thousands of human professionals. They work in hundreds of world class companies, using our solutions every day to measurably improve their effectiveness across audit, expense and AP management, and compliance.

Enhancement NOT Displacement

What have we learned? Above all, introducing AI, and specifically machine learning – ML – into the audit function mix is about enhancement of human skill not its displacement. Machine learning isn't mimicry of human intelligence. It teaches machines to perform tasks and then to progressively improve their performance.

When all is said and done, even the most sophisticated machines remain precisely that: machines. And a machine's real function is to make things easier for humans, so that we can enjoy a better life. That's true for every application of machine capability, from the devices in our kitchens to the highly sophisticated solutions running on Oversight's AI technology for financial risk mitigation. Machines don't choose what we wear or what we like to eat for dinner. But they do take the drudgery out of washing our clothes and dishes. In the audit environment, our ML-enabled solutions can ingest, synthesize, and analyze data 24/7. And machine learning technology not only means our solutions never take a break or get bored or ill from overwork, it also means the more they do, the more effective they become. This useful paradox doesn't make them a threat to us. It makes them even better servants. That's the key word: 'servant'. Because the incredible strengths of this technology are at our disposal.



Humans Remain Uniquely Capable

Meanwhile, humans retain their unique capabilities. And organizations of all sizes remain, fundamentally, human environments. A successful organization is a shared human endeavor. What opportunities does this reassuring realization create?

Foremost is the concept of empathy. Humans know their own organization, and the people who make it what it is, better than any machine. They understand human context. What actions are most likely to really mean when taken by individuals. How the parts of the organization connect and where the disconnections are. Where the greatest likelihood for financial risk lies. They have a 'feel' for their own data that can never be replaced and a 'nose' for where data should be collected. They deeply understand context. And that's fundamental to effective data gathering and analysis.

Common Sense Cannot Be Mechanized

Next comes common sense. Finance professionals understand the need for balance in identifying, mitigating, and eliminating financial risk. Much leakage is the result of genuine misunderstanding, or simple unawareness, of company policy and protocols. There needs to be recognition of situations that demand immediate and assertive action, and of those where a friendly and just-firm-enough reminder will do a better job.

In short, humans remain supreme arbiters between blunt financial tactics and true value preservation and growth strategies.

Human + Machine = Better (Machine – Human ≠ Better)

So, machines do machine stuff really well. And humans excel at human stuff. What happens when we combine these complementary strengths? Let's identify some specific areas where human + machine = better.

The first centers on the work. Credible estimates indicate over 80% of a finance team's time is taken up collecting, checking, and structuring data. By hand! That's a whole bunch of effort before you even get started with the true value of analyzing that data and taking meaningful action.

Inverting Today's 80/20 Rule

Implementing an ML-driven solution takes care of all that first base activity. Humans make the all-important judgement calls about which data to include. The ML-driven solution does the work. The result is an immediate inversion of the current and

highly unsatisfactory 80/20 rule. Much more of that all-important human time and skill can now be applied to interpreting and acting on insights. And not on assembly work.

Better Working – Built-in

The second area of human enablement leverages the capacity of machine learning technology not simply to do a lot of work, but to improve how it works. ML 'teaches' itself to improve over time, according to criteria set by human users. So, the output becomes progressively more precise, insightful, and accurately predictive

Forests. Not Trees.

The third area is transformation of the role of audit and other finance professionals. Gone is the daily struggle with individual trees. Now there is space to look at the shape of the forest today and plan for its improvement tomorrow.

The Time for Focused Action is NOW

Making sure that human + machine = better requires focused actions:

Don't ignore, embrace. Lean in, familiarize yourself with and embrace the technology.

Realize the hero is you (not the machines) Become the hero in your professional scenario. Own the productivity improvements. Contribute to the strategic directions and real value creation. Leave the tactical stuff behind. Your CFO will love you. Your CEO will respect you.

Recognize the real risk here. It lies in ignoring the potential ML brings to turbo-charge your company's audit effectiveness, financial performance, and the careers of the people involved, including you.

As a finance professional, do you find this argument for the informed, confident, and swift adoption of ML-enabled solutions more appealing than threatening? If 'yes', then it has succeeded! And remember, the strongest Terminator of them all was on OUR side!