

Artificial Intelligence, Business, and Epochal Change

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Background

Ongoing developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) indicate that machine learning technologies will not simply match, but will potentially significantly surpass, a wide range of human cognitive abilities (Bostrom, 2014; Sproule, 2025). Given this trend, there is reason to believe that AI could threaten humanity's hegemonic, agentic, positioning (Bengio et al., 2025); that it could be a driver of civilizational, epochal change (Whelan, 2021: 175-182). Business actors occupy a unique dual-position within this context. First, as leading architects of AI development, high-tech corporations are rebuilding the organizational structures, labour markets, and human-machinic assemblages (Whelan, 2019) that will define social existence for decades to come by impacting upon such fundamental concerns as democracy, peace, and human flourishing (Danaher, 2016, 2019; D'Cruz et al., 2022; Susskind, 2023). Second, the institution of business and markets as a whole, will also find itself the subject of transformative forces (LaGrandeur & Hughes, 2017; Schumpeter, 1976) that it cannot control *despite* the fact that certain actors therewithin – e.g., high-tech corporations – have given rise to them. AI developments that impact on matters of governance and control, energy demands, and the competitive viability of entire industries/labour forces, are thus transforming the business landscape. Indeed, they threaten to undermine widespread assumptions regarding organizational agency and accountability, and raise difficult questions as to who or what might fill such (responsibility) voids.

Major Themes

With this context in mind, the Special Issue aims to develop conceptually sophisticated perspectives on the dual-position that business occupies with regards to artificial intelligence and epochal change. Rather than focusing on lower, more specific, levels of analysis – e.g., AI and organizational efficiency, AI and human resources, AI and privacy – we invite submissions that seek to account for the full richness of AI's impacts by adopting a higher-order point of view. The reason why is that, as a general purpose technology (e.g., Eloundou et al, 2023), AI will have existential impacts that shape all aspects of daily life (Whelan, 2021: 33-34). Consequently, we encourage submissions that employ a philosophical interdisciplinary approach (Ibid.: 10-12) so as to further our understanding of the two positions that business occupies with regards to AI and epochal change, and which we respectively outline in more detail below.

The Ideologies Driving AI Business Development

Alphabet, Amazon, Anthropic, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and OpenAI are all leading players in AI development given the immense knowledge capital they can direct (e.g., computer scientists), and the significant technical resources (e.g., hardware) they have at their disposal. Further to these US luminaries, other corporations from other parts of the world – such as China's Alibaba and DeepSeek, India's Ola Group, France's Mistral, and the UK headquartered Synthesia – are similarly seeking to be at the frontier of AI developments in the years ahead. Such corporate actors all have a strong tendency to instrumentally converge on financial wealth as a means by which to realize grander goals (Bostrom, 2014: 109). But if we are to understand these grander goals, and the contours of technolgocial development more generally, then we need to identify and explicate the cultural, moral, and political

ideals that inform them (Levy, 2010; Turner, 2006, 2009; Phillips, 2012). In particular, we need a much fuller understanding of the ideological presumptions (Greimas & Courtés, 1982: 149; Johansen & De Cock, 2018) that underlie the shifting fears and desires of the world's corporate and political elite (Levy, 2025; Shah, 2023). As it stands, the business and society literature has only just begun to offer the conceptual tools that can explicate how these considerations inform high-tech corporations, and frontier AI developments in particular (den Hond & Moser, 2023; Whelan, 2019, 2021). Consequently, if the field of business and society is to make fuller sense of the ideologies, policies and practices that inform corporate led AI developments, and that society may well need to redirect, then the further enrichment of such conceptual tools is needed.

The Transformative Effects of AI on Business, Markets and Society

The internet is widely recognized to have transformed business and societies. Indeed, commerce, search, and meeting platforms are now so ubiquitous that it can be difficult to remember how people managed to conduct any business at all prior to their proliferation. Whilst significant, these differences between the pre- and post-internet era could pale in comparison with those being created by AI (Kissinger, 2018; Schmidt, 2025). This is because AI can massively increase the capacity for individual humans, or groups of humans, to accomplish various tasks; and because AI can do things that humans have little (or no) hope of doing by themselves. Generative AI, for example, is proving transformative for those employed in the fields of communication, creation and information: e.g., coding, filming, illustrating, writing (McKendrick, 2024; Walsh, 2024). More radically, and further to their having transformed the ludic practice of Go (Whelan, 2021: 175-180), AI advances made by the Alphabet owned DeepMind have had effects akin to an 'earthquake' within the biological sciences given their capacity to predict protein structures (Callaway, 2022). Thanks to the role they played in these later advances, DeepMind's Demis Hassabis and John Jumper were awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2024. That same year, the former Google employee Geoffrey Hinton also won the Nobel Prize for Physics for his foundational work in the deep learning field (NobelPrize.org, 2024). The awarding of such prizes clearly illustrates the immense AI power that the megacorporation Alphabet wields. Furthermore, such prizes point towards AI having widespread and profound impacts on business, markets, and society as a whole. Such awards thus highlight what we suggest is the, relatively unique, dual-positioning of business with regards to AI and epochal change: they point towards the ways in which business must be conceived as both an agent that creates, and an agent that needs to account for or react to, (general purpose) technological advances. But unlike prior examples of (general purpose) technological advances in which business has occupied a dual-position (e.g., the steam engine, or even the internet), the AI technologies that are now being developed suggest the unprecedented emergence of superintelligent agents that can plan and strategize by 'themselves', and that are concerned – like many, if not all, humans – with self-preservation (Bengio et al, 2025; Bostrom, 2014). Suffice it to note that business and markets, and the societies and cultures of which they form apart, could be radically transformed in the coming decades as a result of this emergent agentic entity.

Potential Topics

In seeking conceptual works that can advance our understanding of AI, business, and epochal change, submitters may consider addressing one or more of the substantive concerns mentioned below. Importantly, the topics listed are suggestions. We thus remain open to theoretically informed submissions addressing other relevant considerations, or whose substantive concerns are framed in different ways.

Conflict, Competitive Race Dynamics, and the Risk of New Agents

- Speed versus safety in the rush to develop (super-intelligent) AI
- Competition and conflict over AI resources
- Defense, offense, and critical AI infrastructure
- (Rogue) AI and principal-agent misalignment
- AI and 'responsibility gaps'
- Existential threats and AI

Corporate Agendas, Embodied Politics, and Shifting Ideologies

- AI and the implicit/explicit embodiment of political goals and values
- Corporate elites (e.g., owners/founders) and the control of AI
- Corporate governance within the AI political context
- Ideological conflict in the era of AI
- The algocratic and epistocratic underpinnings of AI developments

Energy, Environment, Resources

- AI and planetary boundaries
- Environmental justice and AI
- The global south and the AI workforce
- Resource creation, extraction and commodification in the era of AI
- AI and exosomatic energy use

Human Values and Well-Being

- AI and the changing value of human labour and human leisure
- The possibility of human excellence and flourishing in AI impacted societies
- AI and the transformation of markets for consumption and production
- The implications of AI for how we conceive and value human rights, democracy and justice
- AI and peace

Submission Process

Submissions must fit with the aim and scope of *Business & Society*. To understand the fit with the journal's scope, vision and expectations related to rigor and contribution, we strongly encourage authors to refer to editorial insights published in *Business & Society*. A collection of these is available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/topic/collections-bas/bas-1-editors-insights/bas>. All manuscripts must be uploaded via the journal's online submission system (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bas>) between September 1 and September 30, 2026. Please specify in the cover letter that the manuscript is for the special issue on "AI, Business, and Epochal Change". All submissions will be double-blind peer-reviewed by multiple reviewers. Interested scholars are welcome to contact the corresponding guest editor, Glen Whelan, UQAM, Canada, whelan.glen@uqam.ca.

Preparing Your Submission

Manuscripts should be between 7,000-12,000 words, including tables, figures, and references. Manuscripts should be prepared following the Business & Society author guidelines (<https://journals.sagepub.com/authorinstructions/BAS>). We can only consider submissions in English. If your first language is not English, financial support may be made available by *Business & Society* for translation on a case-by-case basis. Please write to the SI editors with your request.

The guest editors will organise an online paper development workshop. The online pre-submission workshop, where authors can present their ideas and receive constructive feedback, will take place in April/ May 2026 (further details will be announced in due course through *Business & Society* website). Interested scholars should send an extended abstract to the corresponding guest editor (Glen Whelan, whelan.glen@uqam.ca by (date TBA). The abstracts must not exceed 1,000 words, references excluded, and should address the following points: (a) the phenomenon of interest and its theoretical and social relevance, (b) how existing literature fails to explain the phenomenon, and (c) intended contributions to the literature. Attending the workshops will not have a bearing on the editorial process, and is not a prerequisite for publication in the special issue.

Special Issue timeline

Online pre-submission workshop (participation optional): April/May 2026

Submission window open from September 1 – September 30, 2026

Online post-submission workshop (tentative, participation optional): January/Ferbruary 2027

ABOUT THE GUEST EDITORS

Glen Whelan is at ESG-UQÀM. He serves on the editorial boards of *Business & Society* and *Business Ethics Quarterly*, and is Special Issues Editor at *Journal of Business Ethics*. His research and writings are informed by a philosophical perspective that focuses on how high-tech corporations, and other businesses, transform moral, political and social norms.

Gabriel Weber is a professor in the Department of Economics, Law, and Society at ESSCA School of Management. He is the academic director of the MSc in Sustainable Management & Social Impact program at ESSCA School of Management. His research interests include ecological economics, planetary boundaries, sustainability transition, energy policies, and climate change. Gabriel has published more than 30 contributions in books, book chapters, and international scientific journals such as *Ecological Economics*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, and *Business & Society*. He is lead guest editor for a Special Issue on Business and Environmental Justice in *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Yann Truong is a Full Professor at ESSCA School of Management, Lyon, France specializing in innovation management, artificial intelligence, and strategic management. He earned his PhD from The Open University in the United Kingdom and holds an HDR (Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches) from École Polytechnique in France. Prior to his academic career, he held management positions in finance in New York and in the pharmaceutical industry in Lyon and Shanghai. In April 2023, he was appointed Director of MSc and International Programs at ESSCA, where he oversees the development of specialized master's programs, including those in artificial intelligence management and sustainable management. At the same time, he is conducting specialist research into artificial intelligence and is interested in the impact of this class of technologies on organisations and societies from a socio-technical point of view. Dr. Truong has an extensive publication record, with numerous articles in high-impact journals. Notably, his work has been featured in the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *Research Policy*, *British Journal of Management*, *Information and Management*, and *International Journal of Production Economics*.

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