

Dawn to Daylight

Reflections of a Consultant in the AI Era

By Shaun Kao





This thought-piece follows on from RCP Associate, Shaun Kao's, previous entry, [Dawn of A.I.: A Paradox of Efficiency and Wisdom](#), with a narrative shift to first-person in a bid to describe AI's impact on his work life and the world around him over the past two years. He ends with a prediction of AI and its impact on our industry in 3, 5 and 10 years.

Preface

If you're reading this, you're stepping into my mind for a while, a passenger to thoughts and reflections that have shaped my experience as a consultant in the age of AI. What follows isn't a grand theory or a universal truth; it's simply a window into how I've processed the twists and turns of the rapid change over these past three years. I've tried to capture the moments that surprised me, challenged me, and sometimes even unsettled me.

If you come across anything profound or insightful here, chalk it up to serendipity rather than design. My only aim is to share what I've seen and felt, openly and honestly, in the hope that my reflections might resonate with anyone else navigating this strange yet bright new world

"Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light"

— Dylan Thomas

A New Dawn

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has woven itself into everyday life.

I start my workday now in a way I couldn't have imagined a couple of years ago. Instead of diving straight into a cluttered inbox, I first consult an AI assistant over my morning coffee: prioritise these, flag that, draft me a response. It's 2025, and this has quietly become the new normal. I wasn't always so comfortable letting a piece of software help manage my day, but since 2023, **generative artificial intelligence (AI) has woven itself into everyday life in profound ways**, and I'm far from alone in this experience.

One Microsoft survey found that about **75% of knowledge workers worldwide are now using AI tools at work¹**. That adoption surged practically overnight. Nearly half of those people only started using AI in the six months prior to the survey. I was one of the hesitant ones at first, but as I found out, *the change was less a tidal wave and more of a rising tide that you needed to learn to swim with, or be swept away.*



From Sceptic to Believer

My turning point came one hectic afternoon in early 2023. I had 80 pages of incident reports to summarise by morning, a task that usually kept me scrambling late. Out of curiosity, I tried ChatGPT: I pasted in the convoluted reports and asked for a summary. Within seconds, it produced a clear overview. I refined a few details, sent it on, and the next day my manager called it “*really thorough work*.” Little did he know I’d had a little help.

That small victory sparked a question: ‘Am I becoming obsolete?’ Determined not to fade away, I leaned in. Drafting emails was quicker with AI handling the basics, and spreadsheets became easier with its troubleshooting; it was like having an on-demand expert. AI didn’t just speed me up, it gave me back hours lost to busywork.

I soon learned I wasn’t alone. A co-worker admitted she was secretly using ChatGPT to draft monthly reports, laughing, but with a trace of guilt. Her hesitation echoed a broader trend: surveys show

52% of employees who use AI at work feel reluctant to admit it, worried it makes them look lazy or replaceable¹.

I’d felt it too, wondering if relying on AI meant I was ‘cheating’ or ‘forgetting how to do things myself’.

Yet, any stigma about ‘using AI’ didn’t stop the momentum. In fact, many employees weren’t waiting for company approval or training – they just jumped in.

A striking **78%** of AI users have been “bringing their own AI” tools to work¹, whether or not IT had sanctioned them.

I found that both amusing and telling. It reminded me of when smartphones first became ubiquitous and people would use personal devices for work emails before companies caught up.

We saw the same bottom-up adoption with AI. RCP rolled out guidelines, mainly about protecting data and privacy. But for the most part, leadership was playing catch-up while employees forged ahead. An RCP employee survey we ran in early 2024 showed that **more than 70% of our staff used one (or more) AI tools on a daily basis**.

So, RCP embraced the change, and gave everyone access to enterprise AI tools.



From Assistant to Collaborator

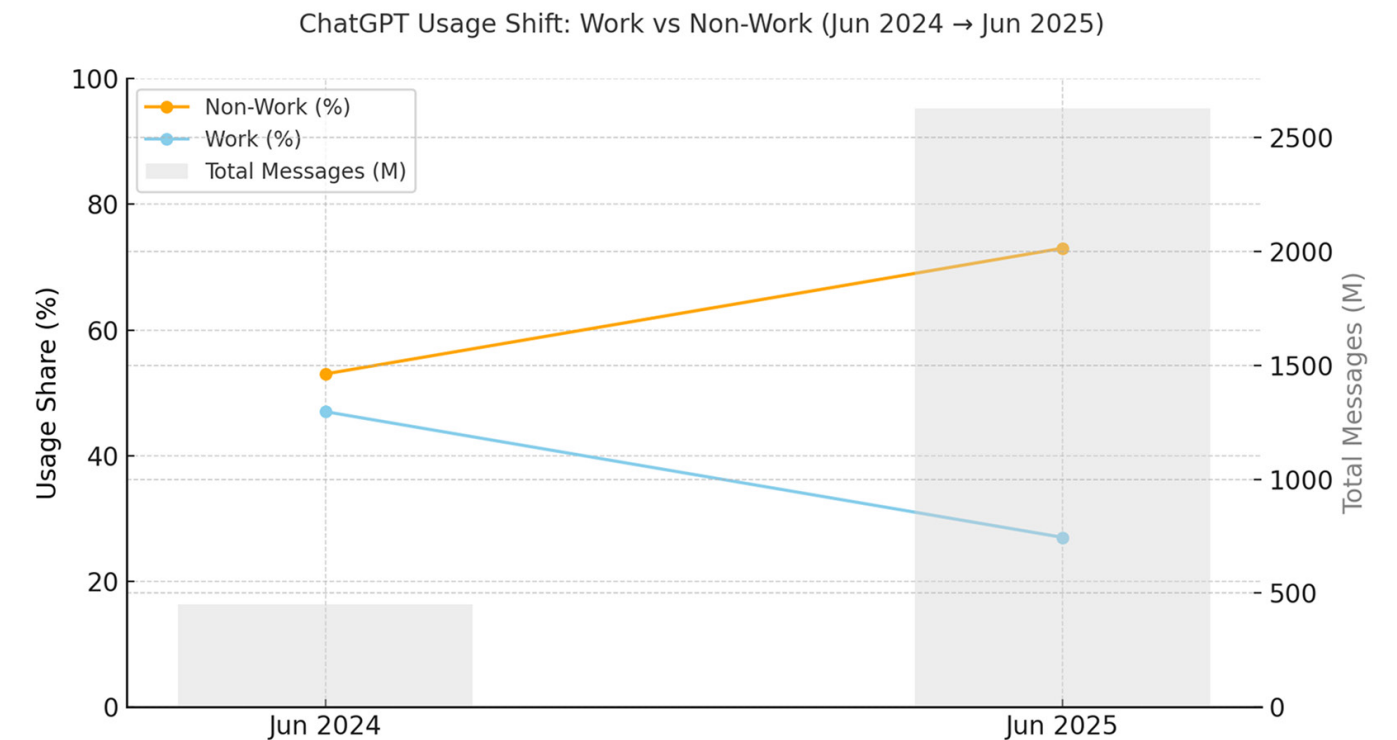


Figure 1: Shift of 20% from Work to Non-work ChatGPT usage.

Two years ago, I mostly saw AI as a work tool – a digital assistant to grind through reports, tidy up spreadsheets, or draft that tricky client email. But somewhere along the way, the lines blurred. What began as “AI at the office” quietly bled into everything else: planning vacations, drafting wedding toasts, even helping me explain capitalism to my toddler. And that’s not just me: OpenAI released a study showing that ChatGPT use has shifted heavily from work toward personal use.

Non-work use jumped from **53%** in June 2024 to **73%** in June 2025; now making up the majority of activity³.

For me, AI has become a steady companion. About half the time, I turn to it for advice, and the rest just to bounce around ideas or ask random questions. The research really drove home how concentrated ChatGPT use actually is.

Roughly **80%** of all interactions fall into just three categories: practical guidance, seeking information, and writing³.

And within that last one, the big reveal is that about two-thirds of “writing” isn’t fresh generation at all, it’s editing, translating, or refining text people already wrote. This flips the narrative: most of us aren’t outsourcing our words, we’re co-authoring and polishing with AI as a second set of eyes. In other words, AI hasn’t replaced my work or my voice, *it’s slipped into the role of collaborator, the quiet co-author shaping both the serious and the everyday parts of my work and life.*



A Day as an AI-Assisted Consultant

By now, using AI throughout my workday felt as natural as using my phone. To give you a sense of how deeply it's integrated into my workflow, here's what a typical day looks like for me:

Morning email triage

AI now prioritises my inbox and drafts responses to routine queries, saving me about an hour each morning.

Meetings and notes

An AI assistant transcribes meetings and generates summaries of decisions and action items. This frees me to focus on discussions and provides organised notes within hours, replacing what used to be a day-long task.

Research and writing

For research or report drafting, AI quickly gathers relevant information and helps brainstorm; I refine the output, cutting work from days to hours.

Abstract tasks

When developing pitches or strategy documents, I use AI as a sounding board to spark new ideas and clarify my thinking. I've learned to use these AI-generated ideas as a thought-incubator rather than a final solution.



Reading that list, I'm struck by how ordinary it all sounds. Each of those activities represents a significant change in how I work, yet it all blended in so quickly that I hardly noticed the day I stopped doing things 'the old way'. And I'm not alone: **one MIT study in late 2023 found that tools like these can speed up many tasks by about 40% or more².**

What's been (unfortunately) fascinating is how quickly these efficiency gains shifted from novelty to necessity. *The frantic energy of trying to get things done has been replaced by a challenge to do better, more creatively, at a higher standard.*



Breaking Silos and Bridging Generations

Perhaps the biggest change I've witnessed is in the subtle shifts in office culture and collaboration. In one global survey by Microsoft,

53% of workers said they worry that using AI for important work could make it look like anyone (or any AI) could do their job¹.

That worry isn't entirely unfounded; there have been headlines about companies automating roles. In fact, about

23.5% of US companies reported they have directly replaced some employees with AI tools in the past year or so⁴.

So, there's a very real undercurrent of "*Could this tool make me obsolete?*" that people often don't voice aloud. This anxiety has affected how we collaborate.

A few months back, a colleague I'll call Pablo, pulled me aside. He's a brilliant Project Manager with two decades under his belt, but the constant buzz about AI left him uneasy. "*I feel like a dinosaur,*" he admitted. "*Am I supposed to reinvent myself?*" His honesty struck a chord. Out of that conversation, a few of us stepped up as AI Champions, sharing prompts, swapping tips, and simply being there for anyone finding the change overwhelming.

What surprised me most was how quickly some of our seasoned colleagues took to it. In fact, a few of them embraced AI with more curiosity and enthusiasm than the younger crowd. It's a reminder that *no matter how advanced the technology, empathy and support among colleagues are still key to making it work.*

Another observation is how roles within a team are subtly changing. In the past, mentorship was typically older-to-younger, but now I'm seeing a two-way street: a young staff might teach a veteran manager how to set up an AI to draft an initial business case, and in return that manager imparts industry knowledge or life-skills that the younger staff lacks. This cross-pollination of skills has enriched our collaboration. It feels less hierarchical.

The people who thrive are not just those with experience,

but those **willing to learn** and leverage AI; often times the intern and the executive are learning side-by-side.



Balancing Output with Outlook

Productivity hasn't always felt like a gift. More often, it's something measured, scrutinised, even exploited. With AI in the mix, I've noticed the pressure ramp up: the faster I work, the more I'm expected to take on, as if every hour I save is just space for another task. It's a treadmill effect – running faster only to stay in place. A recent employee survey by Microsoft echoed this:

68% said they struggle with today's pace and workload, and nearly half admitted to feeling burned out¹.

It seems that as tasks get easier, organisations don't lighten the load, they raise the bar.

I've learned that to truly benefit from AI, we need to set boundaries and redefine productivity, in human terms. For me, that means if AI gives me a little slack in my day, I try to reinvest some of that time into reflection or connecting with my colleagues (or okay, sometimes just a proper lunch break). It's not always possible when deadlines loom, but it's a mindset shift I'm attempting.

After all, what's the point of boosting productivity if we don't also boost our well-being or the thoughtfulness of our work? The point of productivity isn't just doing more; it's doing better and creating space for a better life along the way.



Losing our Edge

A major downside I've noticed is how easy it is to let AI do the hard work. Whenever I stopped actively engaging with what AI produced, my memory and mental sharpness declined, as if a fog had settled over my mind. A recent MIT study has demonstrated that over time, **people who frequently outsource writing to AI exhibit weaker brain connectivity patterns (e.g. in alpha and beta bands, brainwaves essentially), indicating reduced mental engagement⁵.**

In laymen terms, if you stop engaging and let AI take over, your ability to think, learn, and create will slowly **erode**, leaving you reliant on the very tool meant to assist you.

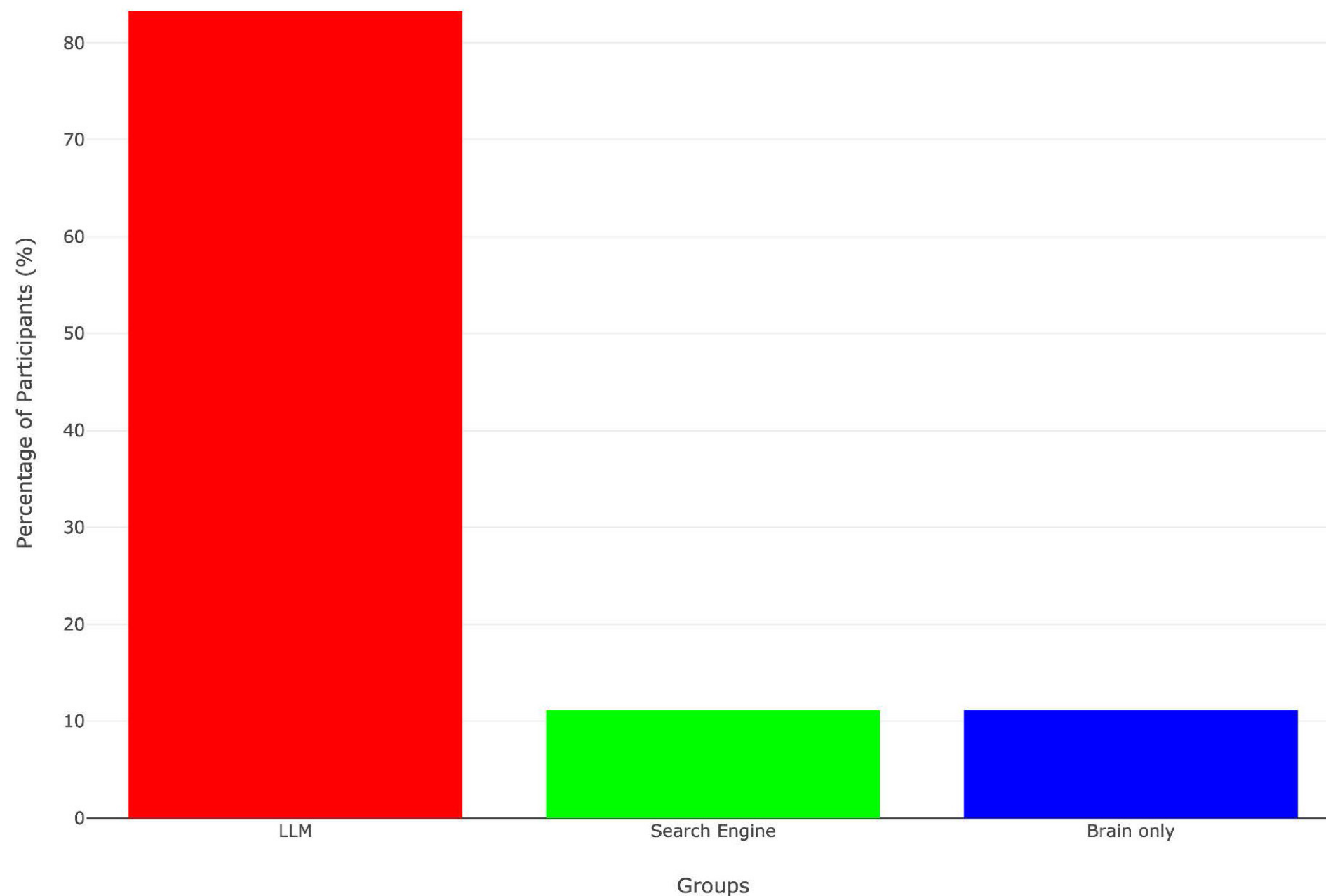


Figure 2: Percentage of participants who struggled to quote anything from their essays.



From Dawn to Daylight

The next 3, 5 & 10 years



In September 2023, I penned (rather bombastically), “The Dawn of AI: A Paradox of Efficiency and Wisdom,” as AI was just starting to appear in my field. Back then, I couldn’t fully predict the impact it would have, although I suspected major shifts were on the horizon.

In my article, I explored how AI opened new avenues for efficiency and offered access to vast amounts of information on-demand, but I also reflected on the possible downside – the erosion of human wisdom.

Now, two years later, with greater experience and perspective, I can clearly see the ways AI is transforming our industry.

AI is no longer a novelty; it’s a new medium and has woven into the very fabric of our existence.

Like the smartphone or the internet, it’s changed the way we live and work.

In the words of John Galbraith (an American economist), “we have two kinds of forecasters, those who don’t know and those who don’t know they don’t know.” I’m probably straddling both dinghies right now – but life’s more exciting when you try to anticipate it.

So, here's my take on the next 3, 5 and 10 years of AI in our world.

By 2028 (3 years)

- ♦ **AI assistants (or agents)** become standard for daily tasks (meeting notes, scheduling, document drafting), much like email is today.
- ♦ **Industry software integrates AI features**, such as BIM auto-generating designs and Aconex flagging errors instantly.
- ♦ Knowledge professionals (engineers, architects, lawyers, etc.) will **prefer value-based fees rather than time and cost basis**.
- ♦ Major construction sites in Australia/NZ pilot **AI-powered drones and cameras** to monitor safety and progress.
- ♦ Staff receive AI literacy training; new roles like **"AI Project Manager"** emerge to facilitate the bridge.
- ♦ Companies using AI effectively begin to see **faster project delivery and lower costs**, gaining a definitive advantage over competitors.

By 2030 (5 years)

- ♦ **Generative design and planning** become mainstream as architects, engineers, and planners routinely use AI to rapidly generate and evaluate multiple design options and regulatory constraints, reducing early design and consenting phases from months to days.
- ♦ **Integrated project intelligence** emerges, with a 'Project AI' monitoring and analysing real-time project data to forecast risks and suggest mitigations, enabling proactive, data-driven project management.
- ♦ **Semi-autonomous construction** becomes common, with robots and automated machines handling repetitive or hazardous tasks, such as AI-guided cranes and robotic mules, improving safety and addressing labour shortages.
- ♦ New service lines are created, such as **'AI Labs'** that produce AI team members, and shifts job roles toward AI-worker resource management and AI facilitator.

By 2035 (10 years)

- ♦ **The construction lifecycle is augmented by AI**, with AI embedded in every phase, including market analysis, cost benchmarking, design collaboration, consenting, construction coordination, and facility management through real-time digital twins.
- ♦ **Autonomy on job sites** as robots and drones manage repetitive and high-risk tasks under remote human supervision, allowing humans to concentrate on problem-solving, adaptability, and quality control.
- ♦ New roles such as **"Construction AI Manager"** and **"Digital Project Supervisor"** become standard, while traditional jobs shift towards robotics maintenance and on-site troubleshooting, making upskilling an ongoing necessity.
- ♦ **International AI building acts/codes** may emerge, with regulatory approvals streamlined by AI-verified compliance and legal frameworks evolving to address liability and safety concerns.
- ♦ **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)**, and probably Aliens revealing themselves to save us from extinction (maybe – don't take this part too seriously).

Crossing the Event Horizon

As you may have guessed by now (or not), I'm a big fan of Christopher Nolan's 'Interstellar' released in 2014 (must've watched it at least 40 times by now, that's 4 times per year!). For those unfamiliar, Interstellar follows a team of astronauts who journey through a wormhole in search of a new home for humanity as Earth faces ecological collapse and extinction. At its core, the film is about humanity's struggle against the unknown; more aptly, our willingness to risk, to endure, and to transcend fear in pursuit of survival and meaning beyond the boundaries of our world.

At the end of the day, the story of AI in modern work life is really a story about people. It's about how we adapt, what we fear, what we aspire to, and how we support each other through change. I've learned to be more open about my own journey, sharing both the cool AI tricks that saved my neck and the moments of doubt I've had. Why? Because it helps my friends and colleagues do the same. There's a new kind of camaraderie in comparing notes on how we 'teamed up' with our AI tools. We're all pioneers in a sense, and that's an exciting place to be if we remember that we're all in it together – all on the same pale blue dot (Carl Sagan, good book) zooming through the vast abyss.

The past two years or so has convinced me that AI is reshaping work life for all, but it doesn't have to erode what makes work meaningful.

My professional identity has evolved, not vanished.

My team dynamics have shifted, but in many ways grown stronger through adaptation. And my day is still filled with problem-solving and human connection (now with an AI sidekick handling the rote bits). Occasionally, I'm surprised with a clever insight that shatters my world view (yet again).

Ultimately, I've come to see this less as a story of humans versus machines, and more of humans and machines, working side by side.

It's a partnership that continues to redefine what a 'workday' means, and in the process, it's also redefining what it means to be a worker.

And, if we steer our spaceship right, we might just redefine it for the better – making our lives not only more efficient, but more rewarding and balanced than before.

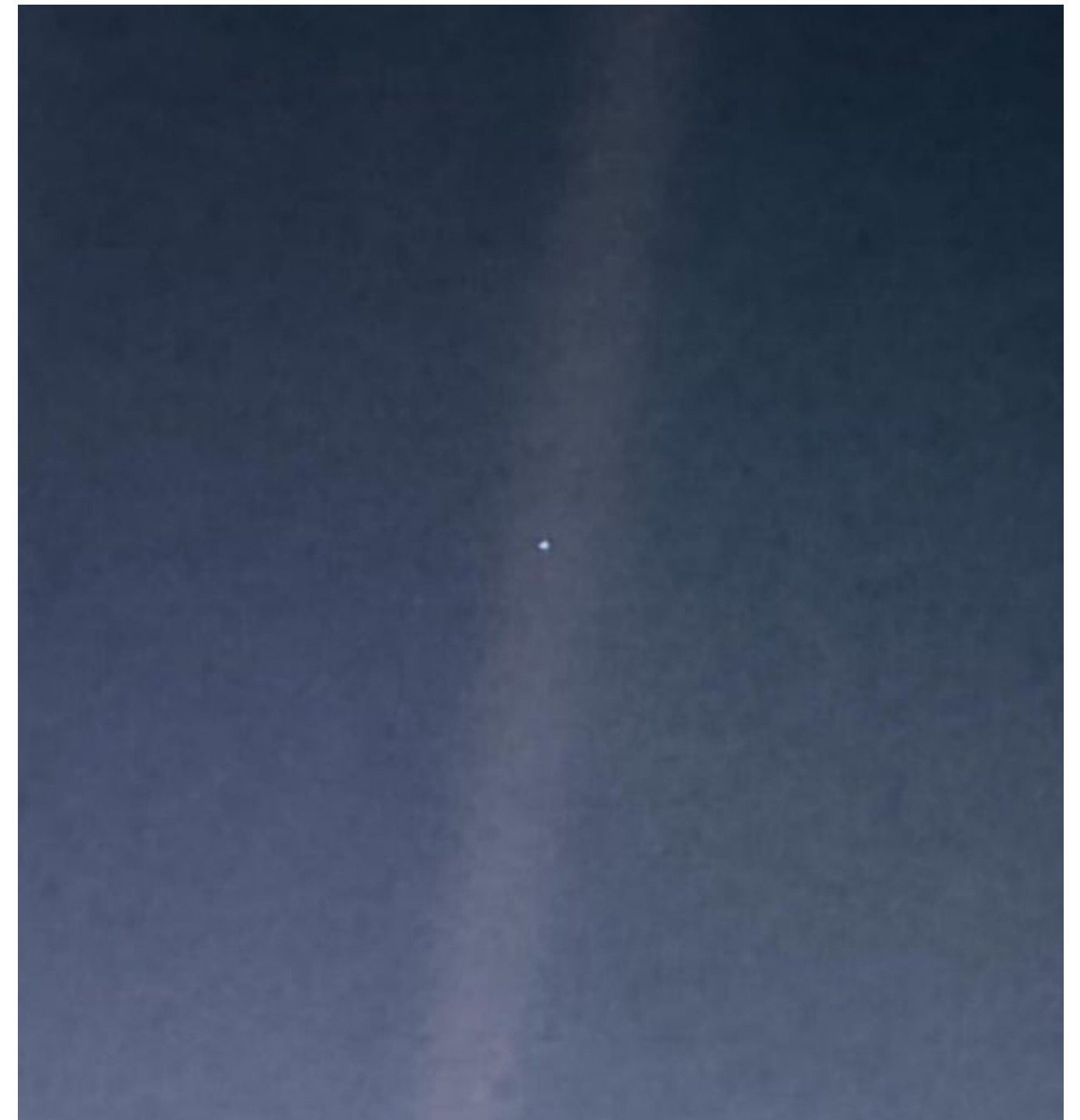


Figure 3: "Pale Blue Dot" - NASA, Voyager 1 looking back at Earth from beyond Neptune (1990)

Thus, I leave you with a final thought;

"Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light".



Postface

We are making strategic investments in Artificial Intelligence to enhance service delivery and project efficiency for our clients. As part of this commitment, RCP's Managing Director, Jeremy Hay recently completed the executive education course 'Leading the AI-Driven Organisation' at the MIT Sloan School of Management in Massachusetts, USA.

This marks an exciting step forward as RCP embraces the opportunities of AI to drive innovation across the construction industry. Stay tuned for updates as we continue to lead through this transformative era. If you're interested in exploring how AI can be applied in construction, we'd welcome the opportunity to connect.

Sources

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