



Unboxing Future of Work

Season 2

Episode 3: The AI Checklist for Success

[Audio Transcript]

Vijay Navaluri: This is Vijay talking from Unboxing Future of Work. I have Andreas Welsch from SAP, he is an AI thought leader. He's here to talk about some really interesting stuff - demystifying some myths in the AI space. And I'm looking forward to have a very exciting conversation with Andreas. Andreas welcome.

Andreas Welsch: Fantastic, thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate the opportunity to join you today.

Vijay Navaluri: Great! Andreas, if you can just give us a quick introduction about yourself- where you're from, what you do, what you like, what's your new passion, stuff like that?

Andreas Welsch: So hey, I work for SAP one of the largest business application vendors in the world. And I help our customers get more value out of automation, that we embed in our applications. So, I'm really passionate about the space of AI and automation and the potential that it brings.

I've been in this space for about six years, working with customers, hands on, very early on, when we were starting to see that hype of 'What is AI? What is Machine Learning? What is RPA?' How is all that different from how we used to build software and how we used to use software, and what are the opportunities. All the way to the internal roles, bringing AI and automation into our core products, with the intent of creating more value for our customers.

And now I have the opportunity to also bring all of that together and keep an eye out on the market - what's happening with our customers and what are they asking for from us and help influence how SAP builds these products. And like sitting on LinkedIn, for about the last year or so I've been creating content daily on how you can set up your AI program and your AI CoE and what you should consider there. So, be on the lookout for #intelligencebriefing and daily content on that.

Vijay Navaluri: Amazing! And these are exciting times for AI. It's in the very infancy stage and especially on the enterprise side. There's so much happening on the consumer side. I'm sure AI is becoming a natural part of most of the enterprise solutions as well, whether it's in the health care, finance and many other industries. So, what really excites you? I mean, you've been in sales, you've been in product, now you are in marketing. So, what excites you and what are you really looking forward to?

Andreas Welsch: So, okay, I started my career in IT. And we were a relatively small department at a growing company. But in relation to the company, IT was really stagnant in terms of head count. So, we needed to automate a lot of the procedures and needed to test them and make sure that they're robust. So, this notion of automation is something that I professionally have grown up with.

And so, seeing the opportunity that we now have, and that we can bring to businesses and business-users and making their lives easier because of AI and automation is fantastic. I think, specifically, because there's so much data that already lives in a company's business systems, and enterprise systems, and there's so much more data coming in every day, every hour, every minute. And it's just getting harder and harder for people to analyze all of that and make sense of it. But even though it sounds cliché, the world is changing faster than ever.

So, making sense of all these changes and how they impact your business and how you should act and not just react is the key here. So, providing these tools and means to business users to make better decisions, smarter decisions, faster decisions and seeing that being rolled out at scale, is something that excites me and it speaks to my IT heart.

Vijay Navaluri: And I could see your passion there. I'm sure you're a firm believer of AI adding value. And there's so much hype about what works, what doesn't work the value v/s the hype and the cost to you....the total cost of ownership around AI and automation.

So, what's your point of view about what's hyped versus what's reality today. And how do you really go about, if you're a leader in an organization looking at leveraging AI as a differentiating value provider or disrupting something that you're doing in the market? How do you really go about it? What's your kind of checklist that you should ask these guys to follow, to ignore the hype and really focus on the value?

Andreas Welsch: I think you're making an excellent point. Looking traditionally at this AI topic and the AI market, there is indeed a lot of hype there and a lot of promise. Now, over the last couple of years, I would say, as people in companies have done these projects, and proof of concept, it's become evident that not everything is as quick and easy and simple as it seems. Because every time you want to build a custom AI model, or run a project, it's dependent on the data that you have and a lot of times the data is pretty messy.

So, on the technology side, I would say, make sure that you select the right data that you do have, clean data to work with. But even more importantly, AI is always a people topic. And it's a topic of change management, most of all, as well. Because what I've seen is, traditionally, software has been

programmed rule based, you have an idea of why something happens, you can maybe look at logs of what has happened and why. But with AI being more probabilistic and making predictions, it's not as black and white. And so that aspect of trust in why does this AI system think it knows a lot better of how to do my job than I do, when I've done this for 10-20 years, is really important.

Also, AI introduces some kind of a risk and uncertainty because of those predictions, because they're not 100% black or 100% white, but sometimes a little grey in between. So how do you communicate that to your end users? I think it's very important as well. But tech is one and people is another, but I think that the most important one at the very top is - what's actually the business value we want to create? Where do we see an opportunity? Is it to reduce costs? Is it to increase revenue or sales or improve our margins? You know, maybe giving product recommendations or bundles of products so you can increase your sales. There's just some examples like that.

But really be, first of all clear about what do we actually want to achieve? What are our business objectives? How do we get people on board and get them to buy into this vision that this is actually here to help you and then do we have the data and the foundation to make that happen?

Vijay Navaluri: Absolutely. So, start with the why and the what and then get into the tech, and look at what you've got, whether you've got what it takes to do it or not, I think which is the data and the talent, obviously, to get there. So nicely put, thanks very much. This distils sort of complexity around and anxiety around starting AI as a huge hype project. But all you need is - have a straight business objective and look for the data that can help you really build the machine learning models or doing an automation project or any of those AI branches.

So, there are two schools that we've been looking. So, there are vendors who championed intelligent automation and there are a lot of followers. And it is a very crowded market today.

So how do you see the adoption today in terms of where it is? And where do you see it going? What's the plan? What do you think is the kind of an AI nirvana or the automation nirvana for an end customer. What does their end success should look like...so that they can have an end in the mind before they start their journey and really look forward to it.

Andreas Welsch: So, I see AI and automation really as a journey. And really depending upon where companies are in their own journey, in their transformation and in their maturity. Some start with automation and look for some quick wins, build momentum, build that awareness around change management and what it means if a piece of software now takes care of a task or a component of work that a person has been doing so far.

So, you know, what I mentioned around the people-change management-trust component, and then build on top of that. Because if you have a running bot that works well and you do get good value out of it, and you can show the hard facts, it's a logical next step to say- how can we tag AI onto that? For example, things like intelligent document processing, meaning extracting information from documents and put that into a workflow or into our business system, could be sales orders, can be invoices. Just the fact that there are so many papers based or even digital paper based documents still today is mind boggling. But there's so much opportunity there as well to do that. And then from

there take the third step and say, now we've done RPA, we've added AI, let's look into some more complex cases that are just based on AI.

Vijay Navaluri: That's very interesting that what you mentioned there, start with the low hanging fruits. It could be some simple automations for you to get the confidence, it could be a gateway to bring in more complex value driven work, leveraging AI, Machine Learning, which also goes through the chain management process of people. And also, you have to look at our data assets. The more value you want to derive the complexity slowly starts growing up. So, you're suggesting that start with something smaller, which does not need big change management, does not need a lot of big data. Get those basic things automated, and then start building on top of it to - going a little bit more intelligent or add more intelligence to the automation over the time.

Andreas Welsch: Correct. Actually, there's actually a second perspective that I would like to add in this. A lot of times we hear people talking about whether they do AI, but what does doing AI actually mean? There are so many different flavors of doing AI, it doesn't always have to be a custom AI model that you built. So again, depending on where you are in your journey and your level of maturity, maybe already using AI in an existing business application that you have license or subscribe to also ticks the box for using AI and you still have that change management around it. And you don't need to build it from scratch. But do you have the right data? Can you use it?

Again, how do you build that end user trust? All of these things stay the same without the complexity at the bottom of 'what technology should we actually use? And how do we do this? And do we have enough data scientists in-house? Or where do we get the expertise from?' It might even be as simple as using a chatbot for maybe some internal IT processes to start with or maybe for customer service if it's external. Is it still doing AI? Not super complicated. You don't need to start from scratch, especially with a lot of the low-code, no-code tools available today. Still ticks the box for doing AI? So keep that in mind as well would be my advice.

Vijay Navaluri: Absolutely. And I would ask a tongue-in-cheek question to you. What's your belief about a robot for every person. Do you think is it first of all, possible? Is it needed? And what's your version of it?

Andreas Welsch: So personally, I see AI and automation as an augmentation of people and people's ability to do their work more efficiently and more effectively. Whether there is one bot per person or depending on the task, it's three or five bots, depending on how granular they are or how specific they are. I think that's a different story.

But I would typically look at it in the context of a business process. And looking at this business process from start to finish and see where are the opportunities. Maybe there are some opportunities to put a bot in place that downloads an invoice from a vendor invoice portal, uploads it to a business system, use AI to extract that information with intelligent document processing. And then maybe there are some manual steps and somewhere in at the end, maybe there's another bot

that sends an email or whatever it may be. So, in somebody's work or daily work, there might be more than one bot per person that you need. But I wouldn't fixate so much on whether it's one bot or any bots, or whatever the metric is, I think the key part is really, what is the business value that you're able to achieve in that end-to-end business process and end-to-end view and context.

Vijay Navaluri: I've seen you contributing a lot on LinkedIn, and I could see you love sharing information and you simplify it so well for a lot of non-programming audience. I see you doing a newsletter, you do a lot of LinkedIn content, just wanted to learn more about what are the things that you do and what you're planning to do?

Andreas Welsch: More than happy to. So, for me sharing information on LinkedIn has also been a journey. It's been a personal journey over the last 18 months. And I've met so many great people out of this automation and AI community over the last couple of months, that it's really inspiring to see how they can, or how much collective knowledge there actually is around the topic. Much like yourselves in the conversation that we're having today. So, I think it's a fantastic opportunity overall, and a fantastic platform to connect and to share that information and learn from each other most of all. Because everybody has kind of a different perspective or some additional information to add to it. So, the more complete the picture it gets.

For me, I actually started live streaming about two months ago. So if you have heard of something called 'What's The Buzz', that's the name of my show, where I invite both thought leaders as well as practitioners on for about 15-20 minutes every other week and ask them to share with the audience what their journey has been like in RPA, in automation. How they see things evolving, and most of all, make it concrete with an example of one use case that they have built and what has helped them build this successfully, or maybe even where they failed and why. So, really make it tangible and make it valuable for the audience, because I think there's so much out of the possible out there. And for many businesses, the out of the possible is still pretty impossible, because there's so many steps just leading to it. So well, it's great to see and to hear what you could be doing. Personally, I find a lot more tangible to see what you can actually do already with minimal effort and what others have done. So again, the value of community and sharing information goes there as well. I have a newsletter as well. It's called 'The Memo'. So, make sure you get the memo. It's three topics-three minutes to read every third Wednesday on the topic of AI, and how you can build your AI program.

Vijay Navaluri: So, it's 'What's the Buzz' and 'The Memo'- the two things to follow for audience to get all these AI bytes, and also get a lot of knowledge not just from yours, but the community's. The kind of interesting stuff people sharing. I think this is a fantastic community. If you look at the way that AI automation community is building around. I have some favorite people. You're one of them. And we all believe in sharing is caring here. And this industry, this technology industry definitely needs it. Because it's very in the early stages. And as you rightly said, for a lot of them, out of possible is still impossible. So, it takes a lot to bring the change management and also the right usage of using technology and demystify the hype.

Great! Thanks Andreas. And so, we will go towards some fun stuff now. So, I just ask question, you just have to answer it quickly. And it's going to be simple stuff for you.

Vijay Navaluri: Your favorite book?

Andreas Welsch: Favorite book... 'Competing in the Age of AI' was something that I've read recently. And it was great to see examples from leading companies around the world and how they have made AI core to their business. So, it's the one that comes to mind, I would really recommend reading it.

Vijay Navaluri: I've got to read that one, too. Yeah. What is the first app that you use?

Andreas Welsch: LinkedIn

Vijay Navaluri : Oh, is it?

Andreas Welsch: It is.

Vijay Navaluri: You get up and look into LinkedIn. LinkedIn is getting better.

Andreas Welsch: Fully committed.

Vijay Navaluri: Not Facebook? Not some news? All LinkedIn?

Andreas Welsch: All LinkedIn.

Vijay Navaluri: Oh, awesome. Who's your favorite creator? Who do you follow? Who do you think is somebody's really cool, a cool creator, or somebody inspiring to you?

Andreas Welsch: So last year, I watched a lot of YouTube in the first quarter to learn about audio and video and setting all this up. So, one of my favorite creators on YouTube is Caleb Pike, he does a lot of the tech reviews, but also good information on gear and set up and these kinds of things.

Vijay Navaluri: Amazing. And little bit tricky question, who is your favorite colleague, or boss, or mentor?

Andreas Welsch: There's so many. I think we're coming up on time.

Vijay Navaluri: So, I always end with one very important, but very relevant question in current times, Andreas. So there's so much technology coming in, different trends coming in - future of work, hybrid workforce, great resignation, all that is happening around us. So, for somebody who is coming into the workforce, joining, coming out of the college, it's too overwhelming to understand what's happening, and where to go. So, what normally would be your advice, how to...for somebody who's just joining the workforce, how to go about it, how to not get carried away by what's happening, but put your feet on the ground, and head on?

Andreas Welsch: So, I believe there's so much to learn whether you're just getting out of college, or you've been in the workforce for a while. And the thing I believe is key is being curious and staying curious. There's so much that one can learn all around you, whether it's in the department you're in, or it's meeting other colleagues in different departments and hearing about that part of the business, how they work, what challenges they might face. Connecting with others and just treating it like a sponge soaking all up the information that you get all around and try to make sense of it. And the second part that goes along with it is: be curious and ask questions. There's so much knowledge all around you. And unless you ask questions, you're missing out on a lot of that knowledge that is available. So, learn, or be curious, learn. And don't be afraid to ask.

Vijay Navaluri: Amazing, amazing. I think I was reading somewhere who said, "What AI can never automate is - staying curious." They can never be curious. It has to be made curious by somebody else. So, I think that's a skill that humans will continue to have.

That's where we end here. And Andreas it's great to have you and amazing talk. There were a lot of simple but effective and good useful tips about how to go about AI and where to follow you and keep looking for more bytes of knowledge and keep talking keep learning keep sharing.

Andreas Welsch: Perfect. Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

[Outro]