

Can AI have a Gut feeling too?

When Experience and Intuition suddenly become calculable



A few days ago, I was visiting my lovely family up north again. At some point, I was sitting in the kitchen with my brother and, somehow, we ended up talking about artificial intelligence and maritime pilots. For us, that's not such an unusual topic. I grew up right on the coast and come from a true seafaring family. Ships, captains and pilots were simply part of our lives. The sea was never a holiday backdrop for me. It was home. Even my school was right near the beach.

At some point, I asked my brother: Could AI one day replace a maritime pilot? His answer came immediately. No! You can't calculate that. A pilot needs to have a feel for the ship, my brother explained. For the wind, the current, the speed, the distances. But above all, for those situations when things don't go according to plan. Theory won't help

you then. You need experience. Intuition. A gut feeling.

I disagreed. Not because I believe that tomorrow AI systems will be guiding ships through the Kiel Canal like unmanned vessels, with no people needed on board, but because another thought wouldn't leave me alone: **What exactly is a gut feeling?** Is it really this mysterious human ability that lives somewhere deep inside us? Or is it sometimes simply the result of experience? A kind of internal calculation. So perhaps it is a calculation after all?

A person experiences thousands of different situations over the course of decades. They see what works. What can go wrong. Which tiny signs indicate a problem. At some point, they no longer need

to think about it for very long. They just “feel” it. And that was where our discussion became interesting. Because if experience develops from a vast number of situations we have lived through, what happens when artificial intelligence can analyse not thousands, but millions of comparable situations? My brother stuck with his no. I stuck with my maybe. Then we changed the subject, because right now, no one can give us a reliable answer anyway. But we both had our own gut feeling about it, haha. I wonder what my dad, as a maritime pilot, would have said.

Since that conversation, I’ve started noticing how often I hear similar statements: AI can’t replace experience. The assistant has known her boss for 15 years. Two words are enough for her to realise that today is probably not the best day for anyone to walk in with another problem. The tradesman hears a faint noise and knows something isn’t right with the machine. The sales assistant recognises whether someone wants advice or simply wants to be left alone. The caregiver notices a change in someone long before she can put it into words. The criminal investigator “senses” a lie from someone’s body language. An experienced employee looks at a case and says, “Something’s not right here.” Ask them why, and sometimes the only answer is: “Experience. Gut feeling.”

These are exactly the abilities that currently give many people a sense of security. AI can’t do that, they say. Maybe they’re right. But the more interesting question is: **How long can we rely on that? What if experience really does become calculable?**

AI is not only changing our working world by automating routine tasks. It is now moving into areas we long believed required distinctly human thinking: writing texts, creating images, translating, programming, analysing data, recognising patterns or connecting complex information. And that brings something else into focus. Experience. Intuition. Understanding people. Gut feeling. Our supposedly last human stronghold.

But perhaps we are making a mistake if we build our professional future around what a machine will **never** be able to do. **We should not define our value by what a machine cannot do yet.** Because none of us knows where that boundary lies. Not me. Not my brother. And probably not even the people developing artificial intelligence.

The Better Question for Our Jobs

That’s why I’m becoming less interested in whether AI will one day be able to take over an entire profession. That question is simply too big for our everyday lives. After all, a sales assistant is more than “selling.” An assistant is more than “organising appointments.” A tradesperson is more than “working with their hands.” And a maritime pilot is more than “steering a ship.”

Our professions consist of dozens of different tasks, decisions and skills. AI may become very good at some of them. Some we may do together with AI. And some, perhaps, AI will never do. So for our own working lives, a much more concrete question becomes important: **Which parts of my work might change – and what will I do with the rest?**

That may sound less spectacular than asking whether AI will eventually replace entire professions. But for millions of people, it is probably the more important question. We don’t need to know today what our working world will look like five years from now. We just need to stop tying our sense of security to the word “never.”

Because even if experience becomes increasingly calculable one day, everything you have experienced, learned, worked for and felt will come with you into the new world of work. Your experience and intuition will not become worthless. You may simply need them in different ways than you do today. Because for now, we humans still meet each other, listen to each other, trust each other and sometimes, we still trust our gut feeling.

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