MOMENTUM

Leading Through Intelligent Automation

Redesigning Roles, Decision Rights, and Culture as AI Reshapes Work

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Executive Summary

Intelligent automation is rapidly changing how work gets done, but deploying artificial intelligence (AI) alone does not make an organization more effective. As automation absorbs execution and accelerates insight, the real leadership challenge shifts from efficiency to design: redefining how roles create value, clarifying who decides what, and shaping a culture that rewards judgment and impact over activity.

Organizations that lead well through intelligent automation recognize that technology is a forcing function, not a solution. AI exposes long-standing ambiguities around contribution, accountability, and autonomy. Leaders who respond intentionally – by redesigning roles around outcomes, rebalancing decision rights between humans and systems, and reinforcing trust-based cultural norms – turn automation into an advantage rather than a source of disruption, even as their organizations scale.

Overview

AI and automation are often introduced as productivity tools: faster analysis, fewer manual steps, more efficient workflows. While those benefits are real, they are also incomplete. What intelligent automation actually does is surface questions many organizations have postponed answering:

- If execution is automated, what is the human role?
- When insights become readily available, who still decides?
- If work becomes less visible, how is contribution recognized?

Rather than gradually evolving roles and expectations, automation accelerates the need for clarity. Informal systems break down. Inconsistent interpretations of "value" become visible. Leadership judgment must be explicit.

In this environment, the organizations that struggle are not those lacking advanced tools, but those that fail to redesign how *people* work alongside those tools.

The Challenge

When automation outpaces leadership design, the results can be subtle but devastating. Many leaders underestimate the organizational impact of intelligent automation. When technology improves faster than the leadership systems surrounding it, tension can result in three common areas:

- **Role Confusion**

  As AI takes on drafting, analysis, coordination, and reporting, traditional role definitions – typically built around effort and execution – lose relevance. Employees sense that expectations have changed, but leaders do not always articulate what replaces the work that technology now performs.

- **Decision Bottlenecks**

AI can surface options, patterns, and recommendations instantly, but it cannot own responsibility. Without clear decision rights, organizations oscillate between over-reliance on AI output and unnecessary human approval layers that slow progress.

- **Cultural Friction**

  Greater transparency and automation can feel like loss of autonomy. When expectations are unclear, structure is mistaken for control, and trust erodes – particularly if performance measures lag behind how work actually gets done.

Left unaddressed, these tensions show up as disengagement, resistance, or an unproductive focus on tools rather than outcomes.

Momentum Perspective

At Momentum, the expansion of AI and automation surfaced a problem many organizations quietly struggle with: our existing performance measures were no longer keeping pace with how work was being done. As automation reduced manual effort and increased access to insight, traditional indicators of productivity – activity, visibility, and execution volume – became less meaningful as proxies for value.

Rather than treating this as a tooling issue, we recognized it as a leadership one. We framed our core question not as "how to measure more," but as "what to measure differently." If automation was removing friction and accelerating output, then contribution could no longer be defined by effort alone. We needed performance expectations that reflected impact, judgment, and intent while still maintaining clarity, fairness, and accountability across roles.

This realization led to a deliberate redesign of our core performance metrics – emphasizing added value with flexibility in how that value is expressed.

For example, the expectation for consultants became explicit: consistently add value to Momentum beyond baseline execution. This expectation now applies across a growing population of consultants, even as the nature of their work varies by client, contract, and career stage. We did not prescribe a single definition of what that value must look like. Contribution can and does take many forms – strengthening client relationships, identifying risks early, supporting peers, shaping opportunities, or contributing to internal initiatives. The metric itself is consistent, but its expression is intentionally flexible, grounded in role context and professional judgment. This flexibility has allowed the model to scale while remaining meaningful at the individual level. By allowing consultants to self-select their own value-add activities, while holding a consistent expectation for impact, we were able to increase overall engagement with Momentum itself. Over 60% of consultants have self-selected into value-add tracks, reflecting active engagement with Momentum beyond their client responsibilities[1].

As this shift took place, the limits of traditional management models became more visible. Our Senior Managers were no longer simply overseeing delivery; they became the primary connection between consultants and Momentum itself. We redefined the Senior Manager role to focus on sustained engagement rather than transactional oversight, allowing the

[1] Momentum, Inc., Master Consultant Tracker, consultant self-selected track data (Contributor and Growth). Internal company data.

team to support a larger consultant population without increasing layers of approval or administrative control. On average, consultant teams increased in size by 15% while maintaining the relationship-focused Senior Manager model – demonstrating that the approach could scale to larger consultant teams without adding additional management layers[2]. Today, Senior Managers at Momentum maintain proactive engagement across a growing consultant base, with expectations calibrated to relationship quality, coaching frequency, and issue prevention rather than reactive intervention.

This shift requires Senior Managers to operate with greater intentionality and visibility. Relationship-building, coaching, and sustained engagement became explicit leadership responsibilities rather than informal or "invisible" work – reinforcing accountability for outcomes that automation cannot replace.

From the consultants' perspective, this shift addressed two tensions at once. First, it created shared clarity about expectations while avoiding task lists that had quickly become outdated. Second, it reinforced trust: employees are evaluated on the impact they deliver, not whether their work fits a rigid definition of productivity.

Across roles, the common thread was a shift away from activity and toward outcomes as the measure of success. We had to be clear about what was changing, and why. We also had to acknowledge and work through some discomfort. We were changing long-standing assumptions about "good performance."

By addressing these challenges directly, we avoided a common automation trap: layering new technology on top of outdated performance models. Instead, AI and automation became accelerators for more thoughtful role design, clearer decision ownership, and a culture rooted in trust and accountability.

In this way, automation amplified rather than diminished human value. Sense-making replaced task completion. Judgment outweighed volume. Relationship-building became a core leadership responsibility rather than an invisible activity. Contribution became both visible and meaningful without becoming prescriptive.

The result is a performance model that scales with automation instead of being eroded by it. As Momentum's consultant population and leadership layers have grown, we have maintained shared expectations, reduced reliance on task visibility, and strengthened engagement without adding unnecessary hierarchy. Automation did not replace leadership – it clarified where leadership mattered most and forced intentional decisions about contribution, engagement, and accountability at scale.

Implications

Leading through intelligent automation requires intentional design in three areas:

1. **Redesign roles around outcomes, not tasks**

[2] Momentum, Inc., Master Consultant Tracker, SM Counts, comparison of average Senior Manager team size 2025-2026. Internal company data.

As execution becomes automated, leaders must answer a harder question: what is this role accountable for in terms of impact? Roles should emphasize judgment, prioritization, coaching, risk identification, and value creation – work that technology cannot own.

2. **Clarify decision rights alongside AI adoption**

   AI should accelerate decisions, not obscure ownership. Leaders must define where AI informs, where humans decide, and how accountability is maintained. This includes making escalation paths explicit and normalizing when human judgment overrides automated insight.

3. **Reinforce a culture of trust and contribution**

   Automation increases visibility, but visibility without context undermines trust. Culture must reinforce that contribution is evaluated based on outcomes and intent, not strict task completion. Psychological safety becomes a leadership discipline, not a soft value.

Key Takeaways

- Intelligent automation is a leadership challenge before it is a technical one.
- AI exposes gaps in role clarity, decision ownership, and cultural norms.
- Redefining contribution early prevents automation from creating confusion or resistance.
- Consistency in expectations does not require uniform expressions of value.
- Leaders who design intentionally – roles, decision rights, and culture – turn automation into a strategic advantage.

About the Author

Amy Townson is the Director of Service Delivery at Momentum, Inc., where she focuses on designing leadership systems, performance models, and engagement strategies that scale alongside organizational growth and emerging technology. With deep experience in management consulting, product and project delivery, and workforce development, Amy helps organizations align roles, decision rights, and culture to deliver sustained outcomes. Her work centers on helping leaders navigate complexity, particularly as automation and AI reshape how value is created, by translating strategy into practical, people-centered operating models.

About Momentum

Momentum, Inc. is a management and technology consulting firm focused on helping organizations move forward with clarity and confidence. We combine technology expertise with a people-first approach to deliver transformation that is practical, sustainable, and aligned to real business outcomes.

Our core service areas include:

- Management Consulting
- Process Improvement
- Product and Project Management
- Implementation Support

We partner with clients across public and private sector organizations to bring structure, clarity, and execution discipline to initiatives ranging from strategy through implementation.

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