

Beyond the Algorithm: Ignatian Discernment and Trust-Based Leadership in the Age of Generative AI

Generative artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming how organizations make decisions, manage talent, and structure work, yet technological progress does not automatically translate into human progress (Kolvenbach, 2001; IAJU, 2023). Current deployments often reinforce a “paradigm of control” characterized by exhaustive measurement, continuous algorithmic supervision, and optimization of individual tasks, with significant hidden costs for trust, dignity, and retention (Bates, 2015; Brusoni et al., 2020). In this context, Jesuit business education, grounded in *cura personalis*, *magis*, and a commitment to justice, offers a distinctive framework for re-imagining leadership formation so that AI serves integral human development rather than subordinating people to metrics and models (Arrupe, 1973; Kolvenbach, 2001; IAJU, 2023).

Building on recent work on the Inspirational Paradigm for Jesuit Business Education, which calls for holistic, value-driven executive education that integrates ethical leadership, reflection, and social responsibility (IAJU, 2023; Porth, Lee, & Buller, 2021), our research proposes Ignatian discernment as a concrete decision-making practice for leaders operating in AI-mediated environments. Executive MBA programs—both globally ranked and those within the IAJBS network—have traditionally emphasized strategic analysis, global exposure, and measurable career outcomes (Houldsworth, Brewster, & McBain, 2016; Li et al., 2021; Tate, Subedi, & Maheshwari, 2019), but only partially integrate ethical reflection, social justice, and spirituality across the curriculum (Gigauri, 2021; Whelan, 2021). At the same time, Jesuit-inspired lifelong learning frameworks stress that leadership development must cultivate self-awareness, critical reflection, and a sustained commitment to the common good throughout the executive

life course (Arrupe, 1973; Garanzini & Michael, 2023; Jarvis, 2009; Lowney, 2003; Ashley, 2006). Taken together, these insights suggest that business schools need new pedagogical architectures that explicitly train leaders to govern algorithms rather than be governed by them.

Conceptually, our research contrasts two archetypes of AI-enabled management that emerge in debates on digital transformation, inclusive development, and organizational control (Autor & Price, 2013; Brusoni et al., 2020). In the paradigm of control, AI is deployed as a “digital overseer,” reducing human discretion and prioritizing short-term efficiency gains, even at the risk of deepening inequality, eroding autonomy, and concentrating power in a few firms and countries (Moog, 2019; OECD, 2019). In the alternative paradigm of trust, AI informs but does not replace human judgment; data illuminate choices, but leaders, shaped by ethics, context, and care for people, make the final decisions (Kolvenbach, 2001; Ryan & Jacobs, 2012). This trust-based approach reframes AI as a partner in human–machine collaboration and measures success not only by productivity, but by shared purpose and integral human development (Kolvenbach, 2001; Ashley, 2006).

The core contribution of our research is a three-pillar framework for executive formation that operationalizes Ignatian discernment in the age of generative AI: (1) Ethical Discernment, (2) Talent Orchestration, and (3) Digital Cura Personalis. First, Ethical Discernment translates the Ignatian practice of reading reality through “context–experience–reflection–action” into an AI setting by proposing the formula “Data – Context – Values → Wise Decisions” (Ryan & Jacobs, 2012; Van Hise & Massey, 2010). Before enacting algorithmic recommendations on hiring, firing, lending, or resource

allocation, leaders are asked to interrogate the human reality behind the numbers and to surface whose needs are being served, who gains, and who is excluded (Kolvenbach, 2001; Moog, 2019). Second, Talent Orchestration offers criteria for deciding what to delegate to algorithms (repetitive, high-volume, rule-bound tasks; large-scale pattern detection) and what to reserve for people (creativity, empathy, critical judgment, ethical responsibility), framing leadership as the composition of a “human–machine symphony” rather than the replacement of workers (Brusoni et al., 2020; Hager & Halliday, 2016). Third, Digital Cura Personalis extends Jesuit care for the whole person into digital work environments by integrating emotional well-being, clarity of purpose, continuous formative learning, and moral reflection into executive education and organizational design (Bates, 2015; Field, 2018; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Methodologically, our research adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach informed by a systematic reading of the Inspirational Paradigm documents, Jesuit pedagogical literature, and comparative analyses of EMBA programs worldwide and within the IAJBS network (Garanzini & Michael, 2023; IAJU, 2023; Li et al., 2021). We synthesize insights from these sources with reflections on AI, digital learning, and executive education that insist on placing the human person—not profit, power, or technological capability—at the center of all decisions (Arrupe, 1973; Kolvenbach, 2001; Ashley, 2006). The analysis then derives concrete curricular implications for EMBA and executive programs, including structured modules on AI ethics and discernment, reflective practices grounded in the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, and project-based learning where participants redesign real organizational processes to move from control to trust (Field, 2018; Hager & Halliday, 2016; Van Hise & Massey, 2010).

The anticipated contribution is twofold. For leadership and organization studies, our research offers a normative yet actionable account of what it means to lead with discernment in AI-intensive contexts, highlighting how Jesuit categories can enrich current debates on algorithmic governance, surveillance, and organizational culture (Moog, 2019; Ashley, 2006). For Jesuit business schools and the broader EMBA field, it provides a design blueprint for programs that aspire to be globally competitive while remaining faithful to a mission of forming “men and women for others” capable of steering generative AI toward inclusive, just, and sustainable outcomes (Arrupe, 1973; IAJU, 2023; Kolvenbach, 2001).

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