

Impact Recap

Highlights and outcomes from your Chamber events



AI: The Agentic Era, and Human-Centric Business

The AI Luncheon explored Artificial Intelligence as the next major technological revolution and examined what its rapid evolution means for businesses, organizations, and individuals. Moving beyond today's productivity tools, the session focused on the emergence of the Agentic Era, where AI systems are capable not only of thinking, but of acting independently to execute complex tasks. The discussion emphasized that while AI will dramatically increase efficiency, long-term competitive advantage will be shaped by leadership, adaptability, and the willingness to rethink how work is done.



The luncheon featured keynote insights from Shawn Kanungo, a globally recognized innovation strategist and bestselling author, known for helping organizations navigate disruption and harness generative AI as a competitive advantage.

Hey Highlights

1. AI Is Entering the Agentic Era

Since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, most AI adoption has focused on incremental productivity gains such as writing, summarizing, and analysis. The next phase, expected to accelerate in 2026, is fundamentally different.

- AI agents will be always on, able to make decisions and execute tasks independently
- Agency exists on a spectrum, from simple automated workflows to fully autonomous systems
- This shift enables small teams to achieve outsized, billion-dollar-scale impact
- The greatest advantage in an AI-driven world will come from bold ideas and human judgment, not technical expertise alone

AI is no longer just a tool, it is becoming an active participant in business operations.

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2. AI Will Change Work, and Challenge Identity

Rather than focusing solely on job displacement, Kanungo reframed AI as taking on work humans were never capable of doing: continuous auditing, massive-scale analysis, and complex cross-system execution.

At the same time, the AI revolution presents a deeper challenge, one of professional identity. As roles evolve, success will depend on the willingness to let go of past definitions of expertise and embrace reinvention.

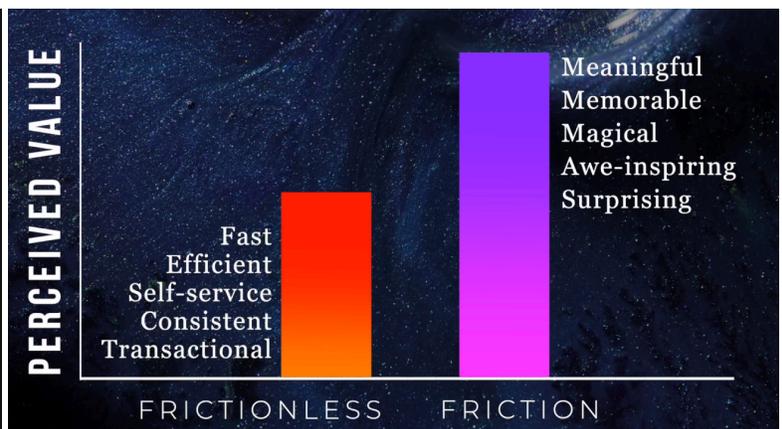
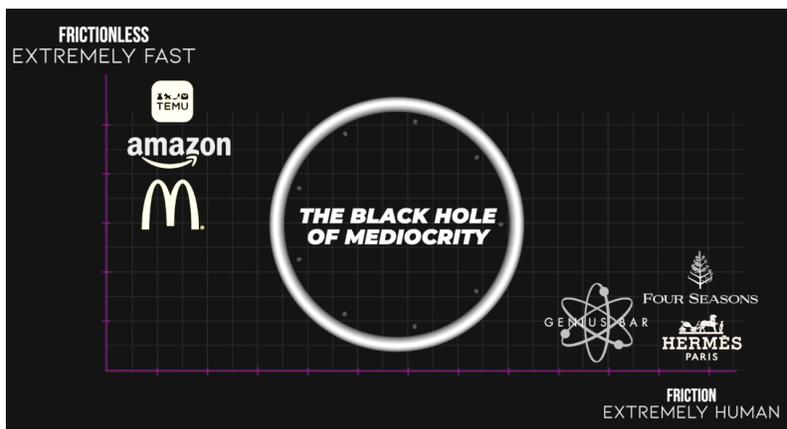
“Because what got you here will not get you to the next stop. It will not get you to the next mountaintop. You need to be able to disrupt yourself - to reimagine, to be a rookie again.”
– Shawn Kanungo

3. Two Winning Business Models Will Emerge

As AI drives efficiency toward near-perfection, organizations will succeed by choosing one of two clear strategies:

- Incredibly fast and frictionless
- Speed, convenience, and seamless execution (e.g., Amazon)
- Deliberately slow and deeply human
- Experiences that prioritize care, trust, and memorability (e.g., The Four Seasons, Apple Genius Bar)

Kanungo emphasized that being “somewhere in the middle” will become increasingly difficult to sustain.



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4. The Rise of the Agentic Enterprise

Traditionally, organizations were built around processes, with people fitting into predefined roles. AI now enables a reversal of that model.

- Organizations can be built around people, not processes
- Personalized AI agents can amplify individual strengths
- The future model is people first, amplified by AI

This approach reframes technology as an enabler of human potential, not a replacement for it.

5. Practical Applications Demonstrated

Kanungo showcased real-world, immediately applicable AI use cases:

- Custom application development:
 - A Netflix-style onboarding platform built through simple prompts using tools like Gemini and Lovable
- Always-on AI engagement:
 - A 24/7 multilingual AI agent created for the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce using synthetic voice and likeness
- Advanced financial modeling:
 - Synthetic data used to build complex performance analysis through plain-language commands with "Claude for Excel"

These demonstrations reinforced how quickly ideas can move from concept to execution in the agentic era.

Broader Implications

Trust, Friction, and Human Connection

As AI-generated content becomes increasingly indistinguishable from reality, the session highlighted the growing challenge of eroding trust. Deepfakes, sophisticated scams, and synthetic relationships will require organizations and individuals to be more skeptical and intentional.

In this environment, friction becomes valuable, the human moments that create meaning, loyalty, and trust. Brands will increasingly be defined by experience, not messaging.

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From Technology to Leadership Responsibility

When powerful AI becomes widely accessible, advantage shifts away from knowledge and toward boldness, imagination, and judgment.

"AI is no longer a future consideration, it's a leadership responsibility. Businesses that engage with it thoughtfully and proactively will be far better positioned than those waiting on the sidelines."

*– Dianna de Sousa, President & CEO,
Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce*



What This Means for Business

- AI rewards organizations willing to rethink processes from the ground up
- Leadership mindset matters as much as technical capability
- Small teams now have access to infinite leverage through AI agents
- Long-term advantage comes from combining human creativity with intelligent automation

Why This Matters for Fort McMurray & Wood Buffalo

As AI reshapes how work is done, the region's business community has an opportunity to lead, not by chasing trends, but by thoughtfully integrating new tools, reimagining operations, and investing in people.

Shawn Kanungo reinforced a clear message: those who act early, learn continuously, and lead with intention will be best positioned to navigate disruption and unlock long-term growth.

Explore more insights and resources
from Shawn Kanungo [here](#).