Age of With ™ Podcast

Episode – 1 A conversation with Beena Ammanath

From Deloitte India's AI practice, this is the **"Age of With™".** A podcast series that looks at the evolution and coming of age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), where humans *with* machines work together to harness its full potential.

In these conversations, we unpack the full impact of human intelligence working *with* machine intelligence. Its application across businesses─speed *with* precision. Its value in solving real life problems─insight *with* purpose. Its correct use in building a better world─ethics *with* accountability.

The technology is smart, but we make sure the way it's used is smarter.

Here's your host, Prashanth Kaddi.

Prashanth Kaddi: Hello, my name is Prashanth Kaddi, and I'm a partner at Deloitte's Data and AI practice in consulting.

Today on the **Age of With™,** we have Beena Ammanath. Beena is the Executive Director of the Global Deloitte AI Institute and leads Trustworthy AI and Ethical Tech at Deloitte.

Beena, to give an introduction, is an award-winning leader with extensive global experience in AI, big data, data science, and IoT. She thrives on realising and imagining how AI and technology can make our world a better place for everyone. I'm really excited to speak to Beena, particularly on AI, its applications, the importance of ethics, and last but not the least, women in AI.

Beena, welcome to the show.

Beena Ammanath: Kaddi, thank you so much for having me on your show. I'm excited to be here and speak to your audience.

Prashanth Kaddi: Fantastic! So, AI is not only such a vast area, but it's been around for so long, and recently has been evolving so rapidly across the globe, across communities, governments, geographies, et cetera. So, there's just so

much that's being said. How is the Deloitte AI Institute, which you lead globally, how are you looking at advancing the role and understanding on harnessing the power of AI?

Beena Ammanath: As you know, prior to Deloitte, I used to work - I was a CTO for AI at Hewlett Packard enterprise, before that at GE and British Telecom, a number of product companies. And one of the challenges that I saw was really the focus on the applied AI side.

So, Deloitte AI Institute is really focussed on being able to make sense of this highly complex and dynamic evolving AI ecosystem, because there are start-ups, there are thought leaders, there is academic research, there is privacy and regulations.

There is so much happening in the AI space. But when you are a company, when you are looking to use AI within your organisation, there is no one place you can go and see, which start-ups are the real deal and which are just PowerPoints.

Which are the academic research areas or the researchers who are doing work that's relevant to my organisation. What are the regulatory or new regulations that's coming into play? What are some of the best practices? What are some of my competitors doing?

Having a pulse on the market or in my industry, but also, to be able to learn from other industries on how they're applying AI.

So, there's a lot for companies who are on their AI journey to learn from each other, because we live in this very complex dynamic AI ecosystem.

And at Deloitte AI Institute, we help organisations make sense of this AI ecosystem with the focussed lens on applied AI.

Prashanth Kaddi: What would some focus areas or some areas where we've made a telling difference be? Maybe a couple of examples.

Beena Ammanath: Yes. Yes. So, we recently put out an AI dossier, which the team worked on for the last eight months or so to really identify. We went industry by industry and looked at what the current AI use cases are and what are some of the emerging and future AI use cases that companies should be aware of.

If you take a look at it, it is an AI dossier for the financial sector, for technology, media, and telecom companies and it at least gives companies that are starting out, or even well on their journey, a sense of where AI is heading in their industry.

The other annual report that we do is called State of AI in the enterprise and we just released the fourth edition. That is also looking at the adoption of AI. What are some of the companies that are well ahead in their AI journey? What are some of the best practices that they can share so that others can learn and accelerate their own AI journey?

We also focus on some of the softer, fuzzier areas of AI beyond value creation, which is really focussing on the ethics aspect.

Because ethics tends to get this very fuzzy and philosophical discussion, and we really want to make it applicable for enterprises and for companies so that they in a structured way, see that it can be applied within the organisation. Also, look at it from a diversity and inclusion lens on how you can make sure that AI teams are as diverse as possible.

Prashanth Kaddi: On diversity, I think one of the topics where we are seeing a lot of value and traction as well, is women in AI, in our own teams.

You've been a global technology leader, and you've also been a great advocate for representation of women in the development of AI.

What are some of the reasons that beyond being the right thing to do, is also the smart thing to do?

Beena Ammanath: Yeah. And you know, it's a subject very close to my heart. So, I actually started my own non-profit, which Deloitte supports fully, it's called Humans for AI, and it is specifically focussed on getting more women and underrepresented minorities into AI.

I'm going to totally date myself here, but when I was studying, AI was more in theory. We didn't have access to a computer, the massive amounts of data. And even at that time, we saw there were not as many women in coding or in technology, and I've always been an advocate for it. But once AI started becoming real and applicable in the world, and as I was setting up my own AI teams, I noticed that we were not getting enough women to join AI teams, they were not studying AI. They were not really getting into these careers. And for

me, it reached a point where I realised that if we don't get diversity into AI, we will not be able to reach the full potential of AI.

Here's why I say that, because as you know, AI takes on our human biases and we all are biased but, that's what makes us human and unique. It's a good thing to be biased because otherwise you and I would be exactly the same.

But we don't want, no matter how great I think I am, I don't want the AI I build, to be just with all my biases. So, we need that diversity. And what I realised is that diversity only comes in when you have diverse teams; your AI will be only robust, if that team is diverse. And it does tend to be that women are not as much in AI as they should be. And for AI to reach its full potential, we need more women in AI.

We at Deloitte are focussing on a number of initiatives around it. In addition to the non-profit work that I shared with you, we put out a Women in AI report. And we are in the midst of launching a big programme around the specific initiative to get more women interested in AI.

Here's the beauty with AI, Kaddi, unlike traditional programming, you can be a part of AI without actually coding because AI is so much about, to some extent, encapsulating human intelligence and domain knowledge.

You can be a woman, who does the design for the AI solution, a product manager, project manager, the QA, the tester. There are so many roles that women can be part of in AI, without actually that deep math or technology knowledge. And I think that's the opportunity that AI actually provides.

I feel if we put in some energy behind this, we can actually equalise. We can solve for gender equality with AI.

Prashanth Kaddi: Hopefully some of the low-code platforms will enable that even faster to do core model development without necessarily being too deep into, you know, science technology and code.

The other topic that you raised. We do acknowledge that machine intelligence is here to stay. We humans can make something of it as we work with it. But being all pervasive as it is today, there is obviously machines, not only taking on our biases, but taking over a lot of things, which could potentially create hazardous situations, both in communities and businesses.

So, on the whole ethical and accountable, explainable AI, et cetera, that we talk about, how do we make AI trustworthy. How do we ensure that AI works for us the right way?

Beena Ammanath: Yeah. That's such a great question. And again, you know, something that we're just trying to figure out.

Two things that come to mind when we think about AI ethics—there's a lot of noise in the market, there are a lot of headlines out there, and you know, any ethics conversation is hard. You generally go down this rabbit hole of bias and fairness. And I think, ethics is much broader than that because, if it's a consumer-facing industry, a consumer-facing AI solution, then yes, absolutely, bias and transparency are important, but there are other ethical dimensions that you have to consider as well.

So, if you are looking at predicting a machine failure, there bias may not be as relevant as for personalised marketing, for example, or you know, patient care.

What we've done is, we think about ethics in the context of trustworthiness, so that it includes all the different dimensions. It includes bias and fairness, but also transparency, accountability, responsibility, reliability, safety, security, privacy.

So, what that gives us is a structured way to think about the different dimensions of ethics and trustworthiness. And then we are also working on operationalising it both within Deloitte and also for our clients.

Here what we do is—it's great that there is so much awareness about ethics— what we're doing is we're trying to solve for it. And we do it across three dimensions—technology, process, and people.

What I mean by that, from a people perspective, is that it is really about bringing in all the stakeholders together and aligning behind the trustworthy principles that the organisation is going to stand behind.

The next step is to provide training to every employee so that they understand the ethical principles for our company.

Then from a process side, it is making sure that your processes are able to catch some of these ethical challenges upfront.

Here's what I mean by that. What we are doing, as any organisation, any engineering team, when you're looking at a project, we focus on the ROI. What's the ROI in one year, what do we expect in five years, 10 years? Can we inject a simple one step in there? Say, what is the ROI? Great! Now let's spend 10 minutes thinking about what are the ways this could go wrong. Because this is the missing step. By just injecting that one step into your process to think about the negative implications of doing that project would help us put in the guard rails in place.

Thinking about the internal processes to proactively engage in ethical discussions and then pre-build those guard rails. And from a technology perspective, it's really about implementing the guard rails.

So, I think the ethics is a very fuzzy topic, but there's also a structure that can be put behind it. The reality is it's still developing. We live in this evolving dynamic world and everything is not yet figured out. The speed limits are not all set.

Prashanth Kaddi: Indeed. And that's, essentially what we're trying to do with the trustworthy AI framework.

So, Beena as you are aware, we've just launched the Deloitte AI Institute in India. What, from your perspective and your vantage, are some of the biggest opportunities for AI in India and how do we go about grabbing them?

Beena Ammanath: Kaddi, congratulations on the launch. It's really been amazing to watch the institute come together in India and launch. So really happy to see it happening. I think Kaddi, one of the biggest opportunities that India has is to really take AI to the next level.

I grew up in India as you know, and we are a very complex country with so many languages and dialects, and if you think from an NLP perspective, the opportunity with NLP is for us to be able to take NLP and really push the limits on it. And, you know, get all these dialects trained on models that can help NLP as a technology mature to the next level.

For example, our maps and directions; that system has been complex forever. How do we push the limits on AI again with that complexity? I think that's the opportunity I see with India and AI—to push the boundaries on AI and in a way, take it to that next level.

The other thing I will say is India, actually, has a big opportunity to take the lead on getting more women into AI. Because when I was growing up, honestly, I didn't even realise it was a problem of not having enough women in computer science because in my computer science class, there was an equal number of women and there are so many more opportunities we give out.

You know, it is not as much of a challenge for us to get more women into engineering, it is more of the retention part. So, I think if we can just put the focus around AI and the retention part, make that culturally acceptable, make companies focus on the retention part, I think there is a big opportunity to even fix the diversity challenge.

So, India, really, with our complexity and with our brainpower, there is so much that we can do with AI and there is so far, that we can take AI.

Prashanth Kaddi: Absolutely Beena, and on a lighter vein, if we can solve autonomous driving in India, I'm pretty sure we can solve it anywhere in the world.

Beena Ammanath: Exactly!

Prashanth Kaddi: Beena also, I think, for the listeners of this podcast, what we do want to know is, what are all the resources that they can access with reference to the Deloitte AI Institute and ensure that they stay updated with all the activities and reference material that exists.

So, I know there's a newsletter as well. Could we sort of point the listeners to where they could follow the progress.

Beena Ammanath: Yeah, absolutely. If you just search for Deloitte AI Institute, it should show up on the top of your list.

We have them in different languages; we have them by different regions. And you can go to the website, and it shows all the latest research from an applied lens perspective, it shows thoughts from the top thought leaders in the world.

It has the latest trends and emerging trends in AI that you can look into.

We also look at what kind of regulations are coming up across the world. We live in a world where, you know, our businesses are global and the regulations are going to be different. It's an evolving space.

Deloitte AI Institute is that one website you can go to, and you can also sign up for our newsletter and this podcast.

Definitely, follow this podcast.

Prashanth Kaddi: Thank you so much Beena for being on the show and thanks to the audience for tuning in to the **Age of With™** podcast.

Beena Ammanath: Thanks for having me.

Thanks for tuning in to another episode. Check out our AI **Age of With** page on the **Deloitte India** website for more reports, articles, and conversations.

Don't forget to tune in next time for more thought-provoking conversations with AI leaders around the world.

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