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As we forgive humans...so must we forgive AI

In the bustling boardrooms of Accra and the vibrant markets of our regional capitals, we have struck an unspoken, unequal bargain. We are a people of deep social fabric, accustomed to the frailties of our neighbors and colleagues.

When a clerk in a busy bank branch misplaces a file or a logistics manager in Tema misreads a shipping manifest, we offer grace. We call it human error - a predictable byproduct of a life lived in the fast-paced, often chaotic reality of the Ghanaian economy.

Yet, when the silicon systems we build or import falter - when an AI credit-scoring algorithm miscalculates or a digital tax-filing portal experiences a temporary glitch - our patience evaporates. We demand not just reliability, but digital perfection. This double standard is not merely a technological hurdle; it is stifling the very future we are trying to build.

The Myth of the Flawless Oracle

We treat AI as a digital oracle - expecting a state of static, error-free enlightenment. When that expectation is punctured, our reaction is often one of immediate, harsh rejection.

Consider the contrast in our financial sector: when a human teller makes a mistake, we often engage in a process of correction and reconciliation. But when an automated mobile-money platform or a fraud-detection algorithm experiences a "false positive," we are quick to label it a systemic failure, often threatening to abandon the platform entirely.

We see this "perfection trap" across our corporate landscape. From the Ghana Revenue Authority's recent push for E-VAT compliance to the sophisticated predictive models used by our leading fintechs to assess creditworthiness, there is a dangerous tendency to view these systems as binary.

If they are not 100% accurate, they are considered "broken." By holding our local innovators to this impossible standard, we risk stalling the deployment of tools that, while imperfect, could drastically reduce the operational inefficiencies that currently plague our SMEs.

The Cost of Rigid Expectations

Our intolerance for machine error has tangible consequences for the Ghanaian "Fail-Fast" movement. In our burgeoning tech ecosystem, the obsession with absolute flawlessness often forces developers into a culture of extreme risk aversion.

Engineers spend months over-tuning models to avoid any chance of a public "glitch," leading to "overfitting" - where a model performs beautifully in a controlled testing environment but fails to adapt to the messy, real-world variables of our local markets, such as our unique linguistic nuances or the fragmented nature of our informal sector data.

Conversely, look at the success of our most resilient enterprises. Those that treat initial, imperfect outcomes as necessary learning data rather than terminal failures consistently innovate faster.

When we treat every algorithmic "stumble" as a reason to scrap a project, we create an environment of fear where the "safer" choice is a rigid, limited system that never surprises us, rather than a dynamic one that might occasionally err but will eventually evolve to understand the Ghanaian context better than any imported, pre-packaged solution ever could.

A Plea for "Algorithmic Grace"

Forgiveness, in our Ghanaian spirit, is an act of recognizing communal growth potential. To forgive a person is to acknowledge that their mistake is not the sum total of their character. If we extended this same grace to artificial intelligence, we would stop viewing every "hallucination" or unexpected output as a sign that the technology is "broken" and start seeing it for what it truly is: a vital signal for improvement.

This is not a call for complacency or a disregard for safety. Rigor remains essential, especially in high-stakes environments like our hospitals or judicial systems. But there is a vital distinction between maintaining high standards and demanding the impossible.

As we integrate these machines deeper into our society, we must reconcile our expectations with our reality. If we want AI to act as a partner in our national development - a tool that respects our local knowledge and enhances our productivity - we must accept that, like its creators, it will stumble.

By softening our judgment, we open the door to a partnership defined not by the impossible pursuit of perfection, but by the relentless, beautiful, and necessary act of becoming better.

Perhaps, in learning to forgive our machines for their mistakes, we are actually learning something more important: how to be more humble in our own mastery, and more patient with the process of our own national evolution.

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Small wastes, big losses

...the productivity impact of everyday workplace habits

During a productivity coaching session at a sachet water factory, I noticed a small leak from one of the filters on the Koyo machine.

Water was dripping steadily onto the floor. When I asked the operators whether they realized they were losing money, the response was a shrug. To them it was just a few drops of water.

But was it?

Curious, I asked for a beaker and proposed a simple experiment. We collected the leaking water for two minutes. The result was startling, 220 milliliters of water had been lost in just 120 seconds. Then we proceeded with the calculations, that seemingly harmless leak was wasting 13.2 sachets of water every one hour.

Over an eight-hour shift, the loss increased to 105.6 sachets, which happens to be more than three and a half bags of water every single day.

Assuming the factory operated for 24 working days then at the end of a typical month, the factory was losing about 84 bags of water.

Over a year, that tiny leak could translate into more than 1,000 bags of water literally flowing down the drain. If a bag is selling at GH¢10, then an annual loss is likely to be within a range of GH¢10,140 – GH¢10,560.

What shocked the team most was not the size of the leak, but the size of the loss.

Productivity tends to be eroded by small wastes that people have become accustomed to seeing but no longer notice such as a dripping filter, five minutes of lateness, an unattended machine, an unnecessary delay. Individually, they seem insignificant. Collectively, they cost organizations thousands of cedis, reduce competitiveness and silently undermine productivity.

The mathematics of neglect

People rarely calculate the true cost associated with waste.

An employee who arrives ten minutes late every day. Ten minutes seems harmless, but becomes fifty minutes over a five-day work week.

It therefore translates to more than three hours over a month. Across a year, nearly two full working weeks are lost.

These moments may last only minutes, but when multiplied across hundreds of employees and repeated throughout the year, the losses become enormous.

The same principle applies to wasted materials, wasted energy, wasted effort and wasted opportunities.

Like termites quietly weakening a building, small wastes slowly erode organizational performance until the damage becomes impossible to ignore.

The culture of "it is just a small thing"

The mindset that "It is only a little leak" or "it is just one sheet of paper" quietly undermines productivity.

Organizations rarely fail owing to one big mistake but due to repeatedly tolerating small mistakes. What people repeatedly tolerate generates into organizational culture.

The productivity mindset

The workers at the factory did not ignore the leak because of lack of intelligence but because they had become accustomed to seeing it, the leak had become normal.

Productive organizations are interested in building a culture where employees constantly ask:

- What resources are being wasted?
- How can we create more value with less effort?

This mindset transforms workplaces into high-performing organizations.

Productivity is everyone's responsibility

Productivity is everyone's business right from the cleaner who prevents waste through to the machine operator who reports faults immediately. Everyone has a role to play in organizational efficiency.

Small improvements, extraodinary results

Solving many productivity problems does not require massive investments. It usually follows the trend outlined in the diagram.

The world's most productive organizations understand this principle. They pursue continuous improvement, not because each improvement is dramatic, but because they know small gains compound into significant results.

Conclusion

The leaking filter was not merely wasting water but exposing a mindset. A mindset that failed to recognize how tiny inefficiencies accumulate into major costs. Productivity is not won or lost in extraordinary moments but won or lost in everyday habits.