

Working for the Future, with AI

Hirano Miku, CEO of a business-centered AI company, is on a mission to shake up work life through AI.

by **Kirsty Bouwers**

Imagine your work life consisting of just a few hours a day. This is the future that Hirano Miku, CEO of Cinnamon, Inc., envisions. Through her company's innovative use of AI, she envisions a future in which people can work smarter and unleash their full potential by spending more time on creativity or meaningful work.

After graduating college, she moved to Singapore and then Vietnam, where she founded Cinnamon. Then, she became a mother. Hirano says that was a wake-up call: it made her feel the current style of work was ineffective. She realized that she wanted to innovate how people work and improve life for her children's generation. The aim was to help create a world where AI could support a person's work, leaving more time for people to focus on the creative side of their jobs. Through this, work would become more efficient, freeing up time to spend on family. After several years in Vietnam, it also became clear that her business ought to be in Tokyo—with the city being home to many large corporations, and Japan ranking number one for AI potential, there were strong incentives to launch an AI business here instead. Hirano thus decided to move the company and pivot its goal: Cinnamon became a company with a mission to change the working model to a much more efficient one that opens up the day to personal time.

Cinnamon's products now collate a wealth of unstructured data—think loose paper invoices, large bodies of emails, and other items that are not necessarily categorized automatically—by extracting key data and converting them into well-structured pieces of information that are easy to find. Thanks to this, one can boost one's output and

productivity exponentially, Hirano believes.

Hirano envisions a world where people's work is complemented by AI. Currently, people adapt to machines, but in the future, machines will be able to adapt to people. An example would be using AI technology to collate and structure information gathered from business calls; by analyzing the data, companies could then become more efficient by recognizing patterns in how the top salespeople operate. Before that happens, Hirano feels the preconceptions that exist about AI, such as fears of it taking over people's jobs, need to change. In her opinion, rather than being something people should be fearful of, using AI should be seen as a positive, as it can make a company more competitive by increasing efficiency in a cheap and quick way. Moreover, with Japan's working age population projected to fall to 50 million by 2050, utilizing AI can be a great way to boost performance, which may set an example for the rest of the world.

This future will need to be addressed in the current workforce as well. AI engineers who can build programs are relatively common, but to devise the algorithms that the AI is based on from scratch, AI researchers are needed. AI researchers are a rare breed. Cinnamon has managed to recruit 100 AI researchers in Japan, Vietnam, and Taiwan—a staggering number. They work in-house to help research and develop their products. Hirano notes that there is a lot of potential for the IT sector in Tokyo and Japan as a whole. "Many more people have become interested in the start-up scene in Tokyo in recent years. It's made it a lot easier to find and recruit the best people."

To enable a promising future elsewhere too, it is female business talent like Hirano who the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is looking to nurture through the Acceleration Program in Tokyo for Women (APT Women). APT Women runs workshops and mentoring schemes designed to help women expand their network and business know-how, and support female entrepreneurs with business expansion (including expansion overseas). There was also the third NEW CONFERENCE (Network to Empower Entrepreneurial Women Conference), an event for female business leaders that was held in November 2020. It was the first NEW CONFERENCE to be fully virtual, and had a program full of diverse speakers, from Tokyo Governor Koike Yuriko to Hirano Miku, among others. The conference provided a chance for female entrepreneurs to gain new insights while learning from senior leaders about how they grew their companies and discussing a wide range of business challenges and other topics.

With the future of work sure to look very different, Hirano and her company are part of driving this change, and passing it on to the next generation.



For an innovative vision of the ideal future work style, look no further than Hirano Miku, CEO of Cinnamon, Inc.