DIGITALISATION

THE FUTURE OF WORK

An article of the Coaching Center of the Swiss Association of MBAs

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The Future of Work is now – how to prepare and how to embrace technology not only as a tool but as a collaborating "partner" at work.

As a Future of Work Psychologist, I am working within our Digital Immersion Lab (DIL) to foster 4 key digital learning areas that can support all of us for the "Future of Work".

When asked "what is the future of work" we can list many things. First and foremost we talk about a digitalized work environment where change is the new "steady", where ambiguity is the new "clear facts", where uncertainty is the new "foreseeable". Of course, there are diverse opinions regarding "is the future bright?", especially if we survey across different generations. It appears that the majority is overwhelmed. Either, because they grew up with legacy knowledge that now has a shelf-life of sometimes only a few months. Or, at the other extreme, predominately gen Y and gen Z, they are uncertain about if studying or learning a certain profession makes sense because just a few years down the line, that job might not exist. The latter is paired with levels of anxiety and sometimes even leads to lethargic behavior because "one does not know how the world is changing, therefore, I stop doing anything about it"

In the skill development space, we all need to foster a learning mindset and skills alike to master an ever-changing and technology-driven work environment by addressing key elements of the work environment – technical comprehension, cognitive and emotional fitness, behavioral flexibility paired with psychological capabilities to handle constant change.

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In today's work environment technology is not only supporting us humans, but it collaborates with us. Machine learning albeit some beliefs is not completely replacing us: Machine learning, the basis for Artificial Intelligence (AI), where patterns amongst millions of data points (provided by us humans) are identified. Conducting comparison and providing recognition in an automated way can tremendously support our work, especially for routine tasks. Artificial intelligence (note: there are numerous definitions out there) can be regarded as a machine that mimics cognitive functions of the intelligent human mind (e.g. speech recognition)[2]. Various studies[*] show that we need to look at the task level of a job, rather than the all-encompassing job itself, to understand what parts of that job are likely to be replaced by technology and what other parts are likely to remain because of technology, e.g. AI, is not able to take over.

As machine learning is advancing at high speed, we might call AI anything that a machine cannot do yet, but that is mimicking the human mind. This is what makes many people anxious – the unknown. To make it more manageable, we suggest having the eagerness to understand what advanced machine learning can do for our work now and then understand very well how we can collaborate with that technology. In addition, rather than fear, root back to our child-like inquisitive behavior to explore what is yet to come. In order for this technology-human collaboration to happen well, we need to understand how that technology works and that the basis of all of this is our own data feed. The data we produce every second, every time we "log in".

We need to learn that we not only have that data and give it away but also how we could control that data stream if we wanted to and how it is used. Only then we learn to trust, and trust is the basis for any collaboration. It also helps to develop a mindset and a list of skills that help with situations where adaptability is key – technology is evolving constantly and so is business that is taking advantage of it. This is what we, as a human workforce need to prepare for, be ready for. The question is, are we ready? Is society fostering personal and intellectual development enough, across all society levels, across all socio-economic backgrounds? Is the educational system changing their curriculum to show adaptability regarding the current work environment? Are organizations, employers, fostering career development path that challenge, support and grow people's mindset and a skill passport alike? The answer is – partially, but hardly in a holistic way

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Ravin Jesuthasan; Reinventing Jobs
[2] MIT, 02.2020, online Course "Digital Transformation", glossary of terms document

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Four key digital learning areas plus the aforementioned "tech-skills" can support us, our cross-generational workforce, to manage the future of work more smoothly:

1) Cognitive readiness – to deal with the sheer amount of data overload

2) Behavioral flexibility and adaptability – to show readiness in constant change

3) Emotional Set-Up – to be self-sufficient regarding mental and physical well being

4) Psychological Capital *3: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (the mindset) – to handle times of uncertainty, seeing the positive rather than the negative

For business, it means to take action now and to invest in a tech-skill and emotional skill level. This may require at least the following 4 iterative steps

1) Identify job areas where collaboration with smart technology (e.g. AI-related gadgets to reduce time resources and to decrease human error rates) is driving your competitive advantage
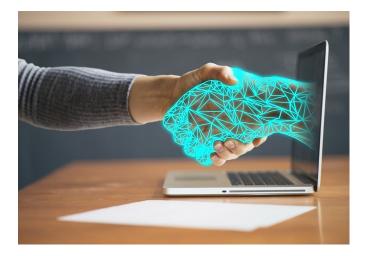
2) Analyse and agree on required "tech skills" across the workforce

3) Assess the status-quo of your workforce skill level with regards to the tech-skill and emotional skill level (see the four digital learning areas)

4) Devise and offer agile learning opportunities around those tech and emotional skills, invest into a digital immersion lab: on-demand learning hacks, in person, virtual, via various channels (i.e. workshops, video and book library, peer to peer learning space, etc.)

Assess and start with 1 again.

FOR BUSINESS, IT MEANS TO TAKE ACTION NOW AND TO INVEST IN A TECH-SKILL AND EMOTIONAL SKILL LEVEL.

Last but not least invest in growing leaders who understand and support the Future of Work environment - the new digital leader, the e-Leader*3. Leadership who knows how to combine traditional leadership methods with digital work environments and cross-generational management style. Therefore, provide a work environment where your next e-leader realizes tech-skill and emotional skill learning across multiple generations, supported by technology that everyone understands and applies mindfully.

"Invest in growing leaders who understand and support the Future of Work environment - the new digital leader, the e-Leader"

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*3 Luthans F., & Youssef, C.M. (2004). Human, social, and now positive psychological capital management: Investing in people for competitive advantage, Organizational Dynamics, 33(2), 143-160.

*3 DasGupta P., (2011), Literature Review: e-Leadership, Emerging Leadership Journeys, Vol. 4 Iss. 1, pp. 1- 36., Regent University School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship

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