

The future of work

Author: Kudzai Derera . December 2019

The future of work: Are students ready?



The future of work is one of the hottest topics in the 21st century and it explores how technologies like robotics, artificial intelligence and automation are shaping the way people work, where they work and the skills they need to do the work. According to [James Manyika at McKinsey](#), when the “future of work” topic comes up there are three issues embedded within it which are:

- The question and discussion around the impact of artificial intelligence, automation on work and jobs, and whether there will be enough work and jobs left after that,
- The changing models for work and work structure which involves questions around independent work, the gig economy, and what people sometimes refer to as fissured work—whether people work as outsourced services or not,
- Whether any of those kinds of evolved work models are going to become the future, and whether people can work effectively and sustainably and earn living wages with enough support—in that kind of world of more varied types of work.

That being said there is need for the current students to be trained and prepared to survive this upcoming digital disruption so that they can be able to make a decent life and earn at least the minimum living wages.

One can argue that amongst the current workforce, which consists mainly of the millennials, majority of them were not prepared but some of them are still thriving whilst others are surviving.

However, the future for majority of the millennials could have turned out differently or had better fortune if they had been prepared for the digital disruption to enter the work place fully baked.

Students are not ready when it comes to the future of work which evolves rapidly and is uncertain. This affects them when they enter the workplace because those who fail to innovate or upskill fast risk falling behind. The tasks done at the learning institutions do not really help in the current rapid technological advancements era and this is a great concern. When I was doing my undergrad degree, most of the things we were taught did not prepare me for the workplace instead it focused mainly on the academic grades I was expected to obtain and failure to get these results would be proof of being very in competent. This makes the future of work (automation of jobs with artificial intelligence and robotics in the future) a valid concern and might leave students not having a decent life or jobless because machines will be eating humans' jobs.

The current status of the students

Change is happening very fast with robots, artificial intelligence and computers proving to be smarter, faster and more accurate than their human counterparts. The students are not yet ready for this future when the computers fully take over the world like they do in the Hollywood movie Terminator. Too much emphasis is put on good grades and not enough on the students' actual learning. Students are not aware of the unique human skills that will be valued in the future, instead they are mainly concerned with getting distinctions and merits.

The internship programs help students gain some understanding on what goes on in the workplace but does not necessarily prepare them for the future of work. Many students do not get exposed to the learning journey to develop their social, communication, research, thinking and self-management skills as they apply what they know about themselves and their learning, both successes and challenges, to the arduous yet exciting process of finding the best-fit job or career (Nixon, 2019).

Are institutions preparing students for the future of work?

The world of work is ever changing and children in primary school today will be employed future jobs that do not exist, according to the World Economic Forum in its 2016 report the *Future of Jobs*. Many jobs which exist today will become automated in the future. McKinsey Global predicts that [half](#) of the workplace activities will be automated in the future while some of the jobs will be lost, others will be created.

The role of education has traditionally been to prepare students for their future workplaces, but as the pace of change accelerates, are curriculums keeping up with the evolving requirements of the future of work? Unfortunately, the curriculums are not keeping up with the evolving requirements. Emphasis is still being put academic grades and reputations by the institutions which puts the students at a disadvantage of not being prepared for what is to come. There is need for strategic planning for educational institutes to ensure the faculties, staff and students are able to adapt to whatever comes next.

What should institutions do to prepare students for the future of work?



The best way for institutions to prepare students for the future of work is to offer different types of learning experiences that keep up with the evolving requirements. They should provide ways for the students to actively learn and explore the world and ideally have adequate skills, real-world awareness and flexibility that will have them equipped for a constantly changing system. In a speech about the future of learning, Alan November, international keynote speaker and author, said we have to “teach students how to learn”.? This is mainly because students have become used to the traditional system where they are required to find the right answer to questions, recalling content instead of productive struggle and deeper levels of thinking. The following are ways in which strategic educational institutes can ensure students adapt to the future of work:

1. Emphasis on soft skills

One of the most important job skill in 2020 will be complex problem solving. Majority of the predicted crucial skills are developed through social and emotional learning. Encouraging students to self-direct and take responsibility for their own learning through individual study and collaboration to help them to develop these key skills. This and encouraging lateral thinking and self-direction helps students become adept problem-solvers. Some elementary and high schools in Canada and around the world are piloting “Genius Hour” projects where students are encouraged to work on topics which interest them from one hour every week up to as much as 20% of their school day (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). The program imitates tech companies such as Google and Facebook encourage employees to work on other areas that interest them outside their usual workload within working hours. The students are encouraged

to develop new ideas and they are given ownership and responsibilities for learning.

2. Ensure students are aware that humanistic disciplines will remain relevant

No matter how tech-driven and AI-supported the future of workplaces are there will be a place for independent thinkers, creators and arts and humanities practitioners. These will be in more demand than ever before. Whilst encouraging students to understand statistics and algorithms there is the need to understand the impact of their decisions on the society at large some of which can result in unforeseen negative consequences. The machines in the future will still be operated by humans therefore without critical thinking skills to assess impacts of the actions of AI unintended negative consequences can occur.

3. Encourage the teachers and lectures to be innovators

Teachers and lecturers are usually the most influential adults in children's lives after their parents. Therefore, there is need to create more rounded, creative educators by exposing them to different experiences. Once the teachers and lecturers become innovators this will positively impact on majority of the students.

4. Encourage digital literacy

Today students are more comfortable adapting to new technologies than their teachers. Digital skills are of paramount importance, however, not all students will have access to technology outside of the classroom. There is need for teachers and lecturers to support students to develop these skills in relation to their use of digital tool and these could be incorporated into the existing lesson plans or with developing soft skills such as critical thinking or numerical skills.

5. Use new and emerging technologies

Microsoft, Google and other companies are offering educational resources to support teaching and learning digital literacy using technology available. Under resources schools can access these and make them accessible to their students. Microsoft's DreamSpace initiative gives primary and secondary students hands-on experience with technology and interactive learning tools such as virtual reality and encourages them to imagine what the world will be like in the future (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). Allowing students to use such technologies allows them to see technology as part of their daily life in the future.

6. Develop resilience

Traditionally, emphasis was put on reading, writing and arithmetic. However, developing resilience has been seen as a crucial element in educating young people nowadays. Equipping them with a resilient attitude will mean they react to change with a growth mind-set rather than a fearing the changes they will have the confidence to adapt to new situations.

In conclusion, the teachers and lecturers have huge impacts after the parents on the students' lives therefore adjusting their current teaching styles and ensuring that they prepare the students for the digital disruption to come is of paramount importance. Students should not just wait for the teachers and lecturers but to also research more and learn more on their own and ensure they can adapt to the changing times to have a better future!

Kudzai Derera is the Business Systems Manager at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm.

LinkedIn: <https://zw.linkedin.com/in/kudzaiderera>

Phone: +263 242 481946-48/481950

Mobile: +263 773 523 084

Email: kudzai@ipcconsultants.com

Main Website: www.ipcconsultants.com

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/The-Future-Of-Work>