

Reshaping jobs.

1. Technology. Technological advances in the area of robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), sensors and data have created

new ways of getting work done that are, in some cases, upending the way we use and think about our tools, and how people and machines can complement and substitute for one another.

2. Demographics. Demographic changes are shifting the composition of the global workforce. In most places people are living longer than ever, and overall the population is becoming both older and younger, with individual nations becoming more diverse. Even more challenging, the younger generations will be increasingly concentrated in developing economies, while the developed economies (and China) get ever older.

3. The power of pull. Thanks to digital technologies and public policy shifts, individuals and institutions can exert greater “pull” – the ability to access people and resources as needed – than ever before. Institutions and prospective workers alike now have access to global talent markets, enabled by networks and platforms opening up new possibilities for the way each interacts with the other. The demand for these platforms is likely to be enhanced by increasing customer power and accessibility of productive tools and machines, opening up opportunities for more creative work to be done in smaller enterprises and by entrepreneurial ventures.

Implications for workers

In this new landscape, personal success will largely depend on accelerating learning throughout a lifetime. As this imperative takes hold, workers will need to take action on their own to enhance their potential for success. Three principles apply.

1. Engage in lifelong learning. As rapid technological and marketplace change shrinks the useful lifespan of any given skill set, workers will need to shift from acquiring specific skills and credentials to pursuing enduring skills for lifelong learning. Individuals will need to find others who can help them get better faster – small work groups, organisations, and broader, more diverse social networks. We are likely to see much richer, more diverse forms of collaboration emerge over time.

2. Shape your own career path. Historically, a career was defined by a relatively stable, predictable set of capabilities that aligned with the needs of an organisation and an industry. This included the progressive mastery of a set of predetermined skills required to advance in the corporate hierarchy, with accompanying salary boosts. But the half-life of skills and expertise is becoming shorter and shorter, with new, unexpected skills emerging as valuable. This has two implications. With needs constantly shifting, employers are less and less able to provide employees with well-defined career paths spanning years or decades. And to keep their skills current, workers must increasingly do whatever is necessary to accelerate their learning, including pursuing a diversity of work experiences or working for multiple employers at the same time. Rather than relying on paternalistic employers to shape their careers' nature and progression, workers will need to take the initiative to shape their own personalised careers. And as work evolves, individuals should cultivate a “surfing” mindset, always alert to emerging high-value skills and catching the wave at an early stage to capture the most value from these skills.

3. Pursue your passion. In our research into diverse work environments where there is sustained performance improvement – in everything from extreme sports to online war games – we have identified one common element: participants have a very specific form of passion, what we call “the passion of the explorer”. This form of passion has three components: a long-term commitment to making an increasing impact in a domain; a questing disposition that actively seeks out new challenges; and a connecting disposition that seeks to find others who can help one get to a better answer faster.

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