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# Tomorrow's Workforce

Mark Spelman, Member of the Executive Committee at The World Economic Forum, explains why businesses need to plan today for the workforce of tomorrow. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** reports



Take stock for a minute and think about how much you've used digital services today and how much that's changed over the last 10 years. The speed of technological change can be overwhelming and according to **Mark Spelman**, Member of the Executive Committee at The World Economic Forum and Co-Head of its Future of the Internet Initiative, we're on the cusp of a new wave.

We're all used to being connected to the internet, but increasingly the objects around us are joining up too. This new type of connectivity will reshape the way we work, and what businesses require from us.

"We're about to move into an era in which everything is connected, online and realtime. We'll be in a hugely different place," says Mark.

"I spoke to the CEO of a crane company who told me it's now a digital business. One woman now runs 20 cranes from a control centre at a port. Even the lorries coming into the facility have sensors so this woman knows where they are and how to optimise loading."

It begs a serious question: Are we ready for what's about to unfold? It's something Mark wants us all to think about. "I'm not sure our workforce strategies are focused enough on the exponential disruption of technology," he says.

## Re-imagining the Workforce

Before we can prepare for the future, we must imagine it. Mark paints a picture of startling contrast to what we see today; there will be fewer jobs and

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those that remain will require skills we may not yet have.

"A Survey by the World Economic Forum found that we could lose five million jobs over the next five years due to technology," explains Mark. "Office and admin workers will lose out due to automation and it won't just be those at the lower end. Roles like accounting and legal will also be affected."

"There will be growing requirements for roles in technology, design, science, engineering and architecture," he adds.

But perhaps the most worrisome shift will be from the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI). Mark explains that as AI and machine learning pick up, many of the jobs currently carried out by people will be filled by robots.

He believes that roles will mostly disappear in the middle of the skills spectrum, leaving jobs for us humans at both the top and lower end of that range, which may have a significant socioeconomic effect.

"There will be a hollowing out in the middle that will widen the gap between the classes," says Mark, who as a result predicts a return to a sharper class divide with clear differences between the 'haves' and 'have nots'.

## Recruiting for Tomorrow

With this analysis you may expect the job market of tomorrow to be saturated with desperate and over-qualified candidates, but due to changing requirements, businesses may still struggle to fill roles. They will have to be savvy about how they recruit new employees and there are already a few interesting developments on this score.

Take Gigster, which connects businesses to Silicon Valley product managers and software developers from an elite pool of talent. It allows companies to hire the staff they need short-term, as and when it needs them.

It's part of the 'human cloud' – a collective and constantly changing workforce pool, which employers tap into for set projects and tasks (not jobs), which are performed remotely from any point on the globe.

"Gigster explains one of the ways in which we'll address skills shortages," says Mark. "But the human cloud and Gigster are just one microcosm of what will happen in the future."

Another way companies will address not only their skills shortages but the changing consumer landscape, will be business partnerships.

"You'll see interesting tie-ups on the horizon and not just vertical ones. >



We're beginning to see horizontal mergers and that's changing the industrial landscape," says Mark. "Ask yourself why Morrisons is tying up with Amazon."

Under a deal announced in February 2016, Morrisons will offer food to Amazon customers through its Amazon Pantry service. While Morrisons will continue to sell food through its physical stores, it has also positioned itself as a wholesaler and Amazon its distribution service.

### Training for Technology

As the landscape changes, how can we protect ourselves from this portent of mass unemployment and a CV of meaningless, archaic work competencies? As is often the case, the answer lies with education.

"We need to help people at secondary school level understand the job market and we can't expect teachers to

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understand the future market dynamics," warns Mark. He adds that it's not enough for business leaders to assume they can simply take what skilled staff they need from other companies.

"The idea that we can be passive recipients of other people's training is dangerous. To be passive means you're actually going backwards."

Mark urges that leaders look at how they can customise careers and training to the individual, and warns that personal development in general needs to be taken far more seriously.

"I think we're moving into a space in which we're going to think about training as investment in our human capital just like we see a pension as our financial capital," he says.

Thankfully, the digital revolution can be a great help in this. "Technology will change the way we approach our skillsets. It will enable more rapid

upskilling and reskilling as wearables and online education speed up methods of learning," Mark explains.

But leaders need to think about how they can quicken the pace, for example using technology to train an engineer in 18 months instead of three years. This kind of thinking will become all the more important as businesses delve deeper into real-time response, not only with customers but with staff and other stakeholders too.

The lesson, says Mark, is not to be fearful of technology or the change it brings, but to seek out with an open mind, how humans can harness and work alongside technology. "Don't fall for the lie that it's all about technology; it's about technology and human skills coming together," he says. ■

### CRITICLEYE COMMENT

PA Consulting's recent report, [The Robots are Coming](#), noted that because machines increasingly carry out logical tasks within businesses, a person's EQ may become their key differentiator; perhaps even the reason they're hired.

Jennifer says: "There is a real change in the type of work that needs to be done by a person and as machines are getting better at carrying out complex tasks, the question becomes whether IQ is no longer going to be the reason you get a job."



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Mark works at the World Economic Forum where he is in charge of the Future of the Internet Global Challenge, examining issues of digital transformation, access and cyber resilience.

He is also a Non-executive Director at Sports England, which promotes sports especially among young people, and a Non-executive Director at the Future Cities Catapult, a global centre of excellence on city innovation, backed by the UK Government and large corporations.

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