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Building a Multi-Speed Workforce

The disruptive technology driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution is challenging long-held beliefs about what a productive, engaged and high-performing workforce looks like. **Marc Barber** speaks to **Ismail Amla** of Capita about the transformation that's 'already in play'



A report by the World Economic Forum predicts that by 2025 more than half of all current workplace tasks will be performed by machines, up from 29 percent currently. During this transition, it's expected that over 130 million jobs are going to be created, with approximately 75 million being displaced.

In other words, the timeline for these changes is much shorter than many CEOs, senior business leaders and Boards care to think. **Ismail Amla**, Chief Growth Officer at Capita, comments: "The workforce is not due to change dramatically over five to ten years – it's already happening today.

"We're seeing an increasing number of what we call 'Hybrid Workers' that mix human and machine skills, both remotely and on-site, and are powered by mobile and Cloud technologies. So, if you look at this idea of a hybrid workforce of humans and robots changing the very nature of work and the workforce, that's already in play."

The impact of AI and advanced analytics is certainly being felt across many sectors. "I think that organisations are more prepared and aware of this technology than you would have thought," **Ismail** says. "If you look at healthcare, there are already examples of where computerised decision support and teletriage services mean people can get advice instantly, which may prevent a condition worsening to the point where emergency care is needed.

"This means visits to A&E can be avoided and that beds are made available for more serious cases, easing the pressure on nurses and

“The real competitive advantage for organisations will come from creating a culture of continuous learning”

doctors, bringing down waiting times in emergency departments and reducing overall healthcare costs."

While these are encouraging steps, there are much bigger changes on the horizon and, according to **Ismail**, the ability to develop new skills on an ongoing basis is going to be vital to maintaining competitiveness. "You have to think about what skill-sets you need to win in fast-changing markets. What investments do you make in re-skilling versus recruiting? Are they full-time or flexible? Or, do you look to partner with organisations that have the expertise and insight you're looking for?

"However, the real competitive advantage for organisations will come from creating a culture of continuous learning. If you cultivate

an environment where your employees can learn in a way that suits their own development, allowing them to maximise their potential, then it will both significantly enhance organisational capability and create an attractive environment for the workforce."

Ismail draws on the global giant Amazon as an example of a company that is tackling some of these changes head-on as it seeks to address the challenge of filling in-demand technical positions such as software engineering, data science and business analysis. "If you look at what they're doing around the workforce to enable them to re-skill to operate in a digital environment, it's impressive. They're retraining their people and making a commitment to invest in training programmes to meet the demands of the digital economy.

"They are changing their processes, methods, policies – their work is exemplary in some of what they are doing in terms of transforming the workforce."

The Skills Gap

A grey area does exist with regard to the role and responsibility of an organisation in retraining staff whose skills have fallen into obsolescence. Who should foot the cost?

"**Ismail** is impressed by the candour of another US giant, AT&T, citing the example of how, recognising that only half of its 250,000 employees had the necessary STEM skills the company needed, it communicated to employees. The company set out the skills they thought staff needed to develop, while at the same time saying it couldn't fully invest in traditional approaches to retraining, and so created a new >



model based on collaborations with partners such as Coursera, Udacity and leading universities.

“There was full transparency about the challenge. Employees were given the tools and the responsibility to reskill to support their transition to the new economy,” he comments.

Ismail also highlights that it's not only technical skillsets that will be needed in the hybrid workplace. “Creativity, curiosity and critical thinking are very human skills that machines cannot replicate, and these types of skills are key to both developing a ‘beta-mindset culture’ where people want to continue to learn, unlearn and relearn”.

Workforce and Strategy

An organisation's chances of successfully navigating these workforce changes will improve immeasurably with a strategic Human Resources Director. However, **Ismail** fears that there are not enough HRDs out there who are able to give CEOs and senior leaders the support they require in building more flexible and agile organisations.

FUTURE PROOFING YOUR WORKFORCE

- Be creative and curious
- Competitive advantage comes from a culture of continuous learning
- ‘Hybrid workers’ are becoming more common, bringing together humans and machines
- Evaluate who you need to reskill and where you need to start recruiting
- The HR function has a vital role to play in supporting workforce transformation

“A successful strategy for future-proofing your workforce does depend on having the tools that allow your organisation to access the best talent”

“A successful strategy for future-proofing your workforce does depend on having the tools that allow your organisation to access the best talent, whether it's permanent or via the gig economy. That means you must have the right policies and procedures in place, such as allowing you to hire and rehire a person in a way that's seamless.

“This means building models of attracting, retaining and developing employees that take into account career breaks and have the flexibility to allow them to explore multiple career paths. I don't think the majority of HRDs in organisations have been able to get to grips with the thinking that's required yet as a result of the seismic changes that trends such as longevity, automation and technology are bringing.

“On the plus side, this is a great opportunity for HR to step up to the plate and demonstrate its

strategic value to an organisation and address the challenges posed by skills shortages as we move further into the world of Industry 4.0.”

Given the inevitability of what is happening globally, it's evident that HRDs, CEOs and Boards have to collaborate to build organisations that are agile, fast moving and capable of attracting talent across a wide span of ages.

“There is an incredible coming together of forces that is creating huge changes,” says **Ismail**. ■



Ismail Amla
Chief Growth Officer
Capita Plc

Ismail is Chief Growth Officer at Capita Plc, the UK's largest tech-enabled BPO provider. As one of the top 100 most influential Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) leaders in the UK tech sector, Ismail was specifically recognised within a group of five ‘highly commended disruptors’.

Ismail has had a high profile, technology-focused career, spanning Europe and North America. He joined Capita from IBM, where he was managing partner for the IBM Services business in North America. Prior to that, he was the CEO of FIS, which included Capco, where he was a member of the global leadership team. Ismail has also held positions as an Accenture Partner and was Vice President and UK Board member for CSC, leading the financial services business in the UK and Ireland.

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