



The Future of Work: Succeeding in an Evolving Workplace

The future of work is looming—is your career future proof? It's a question many seasoned executives should be asking themselves, as we navigate the uncertainties that new technologies bring to the workplace. In the first of a series of articles on the *Future of Work*, [Ian Brenner](#) and [Tessa Desatnik](#) provide three key mind shifts that every executive should consider in today's fast-changing workplace.

With the exponential rise of technology in the workplace, jobs and industries across the board are being disrupted. As an executive trying to wrap your head around what is happening—what does the future of work mean for your career? What are you proactively doing to prepare for these radical changes? More specifically, how are you preparing yourself to appeal to the next iteration of employers?

Executive transition has become a fact of life. In contrast with even the most recent decade, we can expect to change jobs, and even careers, numerous times throughout our lives. In fact, most of today's business leaders, no matter their function or industry, have already experienced some form of profound transformation due to changes in technology, knowledge base or the structure of work itself.

This is the first article in a *Future of Work* series—addressing today's fast-changing workplace and the challenges it poses for executives as they transition through multiple roles in their careers. The main theme? Evolution. Whether that comes in the form of evolving your mindset, your skillset or your definition of modern-day leadership—the key is to remain resilient and open-minded to change.

Redefining how work happens

As the workforce evolves, work is *happening* in new ways. Organizations are moving from a traditional functional approach, to a focus on the task or project at hand. To achieve this, businesses are turning to networks of alliances and teams to get things done, and are approaching external talent as the new, augmented workforce—all marching together to achieve a

common goal.

Disruptive influences include the emergence of multiple work roles, as interim workers, consultants, freelancers and contractors are added alongside traditional employees. At the same time, work-team structures are evolving to include new alliances, joint ventures, collaborations and finally, the *much-feared-less-understood* integration of humans with automation and robotic processes.

Old paradigms are out and new ways of thinking are in. And though it's only natural to feel a sense of trepidation with the radical changes upon us, there are certain key lessons that can provide guidance. In particular, there are **three shifts** you need to be thinking about:

1. Change your mindset

For today's executive, it helps if you approach career planning with a blank slate. Compartmentalize whatever conventional approaches have guided you in the past, such as organization charts, hierarchies and traditional career paths. Shifting roles and project-based responsibilities spell impermanence and require executives to assume a *beginner's mindset*. Expect that you'll need to relearn whatever you thought you knew to take on that new opportunity. It's not going to be any different next time—each new move you contemplate will require lessons learned and that same fresh attitude and curiosity of a beginner.

2. Develop your skillset

The second shift involves changing your skillset. The fundamental change to consider is moving from the notion of a *job pathway* to that of a *skills pathway*. Think of an accountant who needs to grasp blockchain, an engineer leading a business who learns about search engine optimization as part of his marketing plan, or an HR professional who understands the impact of design on the employee experience. All of these involve reshaping the workplace and the operating model to optimize outcomes for the business.

To facilitate this move to a skills pathway, we are seeing an evolution in the training environment to make it more modular, customized and agile. With this, the emphasis shifts to training for skills that match to tasks, versus credentials that map to traditional functional roles. It's a helpful metaphor to imagine yourself as a builder, creating a *scaffolding of skills*. In effect, you are continuously generating layers or scaffolds of skills—one level at a time—as part of a life-long venture in learning.

3. Rethink your definition of what it takes to be a high-performing leader

The third fundamental shift requires a fresh look at leadership qualities. With technology and digital innovation transforming the face of business, the personality traits needed for success are also changing. It has become vitally important for businesses to have leaders who are not only well-rounded, including across geography and industry,

but who can implement the changes needed to stay ahead of disruptive conditions. Modern-day leadership requires pragmatism, humility, vulnerability and the ability to connect at a fundamentally human level. And while all these qualities are essential across all industries and cultures, integrity and resilience stand out as the most important attributes for success.

All of these are very *human* attributes. Despite the move to workforce automation—and partly because of it—often referred to as the *soft skills*, executives need the harder to master emotional intelligence-related skills to manage people, such as empathy, mentalization and effective communication. The challenge, of course, is that emotional intelligence can't be taught in a classroom. This skill is contextual and while it is learnable, much of it comes from leadership experience.

Invest in yourself

All of this puts the focus on your own self-development. Warren Buffet put it best: “Invest in yourself. Nobody can take away what you’ve got in yourself, and everybody has potential they haven’t used yet.” In a lifetime venture where you are learning continuously and building those scaffolds of skills, your work identity will take on a form distinct not only from other executives, but independent from your employers and clients. Like a form of personal brand or goodwill, you will take that identity with you wherever you go, along with the ability to constantly reshape and expand it.

Key lessons to come

Additional articles in this series will explore these key lessons in greater depth for the benefit of executives as they move through new roles and responsibilities. The next article will look at the particular challenges of older workers and discusses the importance of emotional intelligence as a means to overcome ageism in the workforce. Next, we'll examine what you need to do to maximize your success in transition, following on with the theme of investing in yourself, developing your skillset and personal brand. Finally, we will explore interim management as part of the agile and augmented workforce, with its impact on new worker roles and work team structures.

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