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Davos: Mind The Skills Gap

By [Richard Jolly](#), Adjunct Professor of Organisational Behaviour, [London Business School](#).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution took center stage at Davos this year. It left me with a strong sense that at a time of enormous technological change, individuals will succeed based on their most human traits.

Though automation improves operational efficiency, organizations rely on their people for creativity. Product designers create prototypes with 3D machines, but their most human qualities – their knowledge of trends and the ability to translate the likes and dislikes of their customers – give them an edge. Salespeople may well rely on software for their sales pipeline, but it's their human interactions that seal the deal.



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Technology has the potential to make our relationships with people better.

It's clear that the role of leader is undergoing a tectonic shift. For decades, leadership has been the CEO's role. But while the brightest and the best leaders at the World Economic Forum are critical to defining issues and policies, there was a feeling that CEOs, policymakers and politicians will not be the ones to solve the world's problems. It is people from all levels who will bring about change.

With the rise of technology, the individual citizen has a bigger role to play. Due to the explosion of smartphone devices, people are educating themselves, accessing information and declaring: "I want to do this differently."

Change increasingly happens from the bottom up, not top down. Leaders need to create confident organizations, where employees can flourish.

How Is Our Work Changing?

According to the World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs Report', the most sought after occupations did not exist even five years ago, and 65% of primary school children are destined to work in completely new jobs.

While office jobs will plummet, computer and mathematical-related jobs will grow. Where factory workers will lose out, data analysts will win. Softer social skills – influencing, educating others and emotional intelligence, such as empathy – will be in higher demand.

Can Humans Change Quickly Enough?

Our work is changing and by 2020, the jobs that we do will be markedly different.

On an individual level we need to become more resilient, coping with the demands of our changing and complex environments.

We're certainly capable of it. You may have heard of neuroplasticity, or brain plasticity, which is the brain's ability to change throughout life. It has an incredible ability to restructure itself by forming new connections between brain cells. As we become experts on topics, the areas in our brains that relate to those skills continue to grow.

So change is possible. But to accelerate change, we need to work on our mindsets and attitudes; our emotional states. Our future work will demand the very traits that make us altogether human in the first place.

Five Skills To Thrive In The Fourth Industrial Revolution

1. Passion. Leaders have spent their careers rising up the hierarchy, and no doubt have more knowledge and expertise than most. But their role is no longer to command and control; it is to create an environment for others to drive change and solve problems. They should evoke passion in people and create an inclusive, integrated culture where people are engaged. At every level across the organization, people need to believe they can contribute to and make a difference at work.

2. Reflection. Today's global business ecosystem is a complex place. We have multiple stakeholders with different agendas, volatile markets, disruptive competitors and unseen technological developments to contend with. It means we often get caught up in the short-term. To succeed, you will need to press pause, take time to think about the long-term, and stay alive in the meantime. In essence, the individuals who are able to stop and reflect will prosper in this revolution.

3. Communication. In a 'Big Brother' world of CCTV cameras, a torrent of data, social media and peer-to-peer reviews, nothing is secret. Everything is transparent. Every conversation, email, and aspect of an organization's well-being is publicly available. In a transparent world, whether you like it or not, you must have better communication skills. What does that mean? You can't lie. You can't hide. When corporate communication can no longer be controlled, you will need to communicate more authentically.

4. Emotional intelligence. As technology advances, effective relationships in multi-stakeholder environments and organizations that have become more internally and externally complex are paramount. In order to engage different stakeholders, you will need to nurture a community culture. With advanced softer skills, you will build up alliances, craft shared values and create collaboration among disparate groups of people.

5. Creativity. In an era of data programming, human creativity – a skill that can't be programmed – will amplify. Why? Because unlike robots or artificial intelligence, our

innate curiosity and ability to laugh can't be mapped or formulated. So, in order to work alongside smart machines, we will need creative people to drive innovation. We will need to hone our natural openness, and increase our willingness to play and to fail. It is the leader's job to create a lab for playfulness to cultivate creativity – after all, play is one of the very few human activities to celebrate uncertainty.

This revolution is an era of automation, constant connectivity, and accelerated change. In order to withstand it and build up our resilience, we must put the spotlight on ourselves. By taking a holistic approach to our wellbeing and building our sense of purpose, we will enhance our performance as people. We need more sleep to operate at speed. We need mindfulness to take in moments that matter, and we need to eat well to feed our minds.

“Are we in an industrial or human revolution?” I hear you ask. My answer's simple: it's a combination of both.