Evolution of workforce skills demand - what the future holds

By Lyndy van den Barselaar   14 Jan 2021

When reflecting on the fourth industrial revolution, or Industry 4.0, a number of things immediately spring to mind. These include the industrial internet of things (IIoT), artificial intelligence (AI), robots and 3D printing for example. Regrettably, little attention is given to individual employees and workers in this emerging industrial world, unless one is discussing the concerns related to potential job losses.

Significantly, many experts are in agreement about the fact that the transformation which is currently underway will surely result in net job creation, as opposed to loss. They do note that different skills will be required, and on the whole, employees and workers of the future will need to be more skilled. As automation and digitalisation advance, it is inevitable that the number of physically demanding or routine jobs will decrease, while the number of jobs requiring adaptable responses, problem-solving, and customisation will increase.

It is interesting to note that the Covid-19 pandemic has played a significant role in accelerating the transition to the automation revolution. Organisations are emerging from the crisis into a world of social distancing and with resulting changes in customer behaviours and inclinations. While recovery is forcing organisations and manufacturing companies to reconfiguring their supply chains and production lines, service organisations are adapting to emphasise digital-first customer journeys and contactless operations.

Although it is near impossible to see into the future and predict the course of every occupation, there are certain skills that can assist in safeguarding your future career opportunities, as well as your current role. While many traditional skill sets, such as technology and finance will remain in high demand, there is a rising demand for employees and job candidates to attain the soft skills that cannot be automated. These include emotional intelligence, effective communication, conflict resolution, critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation.

In addition to these soft skills, there is also an increasing need for workers and employees who possess the hard skills to utilise, build and innovate these future technologies.

Hard skills required for 2021 and beyond

As we look to the future, the hard skills that many employers will require are largely based on data analysis and technology.

Now more than ever before, organisations are receiving massive amounts of data and employing tools to convert that data into business intelligence and insights. We at ManpowerGroup SA have identified the following hard skills which will be in great demand in 2021 and beyond.

1. Blockchain proficiency

Blockchain development has generated numerous job opportunities for tech enthusiasts and developers. A blockchain developer is someone who possesses a number of skills in areas such as cryptography, data structures, algorithms, and computer networking. Blockchain developers are also responsible for developing smart contracts, web apps, and blockchain protocols.

2. Cloud computing

With the demand for cloud computing skills on the rise, an ever-increasing number of companies are adopting cloud services. With that growth, comes the demand for cloud professionals who will engineer and manage the technology.

3. Analytical reasoning

For those who are not particularly interested in the fundamental engineering aspects of tech, most companies are seeking analysts who can convert endless amounts of data predictive analytics, or insights that can effectively guide business decisions.

4. Artificial intelligence (AI)

As companies search for new ways in which to support and enhance their workforce through machine learning and data analysis, AI provides incredibly powerful possibilities. Whether it be in the fields of business analysis, predictive algorithms and metrics, or networking with end-users, AI really is the future of business across all industries. Individuals who are capable of developing more intuitive AI systems and harnessing the power of machine learning will continue to be in high demand.

5. User experience (UX) design

Although most users might not always take notice of an app's user experience (UX), they are likely to detect when it is bad, slow or awkward. Considering the amount of commerce and business that is conducted via online platforms, individuals who are able to design and enhance first-class user experience are highly desirable.

The key to supporting the development of the required soft and hard skills in the workforce of the future is the provision of access to information and building a culture of continuous learning.

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