

Leveraging the opportunities of digital transformation

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The global drive towards digital transformation is having a profoundly disruptive impact on all areas of our lives but will have the most significant impact on the way we work, where we work and the type of work we do.



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The concept of gig work is being readily accepted by millennials, who are openly embracing the idea of career flexibility to acquire wide-ranging skills and exposure to various roles, without being tied down to one life-long profession.

Research by Gartner reveals that gig or contingent workers represent approximately 15-25% of the global workforce today. By 2025, gig workers are expected to account for 35-40% of the workforce.

Like any disruptive change, digital transformation has been met with a notable degree of fear and trepidation, especially among those who believe that technological advancement will eliminate jobs.

But, instead of fearing the current revolution, people should rather embrace it, and they will begin to see more opportunities than threats emerging in the next few years.

Therefore, digital transformation needs to be seen in the context of previous industrial revolutions – the transitional period always creates a degree of uncertainty, because people tend to cling to what they know. Despite this, the end results were vast improvements in the way we worked and lived, so it is important to see the current developments in a positive light.

Career flexibility

Technology and connectivity are driving economic growth, which in turn will create new and different opportunities for us to do more new and interesting things that we haven't even thought of yet.

Essentially, a gig-based economy is centred around the notion that we all have multiple interests and multiple skills that can be leveraged in different ways. It is the constantly changing economic and digital landscapes that are creating opportunities to exploit this new way of working.

Within the South African economic context, people are struggling to find jobs in the traditional labour space. The country's official unemployment rate currently stands at an alarming 29.1% – the highest level in over a decade.

At the same time, traditional jobs have also evolved, and roles have changed. Consider professions such as marketing, engineering and even medicine and how the nature of these jobs has changed due to the evolution of technology, tools and science.

At the same time, people need to embrace the concept of life-long learning to develop skills that are required now and adopt an on-the-job or on-demand learning approach, that will see them gain skills and expertise as the need for them arises.

Connectivity is key

The crucial element to surviving and thriving in a gig economy is access to connectivity. Connectivity gives us the ability to abandon the idea that work is a fixed location, but rather an activity that can be done from anywhere. The concept of remote working is gaining traction. An increasing number of organisations are starting to realise that just because their employees are not behind their desks does not mean that they are not productive.

Anyone with a smart device can really do anything from anywhere – embracing that and turning it into productivity is where the magic will happen. The ability to balance life and career is becoming more important to people, and, to a large extent, technology is enabling that.

Connectivity creates opportunities and allows people to become self-sustaining. If you are connected, you can verify your identity, you can have an online bank account and have access to the world. Access to global data, information, trends and tools are what we need and that stimulates a level of knowledge and learning which would be impossible without connectivity.

Crucially, connectivity also facilitates learning, as it provides access to global information resources that can easily be used to acquire new skills and knowledge. Not that the role of universities and the importance of tertiary education should be discounted, but we need to accept that the role of technology is also having a profound effect on learning and education.

Driving economic growth

But the importance of connectivity extends beyond the individual. Connected communities have access to a marketplace for their goods and skills, and can become the true drivers of economic growth.

We can only hope that the private sector, along with government, continue to work towards connecting the country and the continent, which will stimulate economic growth at various levels.

It is also important to acknowledge that data is now an essential commodity. The Competition Commission's recent ruling that mobile operators must provide prepaid customers a lifeline package is a step in the right direction. It will ensure that all citizens have data access on a continuous basis, regardless of their income levels.

Change brings opportunity. It is up to every individual and company to embrace this change and take advantage of the opportunities that come their way. Digital transformation forces us to think and act in new ways, particularly in terms of how we approach work – there is no need to fear it.

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