

Strategic Planning Dialogue Session #2 – September 13, 2024

The Changing Landscape of Work

Description

The employment landscape is rapidly changing and shifting how we see work. Many of the jobs that will exist in 2035 are not present today and the skills needed to do these jobs will need to be developed. Artificial intelligence and automation are certain to impact the way we live and work. The value of diversity in the workplace is growing and evolving. Remote work has a greater impact than ever before. A retirement surge is headed our way. Are we ready?

Panel discussion – Question 1

How do you foresee the most significant changes in employment trends over the next 5 to 10 years?

Overall, adaptability and the ability to learn continuously emerge as critical traits for the future workforce. The conversation highlighted a significant shift in how we perceive work, emphasizing human skills alongside technological advancements. Themes include:

1. **Human Connection in Healthcare:** The healthcare sector will continue to require a human touch, despite advances in technology and artificial intelligence (AI). Lifelong learning will be essential as roles evolve, especially with telehealth and more guided care models.
2. **Shift to Remote and Flexible Work:** The traditional office model is changing, allowing for greater mobility. The gig economy is growing, leading to more portfolio careers and varied work arrangements.
3. **Automation and AI:** These technologies will elevate employees into more skilled roles, as routine tasks become automated. This shift necessitates a focus on critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
4. **Continuous Learning and Adaptability:** Professionals will need to embrace continuous improvement and adaptability to keep pace with changing demands and technological advancements.
5. **Skills Over Degrees:** There is a growing emphasis on competencies rather than formal qualifications, pushing educational institutions to tailor programs to meet industry needs more effectively.
6. **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Companies will increasingly need to align their missions with social values to attract and retain talent.
7. **Data-Driven Human Resources Practices:** Organizations will leverage data to enhance workforce management, addressing turnover and engagement proactively.

Panel discussion - Question #2

How do you see remote work and flexible working arrangements evolving and what impact will they have on employee's productivity and well-being?

Overall, the discussion emphasized the need for companies to adapt their management practices to accommodate remote work while ensuring productivity and security. Some crucial points about the evolving landscape of remote and flexible work were shared. Following is a summary of the key themes.

1. **Well-Being Benefits:** Working from home can enhance employee well-being, providing opportunities for flexibility, downtime, and a better work-life balance. Many employees find they can focus better and manage their tasks more effectively in a remote setting.
2. **Productivity Challenges:** There's a mixed impact on productivity. While some employees thrive in remote environments, others, especially in fast-paced industries like finance, might feel that in-office work fosters quicker decision-making and collaboration. The need for immediacy in competitive environments can lead some leaders to push for a return to the office.
3. **Security Concerns:** Remote work raises concerns about data security and the protection of trade secrets. Companies need to evaluate whether their sensitive information is at risk when employees work from home.

4. **Innovative Disengagement:** Technology can create challenges in managing productivity. Employees might use tools to create the illusion of productivity, complicating performance assessments.
5. **Multiple Employment Risks:** The scenario of an employee holding multiple full-time positions highlights potential conflicts of interest and the challenges employers face in monitoring employee engagement and commitment.
6. **Evaluation and Accountability:** Companies must find ways to balance employee flexibility with the need for accountability. This includes considering how remote work arrangements impact overall business evaluations and performance metrics.

Panel discussion - Question #3

How should educational institutions adapt, adapt their curricula to prepare students for the changing job market?

The discussion emphasized the need for a collaborative and flexible approach to education that prioritizes real-world relevance and continuous growth. Key Themes for Adapting Curricula:

1. **Flexibility and Innovation:** Educational institutions may move away from rigid structures like the Carnegie unit to foster innovation. Emphasizing responsiveness to industry needs will create more relevant programs.
2. **Focus on Skills:** Shift from traditional degree requirements to prioritizing skills and competencies. Programs can embed industry-recognized credentials and continually assess their relevance.
3. **Work-Based Learning:** Incorporating apprenticeships, internships, and customized training will bridge the gap between education and industry, ensuring that students are job-ready.
4. **Collaboration with Employers:** Institutions should actively engage with local businesses to understand their needs and align curricula accordingly. This involves proactive communication and possibly even offering non-credit options that still meet industry demands.
5. **Lifelong Learning:** With the rapid pace of technological change, promoting continuous education and reskilling is essential. Institutions should market themselves as lifelong learning centers to stay relevant.
6. **Soft Skills Emphasis:** Hiring managers are increasingly valuing soft skills like communication, adaptability, and work ethic. Curricula should include training in these areas; they are crucial for success in the workforce.
7. **Holistic Approach:** It is important to consider the whole person—combining IQ with emotional intelligence. Educational institutions should help students develop their character and align their personal values with their career aspirations.
8. **Updating Job Descriptions:** Regular revision of job descriptions is critical to reflect current skills and industry needs. This adaptability ensures that candidates are assessed fairly based on what is truly required for the role.

Panel discussion - Question #4

What role do you see diversity playing in shaping the innovation and growth of future industries?

Diversity is not just an ethical imperative but a critical factor in delivering effective, patient-centered care. As healthcare evolves, leveraging both human insight and technological advancements will be key to ensuring that all patients receive the high-quality care they deserve. Following is a summary of how these elements work together, from a healthcare perspective.

1. **Culturally Competent Care:**
 - **Human Connection:** Understanding and relating to patients from diverse backgrounds fosters trust and improves care experiences.
 - **Compassionate Engagement:** Ensuring that care is tailored to cultural needs enhances patient satisfaction and outcomes.

2. Role of Technology and AI:

- **Support for Care Providers:** AI can offer insights that help healthcare professionals understand cultural nuances and patient histories more effectively.
- **Adaptive Solutions:** Technology can streamline the process of gathering patient data, allowing for quicker adjustments to care plans based on diverse needs.

3. Reducing Algorithmic Bias:

- **Diverse Perspectives:** A varied workforce can identify and correct biases in AI algorithms, ensuring that healthcare tools are equitable and effective across different populations.
- **Comprehensive Data Analysis:** Diverse teams bring varied experiences to data interpretation, leading to better-informed decisions that consider all patient demographics.

4. Equity in Healthcare:

- **Addressing Disparities:** By prioritizing diversity, healthcare systems can better address inequities and improve access to care for underserved populations.
- **Innovative Solutions:** Diverse insights lead to innovative practices and programs that can bridge gaps in healthcare delivery.

Panel discussion - Question #5

How will automation and AI redefine job roles across your industry?

The integration of AI into the workplace presents both challenges and opportunities. By focusing on trust, data quality, and a culture of inquiry, organizations can harness AI's potential to drive innovation and enhance productivity. Following is a synthesis of key ideas on the role of AI and automation in redefining job roles and enhancing workplace efficiency.

1. Adaptation and Creation of Roles:

- **Evolving Job Functions:** AI will modify existing roles while also creating new ones that capitalize on both human strengths and technological capabilities.

2. Trust in AI:

- **Data Integrity:** The reliability of AI outputs hinges on the quality of the data used. Ensuring that data pools are robust and free from bias is critical.
- **Establishing Guardrails:** Effective use of AI requires technical, business, and legislative guardrails to ensure ethical and effective implementation.

3. Augmentation through AI:

- **Enhanced Decision-Making:** AI can assist in generating insights and facilitating communication, allowing employees to ask better questions and make informed decisions faster.
- **Efficiency in Administrative Tasks:** Automating routine tasks like report writing and meeting notes frees up time for more strategic work.

4. Learning by Doing:

- **Test and Learn Approach:** Emphasizing experimentation with AI will help organizations discover practical applications and refine their use of technology.
- **Continuous Improvement:** As employees engage with AI tools, they will develop a deeper understanding of how to leverage these technologies effectively.

5. Culture of Inquiry:

- **Encouraging Questions:** Cultivating an environment where employees feel empowered to question the status quo can drive innovation and improvement.
- **Fostering Communication:** Effective communication with AI tools can lead to quicker problem-solving and more competitive strategies.

Panel discussion - Question #6

How can governments, educational institutions, and businesses collaborate to address the challenges of workforce displacement due to automation?

The panel emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication in driving innovation and addressing challenges in today's workforce. Following are some key takeaways.

1. **Hybrid Solutions through Partnership:**

- **Collaboration is Key:** Partnering with diverse voices leads to more comprehensive solutions. It is crucial to step outside of familiar circles to gather different perspectives.

2. **Value of Diversity:**

- **Diverse Perspectives Enhance Outcomes:** A variety of viewpoints strengthens problem-solving and innovation. This ties back to the earlier discussion about how diversity impacts industries.

3. **Communication as a Foundation:**

- **Open Dialogue:** Effective communication is essential for resolving issues and fostering collaboration. It is important to ask questions and to actively listen and engage with responses.

4. **Continuous Learning and Adaptation:**

- **Challenging Assumptions:** Regularly questioning established beliefs and practices encourages growth and keeps organizations competitive.

5. **Engagement Across All Levels:**

- **Inclusive Discussions:** Involving different levels of an organization in discussions can lead to richer insights and solutions.

Panel discussion - Question #7

What advice would you give professionals or employers?

Panelists provided their perspective on future-proofing careers, highlighting the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and building meaningful relationships in an ever-changing landscape.

- Be flexible and adaptable. Take chances on yourself. When opportunities arise, seize them instead of waiting for the next one. Embrace a mindset of curiosity and problem-solving.
- Focus on having a growth mindset. Remember what industry you are in and how transformative work can elevate students and professionals alike.
- Do not fear AI; leverage it to enhance your skills. Focus on developing soft skills that will stay relevant throughout your career.
- Start every meeting by asking what your audience has learned since your last encounter. Foster a culture of continuous learning and contribution rather than just task completion.
- Relationships matter. Make AI work for you and clarify your purpose so others can align with your vision. Storytelling is essential in making connections and conveying ideas.
- Cultivate resilience. The future is unpredictable, so developing resilience will help professionals navigate changes. Encourage critical thinking, especially when using AI, to ensure answers are accurate and comprehensive.

Audience question #1: What suggestions do you have to help organizations with large generational gaps?

Several suggestions were proposed by the panelists:

1. **Understand Diverse Needs:** Conduct annual employee surveys to identify what different generations value in the workplace. This data can help tailor approaches to meet varied needs while ensuring confidentiality.
2. **Focus on Purpose:** Emphasize the organization's mission and purpose over individual work styles. Encouraging a shared goal can help bridge differences in work approaches.
3. **Enhance Communication:** Prioritize communication and emotional intelligence among leaders to facilitate connections across generational divides.
4. **Inclusive Hiring Practices:** Implement inclusive interviewing strategies that go beyond race and gender, such as considering candidates with autism or from diverse educational backgrounds.
5. **Diverse Candidate Slates:** Actively present diverse candidate slates to hiring managers and challenge biases in candidate selection. This includes partnering with hiring managers to understand their needs and capabilities.
6. **Broaden Recruitment Efforts:** Expand recruitment to include Tier 2 and Tier 3 schools or underrepresented communities to find high-performing candidates that may have been overlooked.

By adopting these strategies, organizations can foster a more inclusive and productive workplace that effectively bridges generational differences.

Audience question #2: You spoke about soft skills, communication, organization and work ethic. How does Harper teach this? And, do you have examples of job skills that enable the new ways of human touch?

To teach these skills, different approaches are necessary for each student. The panelist highlighted the importance of fostering curiosity and excitement in students, drawing from personal experiences. They advocate for in-person interviews to gauge body language and enthusiasm.

Regarding job skills that enable human touch, one example comes from Airbnb's customer service training, which focuses on behavioral and therapeutic skills for handling sensitive situations. The same training framework is also being adapted to train AI.

Audience question #3: What is the role of higher education in this? Is it primarily job prep? Do you foresee employers changing their training methods or level of support to meet outcomes?

The responses emphasize a need for employers to evolve their training and support strategies, advocating for a hybrid partnership between employers and educational institutions. Participants highlight the importance of preparing individuals not just for specific jobs but for lifelong learning, fostering a mindset geared towards growth and adaptability.

There is a call for clearer communication about career pathways to help employees understand the breadth of opportunities their skills can offer. Additionally, the integration of apprenticeship programs is seen as essential, although there is a challenge in justifying their costs and benefits in the short term.

Additionally, there is a push for businesses to view workforce development as an investment rather than a cost, recognizing that investing in employee training leads to higher engagement and retention. Lastly, the responses touched on adapting successful international practices to fit the American context, reflecting a broader trend towards investing in a more educated and skilled workforce for the future.

Audience question #4: How do businesses avoid the obstacle of managers standing in the way of more productive work from home in a remote capacity.

Responses highlight several strategies for businesses to overcome managerial obstacles to productive remote work.

1. **Empowering Leaders:** Emphasis on equipping managers with the skills to utilize remote work effectively, fostering a culture of trust rather than micromanagement. Leaders should focus on outcomes and enable employees to work flexibly as long as goals are met.
2. **Hybrid Work as a Norm:** Recognition that hybrid and remote work arrangements are likely to remain. There is a need for leadership development to adapt to these changes and effectively manage a hybrid workforce.
3. **Understanding Productivity Dynamics:** Acknowledgment that while remote work can enhance certain productivity aspects, it may also diminish creativity. Continuous research is essential to identify the benefits and drawbacks of different work models across industries.
4. **Promotion and Stigmas:** Discussion about potential biases against remote workers in promotion opportunities. Organizations need to address these stigmas and ensure that working from home does not hinder career advancement.
5. **Diversity of Experience:** The need to consider diversity in thought and experience in the context of remote work, encouraging further studies to understand its impacts better.

Audience question #5: What advice would you give professionals or employers looking to future proof their careers?

Responses to the question about future-proofing careers emphasize several key pieces of advice:

1. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Professionals should remain open to change and ready to seize opportunities as they arise, rather than waiting passively for the next chance.
2. **Growth Mindset:** Cultivating a growth mindset is crucial. This involves embracing challenges, being proactive in learning, and focusing on continuous improvement rather than just task completion.
3. **Leveraging AI:** Instead of fearing AI's impact on jobs, individuals should learn to harness it for productivity. This includes understanding its limitations and the importance of critical thinking in evaluating AI-generated information.
4. **Value Relationships:** Building and maintaining strong relationships is vital. Networking and collaboration can enhance learning and career development.
5. **Resilience:** Developing resilience is essential for navigating uncertainty. Professionals should prepare for evolving skill requirements and remain steadfast in the face of change.
6. **Focus on Purpose and Storytelling:** Having a clear sense of purpose helps guide decisions and inspires others. Storytelling can enhance communication and engagement in various professional contexts.
7. **Continuous Learning:** Employers should encourage a culture of learning by asking team members about their recent learnings and fostering an environment where everyone is committed to growth.

Overall, panelists shared a common response that adaptability, a proactive learning approach, and strong interpersonal skills will be key to thriving in the future job market.