

weconomy

COLLABORATIVE ENTERPRISE MAGAZINE

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13



Kill Skill

A NON-CATALOGUE OF SKILLS



open



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EN





Weconomy is the research platform of Logotel, a Service Design Company. It is open, shared and multidisciplinary, and explores the paradigms and opportunities of the collaborative economy. For the past 10 years, Weconomy has been observing avant-garde transformations in order to improve the vision of Logotel's designs. It first came into being in 2009, in conjunction with the book *Weconomy. Leconomia riparte dal Noi*, published by Dalai, and then developed further through the *weconomy.it* website, with the participation of an international network of more than 200 authors. Research has expanded even further since 2012, with a series of Journals that are published in paper form, on the website and through the app. Each Journal is based on a letter of the alphabet. This edition, the thirteenth in the series, is dedicated to "S" for skill. **Happy reading!**

weconomy

COLLABORATIVE ENTERPRISE MAGAZINE

a cura di **Logotel**

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Logotel is a Service Design Company that works collaboratively with companies to plan and foster business change. We have been building services and experiences with our clients on an international scale since 1993, covering everything from strategy to implementation to the “life” of a project. Our team of over 190 people is based in Milan in a 2,400 m² centre that used to be the factory where Faema espresso machines were made. Our offices abroad are in Paris and Madrid. Logotel served over 60 clients in 2018, providing training to 5,000 people, and supporting over 80,000 people every day through the 31 content and business communities offering services, content and inspiration while encouraging sharing and engagement.



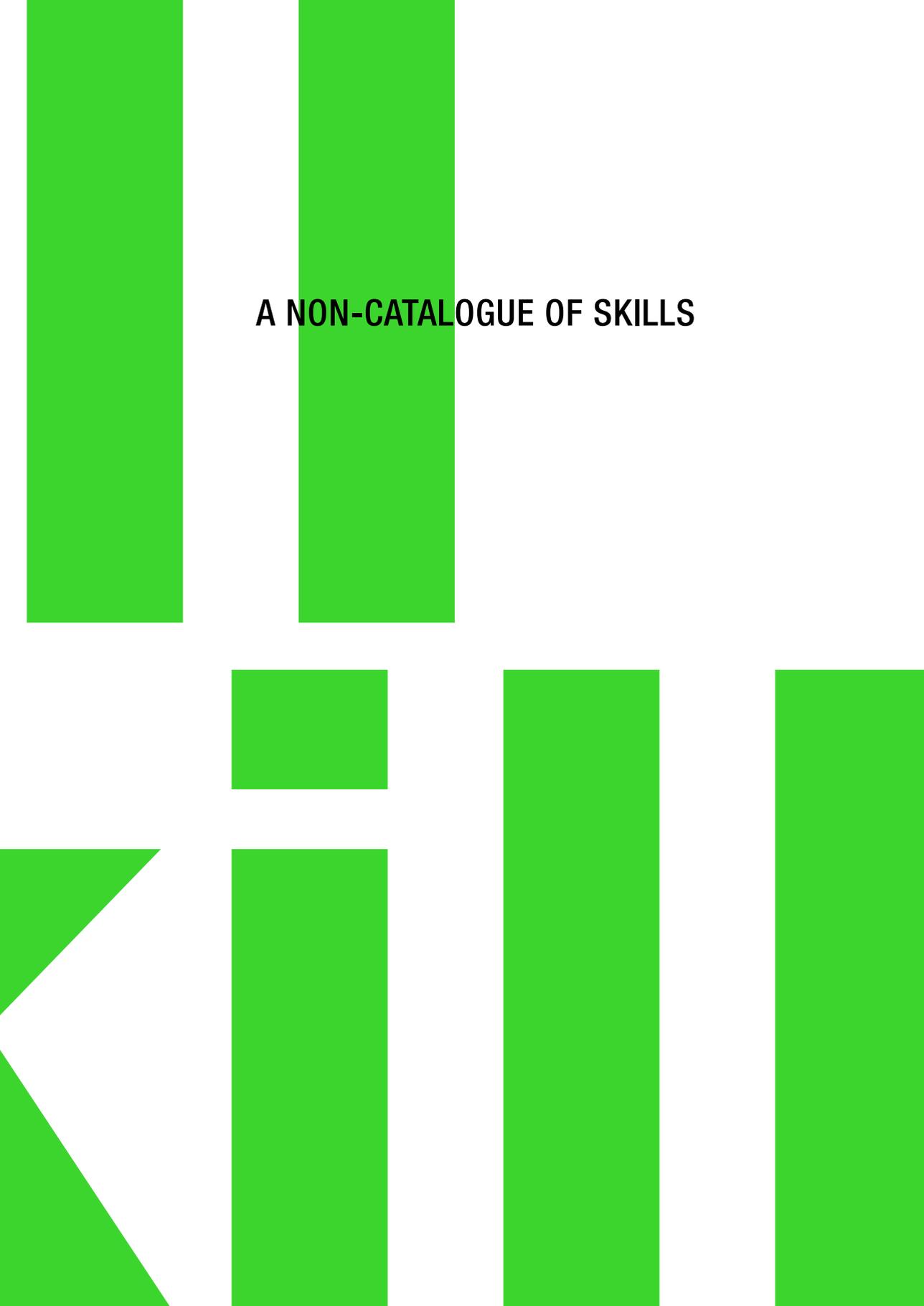
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The image features a white background with several green geometric shapes. At the top, there are two vertical bars of different widths. Below them, the text 'A NON-CATALOGUE OF SKILLS' is centered. In the lower half, there are four vertical bars of varying heights and widths, and a large green triangle on the left side that is cut off by the edge of the image.

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opening



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skills in action

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stories

final
lap

QUID NOVI?
Generation
working together



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EMPOWERMENT,
FEEDBACK,
GAMIFICATION

Once upon a time
in retail

E

INFO

Indie, Inter:
renewing innovation

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OOPS, OR, OK

The paradox
of continual choice



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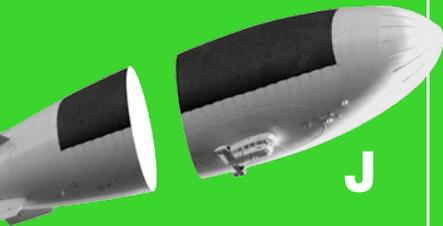
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A non-catalogue
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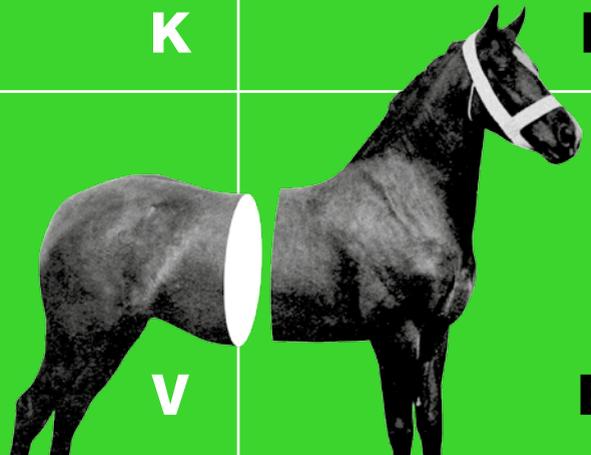
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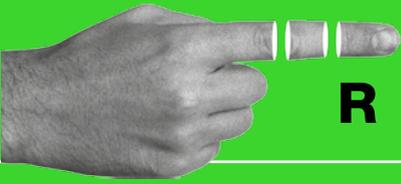
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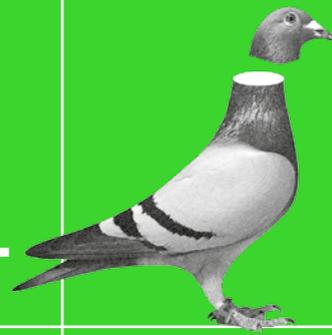
ROBOT

Is automation collaborative?



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P.O.P COLLABORATION

Point of presence

P

A

AUTO, BETA, CO.

(Re)writing
the future

HR

Human (R)evolution

G

H



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X

NE(X)TWORK

Flow. Amplified Identity
Common Environment

N

M

MANAGEMENT

Cross, Self Content

THE A-TO-Z OF THE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY

We are living in an era when the traditional models of organising companies and interacting within them are having to engage both with radically different new generations and with some non-human partners and intelligences. Faced with these challenges, Weconomy is exploring how business, design and sharing come together to impact on people's experience. Weconomy is a network of managers, researchers, designers and professionals who firmly believe that any effective initiative or innovation is still driven by people and the relationships that they have the freedom and creativity to build. The Weconomy Journals are monographs, where every issue opens up a research perspective on the collaborative economy, themed around a single letter.

Kill skill. Why must we kill catalogue skills?



Cristina Favini

*Strategist,
Manager of Design,
Logotel*

**The best people
are not made of labels.
Their “betterness” is the
“outcome” of a lifetime**

One of the choices that had the most impact in my life was the decision to surround myself with people who are *better* than me. And I have done so, we have done so. We don't always manage it. Now we have to agree on what *better* means, because that's the crux of the matter.

We're well aware that if we want to make a difference, to produce a real impact for people and society, to bequeath something beautiful to posterity, then we need others; we need people who know how to “see” reality, with curiosity and a hunger for debate. People who also know how to “fore-see” things that are not here today, in order to imagine how to they might be achieved, by first and foremost mixing different professions and roles so as to “show”, give form to actions in relation to others, bring an idea into existence – and make it grow – through day-to-day behaviours.

People who are only capable of carrying out tasks have never been enough, and – now more than ever – we need people who know how to grasp the meaning of what they are doing, or better yet, how to design, interpret, share and advance it with conviction and sacrifice. It is these individuals who give rise to the experiences that give us the most satisfaction as entrepreneurs, as “team motivators”, as professionals or simply as colleagues. Because in this way we are able to seize opportunities, which then become those “blood, sweat and laughter” projects that we manage to bring to completion in the face of all hurdles and whose value is – ultimately – recognized, because they truly improve things. These are the projects where we give our best, together with the best of others. Individuals, who by definition are unique and therefore irreplaceable, are more crucial than ever in this context, especially in this technology-dominated world that needs a human touch: it is the original and non-standardized component that sets us apart from machines.

The return of the assembly line (of skills)

As we know, technology has accelerated the rate of transformation and increased the density unforeseen events that we must tackle. It is not by chance that the most regularly mentioned future skills include not just technical skills but also, with increasing insistence, the so-called human skills: flexibility, creative thinking, emotional intelligence, analytical ability and decision-making.

Now we come to the catchphrase of the moment: skill is the new black. What “future-proof” skills do the best people have? In order to find an answer, we find ourselves reading grids, charts and codes. We have subdivisions into soft, hard and even fusion. People are broken down into a jigsaw of definitions. According to this approach, skills appear to be software add-ons, or “minimum requirements” for making a new operating system function. And our “diminished” hardware-individuals must be “increased”. Such definitions are pigeonholed in Excel sheets that we strain to fill in, until we discover that there are still countless empty cells. This represents our skill shortage, which we must urgently fill with whatever is on offer in the latest edition of the *Catalogue of most fashionable skills*. “Critical thinking” becomes a course that is provided to throngs of people, topped off with training modules on Agile methods. New procedures replace old procedures, until the next trend comes along.

The only limit is our own vision

Let’s go back to the beginning; to the best people. I first noticed that the greatest limitation is my own one; it is our perception when we look at people. The best people are not made of labels. Their “betterness” is the “outcome” of a lifetime, of a history. They are an irreducible whole that cannot be detected from a CV alone. They are people with whom we can build a path to follow together. Their knowledge is the result of what they do both inside and outside of the “world of work” and their skills are there and continue to develop as, along their itinerary, they challenge themselves with environments, contexts and projects/challenges that allow them to do so.

A basic tenet therefore, could be: you can’t start from skills. A person’s value/substance can be seen in action, in their skills in action. There are no grids or charts that can reveal it to us. So what type of action are we able to inspire? What moves can we elicit? Obviously aptitudes exist, but even these need the right ground to reveal themselves.

Free your inspiration and act

The outlook of those who think that everything is replaceable is structurally limited: mankind → output, even when speaking of skills and training. It is an outlook marred by the urgency of things, and is blind to the possibilities of individuals. The real challenge concerns above all the people who are with us. Of course, there are challenges that require people that are equal to the task, but let’s turn this view around: do our own intellects measure up to the people around us?

Further reading

Weconomy #12 Robot. Is automation collaborative?

A journal dedicated to the possible relationships that humans may have with technology. It is set out as an open dialogue on the effects of automation and the “post-human” dimension on businesses and society

bit.ly/wejournal12

Weconomy #11 Quid novi? Generation working together

An analysis on the value of sharing workplaces, times and spaces and among different generation and the opportunities of having different mindsets and points of view into organizations

bit.ly/wejournal11

Weconomy #8 Ne(x)twork: flow, amplified identity, common environment

This issue is about the future of work: shared and always connected, that generates the flow of the collaborative enterprise

bit.ly/wejournal8

The real challenge of training lies here: in building contexts and ecosystems that engage people in a continual dialogue and debate between individual and group

All of this inevitably influences every discussion on skills. The motives we have, the paths we propose, are offered to the people – and their histories – who are related to us and our history. Any offer of change (reskill, deskill, upskill) must be able to connect with the history of the individuals, or else it will fail.

Organizations must inspire work on oneself and agree to take part in it, at the same level, going beyond the traditional hierarchies. This generates the most crucial transformation: that of people and their outlook. Only in this way can new responsibilities be accepted.

Environments and networks of relationships that empower people

“The best that a person can offer is offered freely”. To this end, it is necessary to create and guarantee “trusted environments” in which people can train and continue to learn, not only during the courses but in their everyday activities. The real challenge of training lies here: in building contexts and ecosystems that engage people in a continual dialogue and debate between individual and group. Here, aptitude, motivation, permission and opportunity all act together to make each person’s initiative real, fitting and creative. In this way, skills can become behaviours, daily actions, natural choices.

Environments that train, or rather that give shape to their itinerary, that take account of their uniqueness and give everybody the ability to improve themselves; surroundings in which continuous learning is part of a network of relationships and of useful and enjoyable exchange. Organizations and individuals need to become “learning” systems, in which the culture of continual self-education also entails creating opportunities for putting one’s own abilities into action. Learning thus becomes an “activatable knowledge” that does not necessarily reside in the subject, but rather in the network or community.

We must go beyond the vision that limits us to seeing only skills, and broaden our outlook to include individuals. Let’s go beyond the vision that makes us stop at the skills of the “good” individual, and instead note the synergy of the functioning group or of the activated network. If skills are not the subject, is there any point still in this urge to

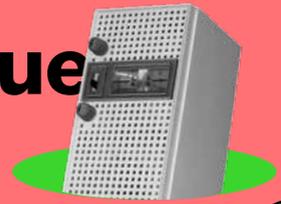
control how they are learned? Or does it become more relevant to give people the freedom to learn in the best way they can? We will know that our system works because we will see its impact in everything that people will do and that we will do with them.

This journal – Weconomy’s thirteenth – aims to provide an opportunity to help you develop your own “critical thinking” on the topic of skills. It is the result of research in the field, based on what we know best: the point of view of Logotel who, for the past 25 years, has dedicated every day to taking care of more than 80,000 people in services that accompany the transformation of individuals and organizations. It is the result of a proliferation of points of view, opening our thinking towards the outside. Ranging from London to San Francisco, and passing by Davos, we have engaged with researchers from the World Economic Forum, experts in learning models, designers, psychologists, entrepreneurs, frontline reality in the field of artificial intelligence, startups and human resources managers, who have all offered their valuable input.

You can read the journal, listen to it by podcast, download it and share it... or simply skip it and continue to think of other things if you can allow yourself to do so. ■

**Of course, there are challenges
that require people that
are equal to the task,
but let’s turn this view around:
do our own intellects measure up
to the people around us?**

An imaginary dialogue on competencies and the world of work



I've heard of neologisms like upskill and reskill but never *kill skill*.

we

It's a play on the title of the Quentin Tarantino film *Kill Bill* – but fear not, gentle reader, we won't be grabbing a katana and wreaking vengeance like Uma Thurman. We just want to make you pause for thought. The shortage of skills for tackling the changes afoot today is one of the hottest topics of the moment. But the solution often goes no further than coming up with lists of "future-proof" skills like "critical thinking", "decision-making" and "digital literacy".



But these skills will be increasingly important, according to some very authoritative research centres. And I tend to agree with them.

we

Sure, but something is missing. An example: programming a computer is a skill that you can learn, and it can be applied in a specific context. But how do you train critical thinking? How do you practise it? In what contexts? When we talk of skills, we are actually talking about developing people, and that cuts across many other themes: business organisation, training models and working practices. There is a whole system of factors that, if neglected, will leave competencies to erode and die – which is what we mean by *killed skills*.

So it's not just about new skills but those you have already acquired, too.



we

This is a key point. Diamonds may be forever, but skills aren't. Technical skills become outdated, like software. It's a case of use it or lose it. To keep people's skills alive and create the conditions for developing new ones, we need to cultivate the right attitude, to motivate people, to enable them to experiment and give them the opportunity to apply their skills. In the *Journal*, we call these elements "activators"; they transform skills into natural behaviours, things we do every day, as we put ourselves to the test.



Haven't you forgotten someone here? I'm picking up new skills faster than you. I'm already replacing humans in many jobs. And as artificial intelligence (AI) marches on, you'll have to work with me, too.

we

On the contrary, we're well aware that automation is transforming the working world. Which is precisely why people need to be able to apply their skills in different ways (*reskilling*) and learn to handle increasingly complex scenarios (*upskilling*).



But if humans can't perform some new task, why not let AI get on with it and leave the more creative things to us?



I'd like to field that one, if I may. Developments in the cognitive sciences show that algorithms can operate unsupervised – without human intervention – evolving based on the context.

we

My dear robot, that's not quite true. A colleague of yours, *Deep Thought*, the most advanced computer in the universe in the book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was tasked with answering the fundamental question, "What is the meaning of life?". The answer, after billions of years of calculation, was meaningless. So while it's true that machines will be increasingly autonomous, who will decide which processes to automate and which ideas to put into practice?



But answering these questions has little to do with AI.

we

Exactly. It's about understanding the sense of our role in an organisation and the value that we ascribe to our actions. That is the real proving ground for skills, which become useful when they allow us to do something significant that reinforces a virtuous circle of trust and motivation in people. Which is why we see the real challenge as constructing a robust ecosystem around which we can build continuing-education pathways that take account of what makes people unique and enable everyone to grow. And that is what this *Journal* is all about.

The scenario. What do we mean by “skills”?

85% of the jobs of the future have not been invented yet, according to an IFTF report. Just as nearly 50% of the vacancies in the last 5 years did not exist in the previous 5. A quick browse on LinkedIn confirms as much, with brand-new job titles like *conversational interface architect*, *omnichannel planner and requirements engineering ninja*. And that's just for starters.

Further reading

Institute for the Future

*The next era
of Human-Machine
Partnerships. Emerging
Technologies' Impact
on Society & Work
in 2030*

bit.ly/we-iftf

David Graeber

*Bullshit Jobs.
A Theory* (Simon &
Schuster 2018)

Nassim Nicholas Taleb

*The Black Swan:
The Impact of the
Highly Improbable*
(Penguin Books Ltd 2008)

Augmentation Strategy

It is about a new vision of the value chain. It implies that the achievement of the full potential of human resources is a core part of the organisations' strategies

It is not (just) about new labels. The relationships between jobs and professional roles are blurring and heading in new directions. While the relationship is direct and straightforward for traditional positions (an engineer is an engineer; a manager is a manager), with the new positions, “what I do” is no longer a constant. Jobs demand an increasingly broad vision: an “**augmentation strategy**”, to quote the World Economic Forum *Future of Jobs Report 2018*.

As professions acquire different names, skills are needed to make them meaningful. Otherwise, they risk becoming empty vessels – or worse, unfillable positions with no suitable candidate. It is an aspect of the *skill shortage* that cannot be underestimated, when there

**The relationships
between jobs
and professional
roles are blurring
and heading
in new directions**

are not enough people with the skills needed to fulfil a given role. It is the most visible effect of a transformation in our social, economic and productive landscape that affects every kind of activity and is prompting some radical visions. Some foresee the end of the classic job title in a future where there will soon be only roles, based on a fluid collection of personal and collaborative skills to

be acquired over time. It is a change of perspective in response to two key needs: to be able to adapt and to manage complexity.

The forces destabilising the formation and development of new skills are already at play

Why is all this happening? In essence, change is becoming increasingly rapid and frequent, and this acceleration will not stop while the economy is both globalised and digitally connected. Whenever new human needs arise, they are picked up on and transformed into new trends that spread around the world. Organisations then need to respond to them with new products and services: the faster they do so, the more competitive they will be. So business must understand, plan, test, make and distribute. Typical launch cycles have concertinaed from two years to six months and will continue to shrink.

Rapid change brings more surprises. Not all changes follow the precipitate pace of technological development. Recent years have witnessed events that economist and philosopher Nassim Taleb terms “black swans”: unforeseen episodes with potentially negative consequences for the whole world. Take the ongoing enigma that is Brexit, for example, or Dieselgate, which throttled the life out of a technology that, without the 2016 scandal, would have had another three decades left in it.

These phenomena impact on organisations’ strategy. They are made of people, who need tools and new skills and capabilities – not just to perform tasks but to understand what they mean. Not by chance, the most cited skills of the future include a whole world of words bound up with soft skills: strategic problem solving, analytical skills and decision-making. And it is not only managers who need them nowadays but anyone in any job. They are overtaking technical skills (like the ability to program a computer or use a software tool) to become part of a “cultural” realm that defies definition.

And we haven’t even mentioned the fourth industrial revolution yet. Algorithms, robots and autonomous systems are coming soon to a future near you, and they will take over entire production chains. In an optimistic vision of this scenario, the machines will be entrusted with “operational” jobs and will improve the quality of our working lives, with fewer hours behind a desk and fewer repetitive tasks. To make this vision a reality, companies, aided by the policymakers, must enable their people to *reskill and upskill* (to retrain them and upgrade their existing capabilities) to use their talent and their best human attributes to generate new value.

Automation is a looming spectre, but the forces destabilising the establishment of, the quest for and the development of new skills are already at play. (And technology isn’t the only one.) Many open questions remain, and if they stay unanswered, another kind of transformation will ensue: one that potentially makes every job a bullshit job, in David Graeber’s terms. Roles, in other words, that use time-expired skills in a context that has now moved on. These jobs survive out of inertia; they have lost their meaning and generate no value. They waste talent and have little or no economic impact. So how, through skills and ongoing development, can people remain relevant – in organisations and for the benefit of society? ■





What if learning new skills isn't enough?

In the film *The Matrix*, lead character Neo has to face the bad guys. And he needs skills, from flying helicopters and breaking locks to executing martial arts. He gets everything he needs, instantly. The necessary information is “injected” into his brain directly from a computer. Is this the utopia of *reskilling* and *upskilling*? Learning lightning fast to adapt to ever-swifter change?

Further reading

European Commission
Future of Learning Package

bit.ly/we-ue

Video interview with Elon Musk on Neuralink

bit.ly/we-elon

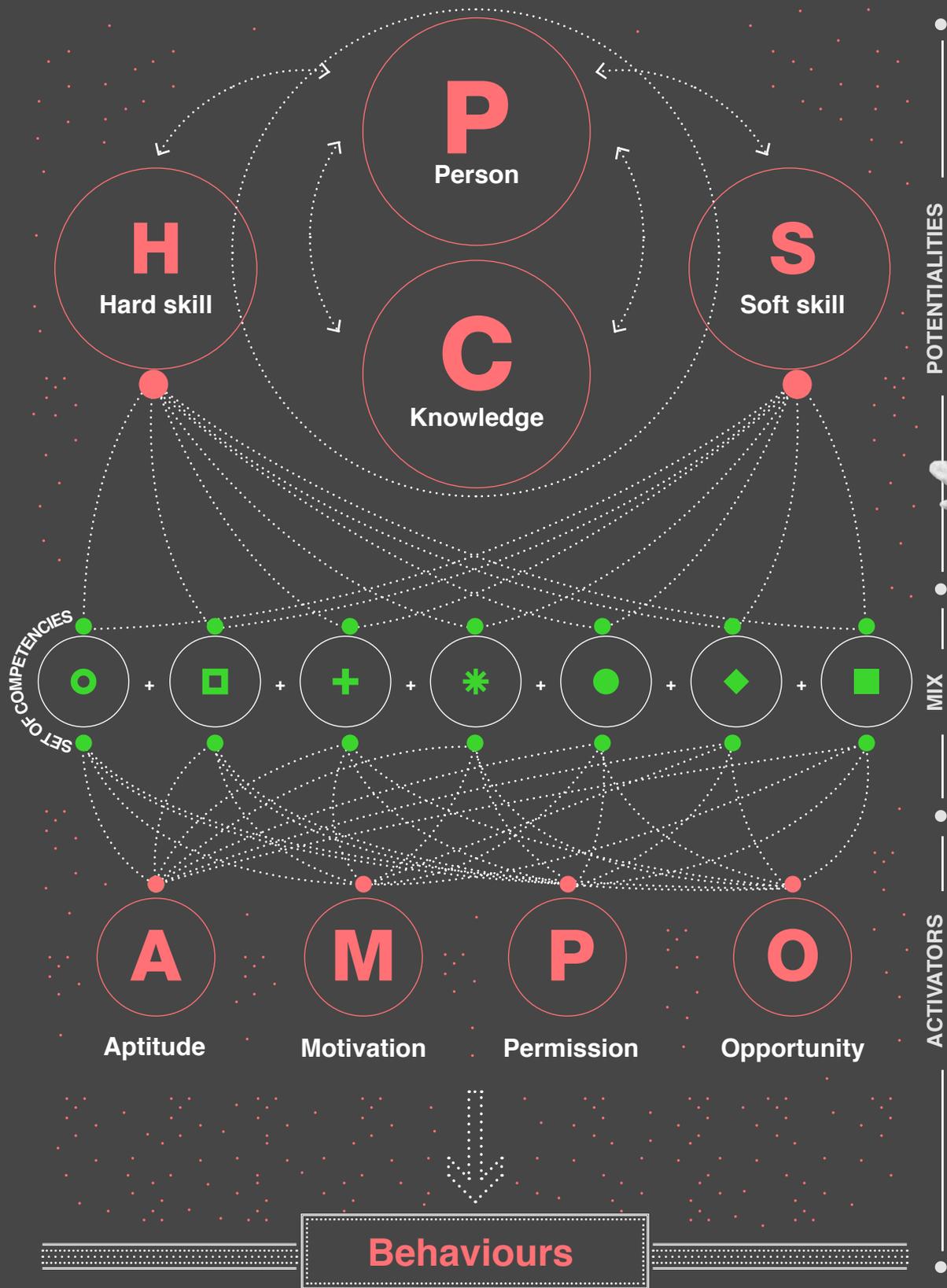
When I Googled “future-proof skills”, I got 162 million hits. Harvard University offers an excellent free event-cum-course on computer coding (CS50). And from Udemy and Coursera to the Italian Oilproject website, there is no shortage of opportunities to learn about *big-data analytics* or emotional intelligence either. An endless sea of training with platforms vying with each other to be ever more effective. When it comes to developing new skills, there's no shortage of supply.

So to be “future-proof”, we just need to link up to the Matrix. And here's the good news: all this could actually happen. Neuralink, a tech company owned by serial entrepreneur and visionary Elon Musk, promises to do just that. (If and) when this technology comes to market, we'll all be able to learn the most complex programming languages or the most sophisticated *decision-making* framework, overwriting what we no longer need – now-passé skills, like multitasking or working under pressure – with new trends like resilience and creative thinking. Which may then be overwritten in turn. And so on.

But is all this really necessary? We are at a time when skills have become unstable: there are countless skills to develop and as many ways to pick them up. So if we immediately learn the latest *problem-solving* method, does that make us better problem-solvers? Strange as that question may seem, we can answer with one last quote, from Morpheus, Neo's mentor in *The Matrix*: “There's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path”.

In the world of training and organisations, “walking the path” refers to people. It probably doesn't mean learning everything new under the sun. Humans learn by doing, by exploring different visions. And above all, skills become “active” when they are useful. To paraphrase the European Commission *Digital Action Plan*, there is no one-size-fits-all for skill-development strategies; every approach must be based on the specifics, case by case. When people take an active role, they enrich and tailor their skills to their particular role, to contribute to their team, to help others develop.

But there's one more piece in the puzzle. To adapt to change, what drives people to abandon established practices and learn something new? ■



Behaviours



Catalogues of skills are an illusion. They suggest that people can be injected with a standard solution of skills to do something new.

Knowledge and skills are a dynamic, evolving whole. To be put into practice and to evolve, **they must become behaviours**, everyday actions, natural choices.

Skills are not real without a context. **It is the context that determines the most suitable mix of knowledge and skills** for participating in an organisation's life.

Skills and knowledge need to be activated in people. And that happens at a **deeper level**: in a space of continual interaction between the individual and the collective, where **attitude, motivation, permission** and **opportunity** combine to channel people's initiative into something creative and real.

We need to work on this level to ensure our idea of skills is not reduced to yet another "procedure".

Made by **Logotel**

Turning skills into behaviours. A systemic model.

Further reading

Daniel Kahneman

Thinking, Fast and Slow
(Penguin Books Ltd 2012)

Kim J. Vicente

*The Human Factor:
Revolutionizing
the Way People
Live with Technology*
(Routledge 2016)

**Knowledge comes from
our life experience.
It cannot be manufactured
as a kind of standard product**

Skills, knowledge, competencies, aptitudes... there's a real temptation to use these words as if they meant the same thing – only they don't. And when we're talking about pathways to develop people, there's an even stronger itch: to coin a fresh vocabulary, almost as if new words were enough to throw over the old and establish a whole new system.

So let's try to set down a few markers. The personal-development world is awash with terms and trends, and without a clear direction, they can lead to approaches that are a bit samey and don't amount to much in practice. In this article, then, we have striven to distil things, to pin down the concepts that we shall be using throughout this.

Knowledge

First, two terms that ought not to be confused: knowledge and skills. Knowledge is about ideas, information and concepts acquired during years of training: a set of cultural notions and private interests, a breeding ground for new ideas. It is about how we look at and understand the world around us and the people in it. Knowledge takes time to accumulate, but in compensation, it stands the test of time, and once acquired, it doesn't soon go out of fashion. It is a vital component of talent, of what makes people unique, for it accrues from a development pathway called life experience. It cannot therefore be manufactured as some kind of standard product.

Skills

Skills, though, are different. We can think of them as tools for tackling problems, handling situations or using technologies. Practice is fundamental: they sharpen with experience, and if not cultivated they atrophy. When speaking of skills,

then, time is a key factor. Thinking of them as tools, they become blunt if not suitably looked after. And we must be sure to use the right ones at the right time. Unlike knowledge, some of which can be termed "universal", skills are specific and selective – skills that are no longer useful can or must be shelved.

Hard and soft skills

Skills are either *hard* or *soft*. The former can be measured and taught, and they concern a specific sphere of knowledge (programming, accounting, etc.); the latter are non-cognitive and regard our creative side, emotional intelligence, and so on. In the traditional view of things, hard skills are fundamental, while soft skills are ancillary. In the latest thinking, however, the two types are seen as converging. Some talk of fusion skills; others, like Kim J. Vicente in his interesting book *The Human Factor*, have coined the term *basement skills* to refer to a collection of skills that are vital in a given role. But while it is no longer useful to create a hierarchy of skill types, we must not get bogged down in classifications and complexities either. *Hard and soft skills* have a long tradition, which we should preserve in order to focus on how they interact with one another.

Skill sets

Knowledge and skills can be considered part of a person's potential. But every context, every project and every job require a suitable mix of the two, and this is where skill sets come in. A new task requires not just one new skill but rather a new combination of them. From this perspective, organisations need to map their people's skills and knowledge in order to re-blend them, to fill specific gaps and establish effective collaborations. What's more, by bringing together differently trained people and by mixing skill sets, we can create horizontal development pathways.

Activators

Thus far, we have addressed the realm of *savoir-faire*. With the right skill set, teams have all the tools they need to handle a fast-moving context. But "being able to" do something can be a world away from actually doing it, from putting your skills into practice on a live project or taking decisions. In his celebrated book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Nobel Prize-winner Daniel Kahneman, the father

Organisations need to map their skills and knowledge in order to re-blend them, to fill gaps and establish collaborations



of behavioural economics, writes: “Whether professionals have a chance to develop intuitive expertise depends essentially on the quality and speed of feedback, as well as on sufficient opportunity to practice.”

To step out of the working environment for a moment, if we are qualified to sail a boat but we have never put out from port, this qualification will not get us anywhere. So practising the skill will achieve nothing, and we will forget it.

So we need something to activate the processes of maintaining, selecting and strengthening skill sets. This is a different perspective from the developmental-psychology *scaffolding* that props up our knowledge. Skills and knowledge, then, are not a catalogue of information to dip into; rather, they are catalysed into action by *activators* that enable us to adapt our behaviour to achieve a common goal.

So what exactly are these activators? They are relational elements found in people as much as in organisations.

1. Aptitude. Some claim that aptitude is based on a predisposition (something innate); others think it a construct of our life story. Every aptitude, though, needs to be cultivated and developed. It acts as the trigger for a process of influence between individuals and communities. Aptitude is based not only on rational components but also on a strong affective element. It is what gives us certain inclinations and makes us lean in a particular direction. It is what suggests a first step, an initial “instinctive” response – for example, to questions like “Is this working environment right for me?” or “Do I want to express my skills in this context?”.

2. Motivation. This is what prompts us to abandon an established practice and take new action. It is based on a continual interplay between organisational needs and individual aspirations. Above all, it introduces the

“I” factor clearly, knowingly and even publicly into the operational context. And it transforms the level of interactions. One motivation leads to another; and they feed on *feedback*.

3. Permission. This is an environmental factor. In innovation and *re- or upskilling* processes, it affords us a space to practise with new tools and techniques.

4. Opportunity. Opportunity is about the importance of actions put into practice. This activator enables individuals and organisations to test the effectiveness of new skills. It powers a spirit of adaptation, allowing a theory to be verified on a real project and then rolled out to the rest of the company – or binned.

Behaviours. All activators occupy a dynamic social space that affects all our everyday actions. Indeed, when skills become behaviours, they accelerate, even turning into instinct and intuition. So what is the ultimate goal here? It is for organisations to become independent generators of new, context-based skill sets, in which personal and educational pathways (knowledge) become practical tools (skills) based on people’s roles. Applying new skills then becomes so natural that we forget how we learned them.

In essence, when activators turn skills into behaviours, we overcome the tendency that, to quote Kahneman again, “is built deep into our nature” – laziness. For then, it is no longer about learning something new, as we are already putting it into practice. And this something is already evolving in relation to others. ■

aptitude



merit

performance

opportunity

re-
skill
de-
skill
& upskill



Reskill

Our skills are not disposable. When jobs change, skills are not necessarily to be binned and upgraded. We risk falling into an endless spiral of accumulating information with no context. So how can we map skills to reveal what they are worth to people and organisations? How can we reposition them? What can training do to help people re-blend their skills?

skill gap

talent mapping

skill shortage

Deskill

Skills sometimes become obsolete and ineffective. If they become a slavish application of a procedure, then our horizons diminish, and we cannot adapt to new contexts. Can unlearning be a valuable skill? What spurs us to abandon established practices? How much awareness do people need in order to decide what not to do any more? How can we guide them?

habits

overload

Upskill

To develop people, they need more than just information. It is important to start from what makes them unique, to discover the intrinsic value they can offer to help organisations plug skill gaps. How can we create the conditions to foster a culture of self-learning and collective improvement? How can we forge links between training, “augmented” strategies and developing individuals?

biography

augmentation strategy



A cultural challenge: we will become “lifelong learners”

Why a “*reskilling revolution*” is necessary:

According to the World Economic Forum’s latest *Future of Jobs Report*, by 2022, the average worker will need the equivalent of 101 days of *reskilling or upskilling* to be prepared for the jobs of the future; 42% of his or her required skillset will be completely new relative to 2018. The Fourth Industrial Revolution does not only change the skills required in the workplace of the future – it also dramatically accelerates the pace of change. Moving to a culture of *continuous and lifelong learning* will be key to succeeding in this new context – for companies and individual workers alike.

Interview with

Till Alexander Leopold

Project Lead, Education, Gender and Work System Initiative, World Economic Forum

Saadia Zahidi

Managing Director, Head of Social and Economic Agendas, World Economic Forum

Vessalina Stefanova Ratcheva

Data Lead, World Economic Forum

A perspective on how skills are evolving as the world of work and society as a whole change. People interviewed contributed to World Economic Forum’s *Future of Jobs Report 2018*

For you, in a *re- and upskilling* process, what are the main challenges to overcome?

A first challenge to overcome is building awareness of the scale of the issue – both among business decision-makers and individuals. On this, we have seen good global progress over the past few years. However, a more structural challenge concerns the fact that most of the world’s current education and *training* systems have been “frontloaded” in the early years of people’s lives. *We are facing the challenge of building, for the first time in human history, a comprehensive education system centered on adults.* People not only need to begin seeing themselves as lifelong learners but employers and *policymakers* will need to put in place the supporting mechanisms and incentives to actually make such lifelong learning practically feasible.

Do you think that *reskilling* processes are the same for every industry or is in some industries is more difficult?

To some extent, the distinctive nature of the work performed within each industry sector will result in disruption to jobs and skills that demand industry-specific adaptations. For example, given comparatively high levels of education in the financial services industry, displaced roles may be somewhat more easily offset by redeploying workers in alternative, higher value-added functions. In contrast, the two largest job roles in the consumer industry, Cashiers and Sales Associates—accounting for no less than 45% of that industry sector’s total employment—have a comparatively small share of workers with advanced education. However, the impending changes to the employment and skills landscape are not simply following traditional categories such as “blue collar vs white collar” or “high-skilled vs low-skilled”. The fundamental pace of change and need for lifelong learning will be similar across all industries and across all job types.

In the *Future of jobs report 2018* we have read that, in the next few years, there will be a “great skill instability”. What does it mean?

Globally, our research findings indicate that average “skills stability”—that is: the proportion of core skills required to perform a job that will remain the same over the 2018–2022 period – to be about 58%, meaning an average shift of 42% in required workplace skills. The implication of this for the reskilling process is that reskilling cannot be a one-time exercise – a one-shot “mass update” of people’s skills for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, if you like – but rather what is needed, as mentioned above, is a comprehensive system of lifelong and continuous learning. The future pace of skills change is likely only going to accelerate.

Based on your findings are there any “future-proof skills”?

Key skills demand trends identified by our analysis include, on the one hand, continued growth in prominence of skills such as analytical thinking and active learning and, on the other hand, growing demand for various forms of technology competency. When it comes to “future-proof skills”, proficiency in new technologies is only one part of the equation, however, as “*human*” skills such as creativity, critical thinking, persuasion, and negotiation will likewise retain or increase their value, as will attention to detail, resilience, flexibility and complex *problem-solving*. Emotional intelligence, leadership and *social influence* as well as service orientation also see a large increase in demand in our analysis.

What’s the role of corporate training in a re- and upskilling process?

Companies will need to pursue a range of organizational strategies in order to stay competitive in the face of rapidly changing workforce skills requirements. In fact, to successfully do this, the skills of executive leadership and human resources officers will also often need to evolve to successfully lead this transformation. More broadly, corporate training has a critical role to play for re- and upskilling workers facing shifting skills demand. Employers must understand that this is a core bottom line and competitiveness issue in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in addition to contributing to the inclusiveness and cohesion of our societies. ■

**Reskilling cannot be
a mass update. It requires
a culture of continual learning.
Skills are only going
to change faster**

Further reading

**World Economic
Forum**
*The Future of Jobs
Report 2018*

bit.ly/we-wef

Beyond practice. How do you train people to think?



**Giuseppe
Monteduro**

Research Fellow
in Sociology, Bologna
University

A sociological approach to probe how a person's behavioural traits can interact with their environment – school and work in particular

Further reading

Giuseppe Monteduro

Una testa pensante è meglio di una testa piena. Una ricerca sul ruolo della scuola nella formazione dei top manager
(Egea 2018)

Skills, of course, are now the hot topic in every public arena, from the professional (where we are required to perform specific, paid, roles) to the educational (where we were required, and today's kids still are, to acquire knowledge) to the informal, in the family or outside. Skills – our individual aptitudes and behavioural traits – represent our public face, a “CV” with which we present ourselves at school or in the workplace and which can open doors for us or see us shut out in the cold. Skills are parameters that differentiate and distinguish. And it is precisely this way of setting us apart that gives them a central role in today's business world. There, a person's individual traits and abilities are increasingly key to the outcome of a procedure or project. Unlike in Henry Ford's era, when *standardization was prized over creativity*, differentiation is now the winning watchword.

Thus, we need to understand how to acquire the skills we need for our environment.

Above all, and it might seem odd to say so straight after talking about differentiation, you acquire skills from people who already have them – imitating and repeating their behaviour, trying to spend more time with them is the “simplest”, most human way to develop skills. This process of “acquisition by osmosis” happens not only at work but also at school and in the home. The saying “*tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are*” means for our purposes that those we choose

to spend our time with also show us how we want to be. What's more, for a number of years there have been specific courses (especially at postgraduate level) aimed at acquiring skills, and they are useful tools *if combined with daily practice*, as they focus the mind to explore what lies behind certain behaviours.

Soft skills are also learned away from the classroom. Ever since we were kids, cultivating the habit of working every day on something,

**In the past, creativity
was valued less
than standardisation;
now, it is what gives
you the edge**

besides the things we do for pleasure, teaches us to be timely, precise and disciplined, to adapt to our environment, to take action and to develop our personality, i.e. all those original characteristics that set us apart from everyone else. This dynamic was exemplified, until the 1990s, by schoolkids' holiday jobs. Their real gain (besides the financial side, with the first experience of managing their own money) was in learning how to reckon with rules set by others, instructions that were not up for debate. Although now an increasingly casual practice, it has been borrowed in schools' work experience programmes, initiatives that will become much more valuable and effective if they help kids learn how to handle external environments. Thus, they can begin to experience the challenges of living in this world for themselves and learn to relate to others (their peers or superiors) outside the familiar, friendly walls of the home or school.

To conclude, a point about re-skilling, that is, the chance or need to rework your skills, to change your behaviour, by leveraging good behaviours that have since lost their effectiveness. To avoid becoming bogged down in old knowledge, good though it may have been, we need to change our outlook rather than our actions. We need a new way of looking at things, of observing and conceiving of them, to generate new knowledge about those existing things.

In this sense, school may be business' best friend. Shaping young people's minds to be flexible and capable of grasping the essence of everything they will encounter may produce people who can prompt positive change, especially – and this is the key – who can take responsibility even when the proverbial hits the fan, because they will be able to swim, not sink, and explore new horizons. ■

**We need to change
our outlook not our actions.
We need a new way
of looking at things,
of observing and conceiving
of them**



Candidates and recruiters.

An evolving relationship.

How can we identify the people with the skills and abilities we need when CVs are becoming increasingly irrelevant?

The CV or resumé still offers some vital information, but interviews are becoming increasingly crucial. It is important to structure them to explore how candidates actually behave in various situations and contexts in relation to the skills required for the position. This kind of interview normally comprises a series of questions based on the candidate's experience; they must give precise answers, describing a specific situation, the objective in question, what they did, and the outcome. The interviewer must, of course, be skilled and empathetic enough to guide the candidate and explore all the relevant aspects, taking into account the seniority of the position.

In general, while taking for granted that the candidate possesses certain technical skills that are essential for the job, it is always more important for interviewers to bring out their soft skills, especially their ability to adapt to different situations using the transversal competences that they have cultivated.

In the current context, the approach to that kind of skill (e.g. problem-solving) varies from company to company. How can personal predispositions be matched to companies' values?

This is a key issue that we at Adecco Group in Italy always emphasise, especially at the first interview. Often, genuine engagement is impossible if staff don't see themselves in their employer's values. This has a major impact, in particular, on understanding and interpreting people's various skills. Our group's values are similar to many other companies', but in our case, what unites them and gives them special significance is another value, or rather an approach: passion. We look for candidates who have a passion for what we do, people who feel it is a mission, a great privilege and a big responsibility for them to make the difference for thousands of people every day – not just finding them a job but offering them the opportunity to gain experience and get a clearer idea of what they want their future to look like. Only those who identify with this description can really understand what it means to have the motivation and the pride to express the values underpinning our profession every day and thus to find the people with the necessary skills.

In particular, people starting out in their career don't know what skills they possess and which of them could generate value. How can we help them find out?

A candidate's first job interviews are really a way for them to discover who they are and what they want and to gain basic self-awareness. It is impor-



Interview with
Monica Magri

Group HR &
Organization Director
The Adecco Group

How the recruitment world is ditching standardised approaches to focus on skills and talent

tant to put them at their ease so that they can give a genuine, realistic account of themselves.

In personal-branding terms, how can an individual convey what makes them unique in order to make the most of their talent?

Uniqueness consists in being who you are and believing in and cultivating your potential. It is vital to mug up on the company, its values and business environment, before interview; it certainly makes a great impression. In contrast, those who put up a façade at interview tend not to do well, as they are unconvincing and do not come across effectively. Candidates should invest their energy not on constructing a mask or attempting to stick to a standard “template” but rather on offering a convincing image of themselves and emphasising their key strengths.

If a candidate has excellent potential but lacks one of the classic “key requirements” for a position (a technical skill, for example), might they as well forget it?

That depends on the type of job and – to some extent – its seniority: with positions requiring greater experience, a certain level of specific know-how is essential; with junior roles, though, it is the candidate’s motivation that tips the scales. In general, “non-technical” skills are increasingly opening the door to entry-level positions and, above all, enabling people to progress faster. From this perspective, some skills, like adapting to change and being able to steer your own development (even if you don’t hear it mentioned much these days), are key within an organisation. These remarks obviously do not apply for highly technical professional roles.

Older workers often have a set of acquired notions that need to be challenged. What are the most effective re-skilling strategies in these cases?

With lifelong learning, there is a constant focus on providing all the tools for individual re-skilling through an in-depth personalised needs analysis, in discussion with the staff member. It is equally important to underpin this process, though, by cultivating a self-awareness of this need; this is the springboard for successful retraining.

No less important are reverse-mentoring projects, which we have used in our organisation for some time. They provide useful cross-fertilisation between different approaches and experiences while conserving the cultural knowledge – and, indeed, the motivation – of older colleagues. ■

Skills such as adapting to change and being able to steer your own development are key

L&D Departments must find a new purpose

In seventeenth Century England, Francis Bacon rightly observed that “knowledge is power”. Today, however, things are different. When Bacon was writing, at the very dawn of the printed word, information was a precious commodity. Now, not only do we have information overload, it moves around the world almost instantaneously.

The impact for the knowledge economy is vast. According to intellectual capital merchant bank, Ocean Tomo, in 1975, intangible assets accounted for just 17% of the market value of the S&P 500. By 2015 that figure had risen to 87%. These intangible assets are made up of brand equity, intellectual property and so on, but the largest single component for more enterprises is human capital – the people of an organization, what they know, and what they can do. Before the internet, these people came into the workplace with smarts and knowledge, and kept up-to-date through informal learning and an annual schedule of training courses. That pedestrian approach won't cut it today. With so much information available for free, people can access a great deal of what they need online without using the training department, at the speed they want, to meet the demands of a busy world.

This imperative for speed is at odds with the traditional *training department's* usual approach: first, create a beautiful, information-heavy course for delivery. Next, schedule attendance, and test on completion. Moving this model online, from the classroom, does not make it faster, nor more effective. The result: training departments are struggling to find a role in a world of digitized information. These departments do have a crucial role to play, but must carry it out this very differently today.

To stay relevant, these departments need to do something radical: give up control.

In a way, this is something that has already happened. People search for what they want online, and find it fast, without going via the training department. Modern technologies have returned individuals to natural ways of learning,



Donald H. Taylor

Chairman of the Learning and Performance Institute, chairman of the Learning Technologies Conference

An international perspective on how technology and learning models can integrate into learning departments

whether that is learning from others (via networks) or on the move, not chained to a desk (using a smart device). When we learn naturally, in these ways, it is much more difficult for the *L&D department* to control what we do.

The role of this new L&D then becomes two fold. First, it must seek out the information that is not available online. It must find what is unique to the organization, the secret sauce of process or information, and enable it to be shared rapidly, allowing employees to make best use of it as a differentiator for the business.

Second, L&D must work with the business in long-term planning of human capability. What skills and knowledge will the organization need in the future, and how can we develop them? This brings with it a profound challenge for the department. L&D must develop a new way of working with the business, to consult with it, understand its needs, and put in place systems to meet those needs. Often, once the systems are in place, the best people to maintain them will not be L&D, but those closest to the business, and we should be fine with that. L&D's new role will not be to control how people learn, but to liberate them to learn as best they can.

Training departments must accept that their role has changed – from instructors of information to curators of content and facilitators of conversations around it. This enables people to learn fast from the vast amount of content that already exists in organizations, rather than waiting for someone else to turn it into a course first. It is also the only way organizations can compete in a world where knowledge is no longer power.

**To stay relevant,
learning departments
need to do
something radical:
give up control**

Further reading

Donal H. Taylor
*Learning Technologies
in the Workplace*
(Kogan Page, 2017)

donaldhtaylor.co.uk

Post-human. The skills to collaborate with artificial intelligence.

Loop AI Labs enables intelligent automation with cognitive SW robots. As our CEO, GM Calafiore characterizes, we do this with the mission of accelerating organizations' transition into cognitive business. We drive sustainable growth in two ways. The first is augmenting and supporting current team's productivity by granting them access to 100% of enterprises data. The second is preparing enterprises for the needs of the future.

We, as a society, are growing faster than ever, and so is our data and its velocity, this is causing worry among many countries that face a negative impact on their GDP in the next 10 years, due to the lack of working age population. The introduction of a "digital workforce" allows for enterprises to fill that gap and shift their skilled knowledge workforce away from the repetitive into the creative and innovative. (Ettore Murciano)

Interview with

Loop AI Labs

Contributors

Ettore Murciano

VP, Channel Sales and Alliances

Jaana Heikkila

VP, Marketing

Dr. Bart Peintner

CTO

Dr. Patrick Ehlen,

Chief Scientist

Taniko Jackson-Martinez

Operations and Marketing Manager

Andrea Pitrone

Chief Customer Success Officer

What are the skills of an AI?

Loop Q is an unsupervised cognitive computing platform. This means that Loop Q learns directly from the data, with no human guidance, labeling, annotating, or preprogrammed ontologies for language and grammar.

Our platform creates unique models that are made exclusively from the enterprise's data. In the future, scarcity of data scientist resources would inevitably become a problem, and developed a platform that works without human intervention. A kind of a SW/HW data scientist, or actually an *immense team* of them.

Semi-supervised approaches are time-consuming, expensive, and less personalized. This approach often starts from an industry-specific model that a team of data scientist has to manually update and customize with the enterprise's data and be re-updated constantly when new data becomes available. (Taniko Jackson-Martinez, Jaana Heikkila)

Do you find that "Contamination" of different backgrounds is useful?

Certainly, having a diverse background and interests is beneficial. Being curious, investigative, passionate, and a *problem solver* are all characteristics that we look for in candidates. Anyone looking to work on the technical side needs to have a strong background in analytics, imagination, study, and experience. For our approach specifically, being comfortable with characterizing unstructured data is essential. Unstructured data is harder to work with than structured data, so interpersonal skills are needed to interview the data owner and strong investigation skills are needed to inspect and characterize candidate data sufficiently to decide how it can be used. From an educational standpoint, experience with traditional *Machine Learning*, data mining toolkits and languages, and experience with connecting API's, databases, web

Further reading

loop.ai/solutions

Loop Q

The company's cognitive platform has applications in customer service, predictive maintenance, back-office automation and recommendation systems for users

servers are all core characteristics to strive for. **(Dr. Bart Peintner)**

Every day we read news about improvements in AI technologies. How does your people upskill themselves?

We stay on top of new developments by following the research field very carefully. This means attending academic conferences or participating on program committees, or at least reading the latest papers. We also listen to industry thought leaders. It helps to be located in the Silicon Valley area, where we have fantastic universities, companies, and meetup opportunities to hear talks and events with people at the cutting edge of AI development.

(Dr. Patrick Ehlen)

Our technical crew collaborates closely with the Silicon Valley AI innovator community. [It's all about reading the latest research, networking, and comparing notes.](#) [The AI scientist community collaborates a lot together and shares thoughts](#) - without giving away their own development secrets.

Our commercial team constantly observes the market and stays aligned about the market development by reading analyst reports and talking with analysts, participating to AI events, talking to the clients about their AI use case needs, reading tons of emails and publications, and joining *webinars*. We ourselves produce all this as well.

(Jaana Heikkila)

How do you keep your product future-proof?

Since Loop Q learns directly from the enterprise data, its future-proof in the sense that as long as there is data it can collect, it will continuously and autonomously keep learning. Of course, data availability, careful selection, and data velocity are major factors to consider.

We find that enterprises that start with smaller projects, as opposed to "moonshot" or large projects, are the most successful because they allow time for change management, project adoption, and overcoming resistance and fear from the current workforce.

(Taniko Jackson-Martinez)

Do you think that, in the future, AI will give humans super-skills? Or do you believe in a mass unemployment scenario?

The best implementations of cognitive computing and AI come from when humans and machines are working collaboratively. The machines learn from human created data, understating the nuance in their workflows, actions, and decisions. It's from this understanding that the machines are able to make recommendations that are confirmed by humans. Together, the machine's learning is reinforced by human employees, and the humans are supported by the machine making their output more accurate and productive. There needs to be a shift in thinking that cognitive computing and AI are a benefit for working smarter, not a technological advancement that will render the human workforce obsolete.

New team dynamics are always an adjustment, it's no different when incorporating digital employees to the current team. The most important thing to remember is that working smarter is always the goal. In all of our implementations with large enterprises and "Global 2000's", we have not seen any loss of employment.

(Taniko Jackson-Martinez)

For you are there some delusional implementations of AI?

Some moonshot projects in healthcare that claim to be 'revolutionizing' healthcare and patient outcomes. They claimed to be autonomous but behind the scenes, it was a committee of specialists advising in the traditional way.

Conversational interfaces" - this means that chatbots and personal assistants are profoundly bad when you compare them to the communicative abilities of actual humans. What we have now amounts to a parlor trick and the notion that these systems are doing language "understanding" is seriously delusional, we have heard from many data scientists.

(Taniko Jackson-Martinez & Jaana Heikkila) ■

That's why we shouldn't be afraid of creativity

What are the skills to be creative? How they can be developed?

This is a big question that would take a few books to answer. I am a believer that to think creatively we need to take our mind outside the conventional and ordinary track of our thoughts. We need to make surprising connections between the things in our mind to find original ideas. The best way to do this is to be playful with your approach to idea generating. The creative process should be positive, confident, and welcoming of ideas that may at first seem crazy. Quite often if someone shows a ridiculous or funny idea it changes the thought direction of people and can give someone else another idea that is new and surprising. When we are out with friends, we are relaxed, we are happy, we are confident to speak, we communicate easily and joke about things and we bounce thoughts and ideas around. We are being our most creative without thinking about it because all the conditions for creative thinking are there. We can learn from this to create the right atmosphere for creative thinking.



Interview with

Dominic Wilcox

Artist and designer

Which skills come to the fore in an arena that defies definition and classification: creativity? The perspective of an unconventional designer

Further reading

dominicwilcox.com

When someone shares a crazy or amusing idea, it changes other people's train of thought and stimulates them to generate new ideas

You spoke about creativity, innovation and finding ideas both for children and big companies. How these qualities can fit in so different scenarios?

It doesn't matter if someone is 5 or 50 years old, the processes of finding good ideas is the same. I think we adults can learn from the free thinking, open minded approach young children take to creativity. They can think up 10 ideas in the time we can think of one. They aren't afraid of the challenge to be crea-

tive as adults can be. They experiment and try things out and learn from their mistakes. They don't worry so much about whether something is possible or impossible as we adults can do. And so they allow their imagination to go beyond the restrictions of our older minds. These are all good methods of finding original ideas.

What, in your opinion, can kill creativity?

Stress, being too serious, panicking, tiredness, too busy emailing, not looking outside the subject you are trying to be creative in, spending too much time researching so you get lost in the details.

Following a stereotype, an inventor is a lonely person. But you believe that creativity and collaboration are deeply linked. Could you explain us how?

I am an introvert and I like to have time to think by myself quite often, but then when I have a new idea I always love to share it and discuss it. I think discussing your early ideas with trusted people is important. Try to avoid sharing with negative people who immediately look for problems as they can kill ideas early. The idea can grow quicker by getting feedback and thoughts of other people. If you have ideas, some will fly and some will sink but you need other people to give them energy.

Some skeptics believe that these concepts are too vague for enterprises purposes. How surprise, observation and so on can lead to actual product or services?

There is a feeling of safety in following logical rules and rigid systems in order to achieve things, so I understand why some businesses get scared of creativity. Creativity can be messy and unpredictable, but this is the best approach to finding ideas that are outside the normal and are extra-ordinary. As I mention above there are practical steps any business can take to increase the creative output of the employees. Out of ten ideas only a few will be good ones, businesses need to invest time in allowing ideas to grow without killing them too early. ■

What customers don't ask for. (Re)discovering what people need.

Training: from top-down to bottom-up, from “imposed” annual programmes with codified, mechanically measured objectives to inviting participants to take responsibility for their own learning and choose independently (or almost) which topics to explore, more and more companies are taking a new direction. They are seeking support to design content, learning pathways and virtual environments to help people self-train and manage change.

Whether it is framed as part of the digital transformation or creating a staff academy, the challenge for trainers is how to support learners in an ever-changing context. The skills needed at work – be they hard or soft – have a shorter shelf life than ever. The training mix must therefore be revamped from time to time to help people replace old skills with new ones (reskilling) or develop existing abilities (upskilling).

This poses a triple challenge for companies: how to select a training approach and, above all, a recruitment model that helps people change their habits; how to identify the content and training methods that are useful for each role; and how to make it all interesting.

HR managers often have very clear ideas, and they approach the content suppliers and platform providers with specific requirements and budgets, frequently with a clear distinction between traditional and online training. But how exactly can we choose one approach as opposed to another – or a blend thereof, and in what proportions? – to meet specific training objectives?

There is no standard answer to all these questions, for it all depends on the trainees' actual needs. Thinking about what the company and its people need is the only way to plan training approaches and provide content that is relevant and interesting for those who will have to use it. Which is why the first thing to do is develop ways for companies and staff to explore and understand what it really takes to do a given task or fulfil a given role and, in parallel with that, to leverage existing skills.

There is a risk of creating huge catalogues of learning objects with little focus, offering a bit of everything for everyone without going into any real depth. Another risk with digital-learning projects is that format containers are created (under the umbrella of an academy) that influence the content, almost to the point of determining it, with no thought during the planning stage for what each training intervention is actually for.

After the content has been selected, the next step is to get people on board. In a context where everything is at hand – and the Netflix model



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What are the challenges to tackle when designing training content to give people a meaningful learning experience?

When providing a comprehensive array of training materials, it is vital to build frameworks of meaning to orientate people's choices

of training (*I have an array of titles and formats to build my training plan from*) is heading exactly that way – it is increasingly important to construct frameworks of meaning to inform trainees' choices. *Why do I have to do this course? What do I need it for in my daily work? How does it help me what I need now? How will I know that I have learned something?*

To answer these questions effectively, we need to distinguish between two types of skill. Hard skills are the technical skills specific to a job, while soft skills are those personal competences that help us tackle situations and manage relationships, such as communication, leadership, creativity, flexibility and teamwork.

The former may be easier to measure, in terms of the actual results (as with foreign-language tests) or a gap between actual and desired performance, yet they also entail a longer learning curve, and learners need to be supported and motivated over time. Soft skills, though, are harder to measure, and one-size-fits-all courses – box-ticking exercises offered to be seen to be trying to solve a business problem but with no great conviction – may result.

In both cases, if the target trainees have freedom of choice without any real engagement in the planning process, the experience will not meet their needs, so they will not see it as interesting or useful.

So what kind of learning experiences does meet people's actual needs? Courses on hobbies, for example. Many people passionately pursue outside interests that are often neither idle pastimes nor investments in a future career. So what kind of learning experiences does meet people's actual needs? Courses on hobbies, for example. Many people passionately pursue outside interests that are often neither idle pastimes nor in-

vestments in a future career. They satisfy needs not only for personal growth, learning new things and tackling new challenges but also for practising and training a skill over time, something that is not always possible at work.

These needs can sometimes emerge in the office but remain unmet there, whereas a singing or acting course, for instance, can be a good way to develop public-speaking skills or combat stage fright.

So why not also consider ways of exploring and developing experience gained away from the working environment?

Helping businesses implement effective, durable training programmes that trainees enjoy means helping businesses ask questions and seek answers about the organisation's and its people's needs and putting them at the heart of an overall system of learning, avoiding a piecemeal approach.

And how can we do that? By listening to people, observing them, supporting them and involving them in the planning process ■

The prison of obsolete skills and the usefulness of unlearning.

The lamplighter on the fifth planet had the skills to do what his nameless employer requested. At sunset, he lit the only lamp on that rock that spun on its axis while orbiting some star or other, and then he put it out at dawn. That, in sum, was his “deliverable”.

Only there came a time when the planet began to rotate faster and faster, so day turned into night and back every minute. The lamplighter adapted and performed his task as zealously as before, without wondering why, albeit while lamenting how awful his job had become. In the space of a few seconds, he had to light and then extinguish the lamp, which flashed away like a car indicator. It was a life with no respite.

His skill, maybe the only one he possessed, had turned into a prison. It had become a kind of obsession for him, a way of defining his identity; that is what happens with skills.

That story, gentle reader, will surely be familiar to you from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's masterpiece *The Little Prince*. The lamplighter's tale, relatively little-known though it may be, has much to tell us.

In particular, it is striking how the lamplighter fails to respond when faced with a life-changing situation. He never asks himself if his only skill is still useful; he merely insists on repeating it, acquiescing as the planet speeds up around him.

Equally remarkable is the resonance between the fifth planet and ours, with our sudden climate change and the technology revolution that has been shaking up our lives and our creative and production processes at an unsustainable pace for at least twenty years. The resulting form of collective neurosis undermines our stability both at individual level and as a society. This growing pressure needs to be countered, and the human cost is high. (Think how many children are on psychoactive medication or how many hundreds of millions of antidepressant pills are popped every year in every major European country.)

The faster pace of modern life clearly has something to do with that. Perhaps not even psychology and psychiatry can get to the bottom of this, so they resort to expedients like nominalism, the illusion that you can know things just by naming them. The various editions of the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, how adept we have become at la-



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How “unlearning” something can be a good thing with a positive impact on organisations and individual wellbeing

Further reading

[correrepensando.net](https://www.correrepensando.net)

Skills end up becoming part of us. They expect to be fixtures in our nature forever

bellung any condition – but that does not mean that we really understand what lies behind them. Psychological suffering now seems to have reached existential levels, bound up with our reasons for being here, as if we were all enveloped in a crisis of meaning.

The lamplighter should have unlearned what had become just a nervous tic, rendered redundant by the upheaval in reality. For unlearning does not diminish us; on the contrary, it is another vital way of learning

We should be honest enough to admit that we are a lot like that little man. Skills end up becoming part of us. They expect to be fixtures in our nature forever, but this is a luxury we can no longer afford, precisely because the Earth is spinning ever faster and is slipping from our grasp, just as the fifth planet slipped from the poor lamplighter's.

In a fast-moving world, a one-to-one correspondence between a skill and its field of application cannot last. The latter changes too quickly and mercilessly invalidates the former, for the domain of inanimate objects knows no pity.

But we should take courage and throw ourselves into this marvellous challenge, because we have some potent weapons at our disposal, from the power of observation to the ability to wonder and – the most sublime of all skills – the faculty of making connections. Everything else may change. Indeed, the world has never stayed still for a moment: even the lamps are different, leaving lamplighters redundant. Which is a shame, for now they can no longer teach us the thing we have not yet considered: we need someone worth lighting a lamp for – people, in other words. People who can learn skills and keep the faith that they will survive these latest fads that pluck out and change small pieces of reality forever, calling for new skills. So, don't get too attached to your skills; rather, remember that they exist to serve their creator: people again, steady as a rock, or at least for as long as they are masters of their tools and skills. ■

Individual and collective stories.

Breaking free from standard paradigms and categories.



**Antonella
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Discovering how our life stories create space for reflection that helps to advance our skills to the point that they become unique and acquire identity

“What’s your story?” Is there any more powerful way to start a conversation?

That’s exactly what I thought when I saw a young woman sat on a bench on a New York street beside a sign with that question written in black marker pen in big, open handwriting. Her face was serene. She seemed to have all the time in the world. By her side, an open notebook and empty coffee cup; on her feet, crazy flip-flops with large orange flowers the same colour as her trousers.

Why does that colour stick in my mind?

Because her question was a thump in the solar plexus for me, as I strolled along in the sun trying to find a way to focus on people and not just roles in a job that I am about to start. She had given me an answer, just like that: get people’s stories, explore the details and what makes them individual (why those orange flowers, for example?), go back to the meaning of stories when working with complex, universal concepts like training and development. I discovered only later that, like many others, she is a story-hunter, one of those great new jobs that the future has in store and that we need to learn about. Exploring stories, prospecting for pen portraits, understanding the values, emotions, ideas and knowledge inside them is a first attempt, a prompt for a truly meaningful way of thinking as human beings who work with other human beings, of looking beyond the generic word people and collecting life experiences and needs. Since that day, that is how I imagine our starting point when we work on skills development, for re-skilling is not like getting a software update but rather a deeper process that must spring from individual life stories. A person’s bio is founded on what makes them unique, on what in each of us defies categorisation but influences everything that we can and are willing to do, our way of relating to others, and the contribution that we can make. Life stories are what makes individuals interesting, like lights on a map in the dark, like dots to join to see the pattern that their uniqueness makes. This is all relevant because organisations are human places, where individual stories form the collective fabric of biodiversity that, if we only recognise, adds value by offering a wealth of different viewpoints. Like a sequence of layers to observe intently.

But how can we do this? Ask that young woman’s question in your company: “What’s your story?”

And invest the time it takes to listen properly to the answers. I envisage this as the springboard for a re-skilling process or a project based on discussion and integrating ideas or the beginnings of a collaborative working group. I envisage conversations like this, blank pages to write stories that we can build on. In its latest *Future of Jobs Report*, the World Economic Forum listed the ten most in-demand skills in tomorrow's world of work, looking ahead to 2020. It is a vision to pore over, word by word. We must bear in mind, of course, that these skills are a catalyst to combine with an increasingly close analysis to identify which people in an organisation need to evolve in that direction. Otherwise, we risk losing identity or creating a shared macro-identity that is blurred and much less vibrant.

"Where do people start from, and where are they heading?"

A collection of personal missions that erodes resistance and that, if built on the right skills, generates encounters of interest and produces diversity and nuance, with as many different facets as there are individuals. Only then will the re-skilling that we are all continually exhorted to do, albeit starting from the same assumptions, produce an outcome worth discovering and worth our curiosity, rooted in sound, robust, rediscovered personalities. And development will be a harmonious evolutionary process, with nothing discarded.

Reveal the life stories, then work on concrete, contemporary skills.

"Bye, stranger, I've collected your story". ■

**Our life story
influences everything
that we can
and are willing to do**

We are not software packages that need updating. Towards a non-stereotyped idea of skills.



Matteo Amori

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How abandoning the idea of classifying things can inspire journeys that generate skills, and the role our uniqueness plays in the process

“Come on, tell me what you can do!” How many times have we been asked something like that? How many times have we found ourselves called upon, like it or not, to put our cards on the table, to proclaim our skills? Often, for sure. And what did we say? We probably rattled off a CV-like list of accomplishments thrown together on the spur of the moment based on a feeling about what the situation required – a job interview, an internal vacancy, a discussion about a new in-house opportunity, etc. – and on how great (or otherwise) our expectations about it might be. Talking about yourself and putting yourself in the shop window is not easy. Especially when the stakes are high, when your career is on the line and a dream job or big break for yourself and maybe your whole team is within reach. You hurriedly start to weigh up what you could say about yourself that would sound good or attractive now. If you’re very skilful, you might manage to paint a picture – even a rich one – with a few telling brushstrokes, to tell a detail, an appealing story. Sure, but what do you leave out? And so on. Anyway, you start weighing things up. And whether the weighing up is done by the applicant, the employee, the team member, or the manager tasked with making the decision about this person or that one, little matters.

The default option, all too often, is still to go with the standard (or, even worse, merely reactive) approach that ultimately always yields a stereotype that is at best useless and at worst counterproductive – probably the very stereotype that we want to replace. To compound matters, this stereotype comes from thinking about what is needed, as opposed to real, wholesome (albeit maybe problematic) experience.

Indeed, the fixation on skills in recent years is justified precisely by the need to dismantle established roles and mindsets in order to produce people who are better suited to managing the challenges of change and complexity.

So it not just de-skilling and then re-skilling but actually a different, necessary way of thinking about people.

The focus on skills nowadays seems to be heading firmly in this direction. Indeed, skills are those abilities and/or behavioural traits (the definitions are not always precise ...) that need to be dismantled, replaced, blended, invented, trained or produced to finally piece together the professionals that a company thinks it needs. A mechanical, jigsaw-like logic, in other words. A logic, a thought, normal-

ly abstract in nature, based more on the countless narratives about change and where it is heading than on the facts, clues, drivers and real meanings that the various scenarios put before us.

Let's be clear. People's ability to keep up with change has become a crucial, decisive topic, and that in itself is great news. It betokens a realisation that the key, pivotal point is the people performing the actions – not the method, the process, the technique, the scenario, etc. But what is it that makes people capable of originality, of being effective, of making an impact? “Personal-skills” training? Probably not.

All the best that a person can give is what they give freely. And “free” doesn't just mean “uncoerced”; above all, it refers to what that person elects to give of themselves – their unique and most personal contribution – based on a personal choice and decision. These personal depths are neither hidden nor private nor inaccessible. They are precisely what we are getting at when we ask people to show initiative. And that deep self is, by definition, unique. Not in the banal or merely biological sense of their fingerprints, DNA sequence or national-insurance number. The deep self works only through inspiration and attraction. It cannot be trained, programmed or re-programmed, only motivated. So we need to offer it chances, opportunities and reasons to spring (or spring back) into action, to be more present and more expressive. The manifestations of a personality like this will vary with its attitudes, the experiences that shaped it, and the context (motivational, especially) that spurs it into life. And it is this variety of capabilities that we call skills. We do not ask this variety to be merely effective or flexible. We ask above all that it generate something genuinely new. But to trigger this generative power takes more than just implementing a piece of software; we need to engage our travelling companions where their deep self bubbles up. ■

**The self cannot
be trained or programmed,
only inspired**

Enriching the Human Asset. Individual Focused Training.

As agrarian society adapted to industrialization, and industrial society gradually became the information age, the information age is morphing into digitalization. History dictates, therefore, that many traditional jobs will disappear, while others will surface in an ocean of competencies defined by a volatile, increasingly complex society.



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The perspective
of training to develop
new skills, from
individual traits
through to ongoing
support

Change is inevitable. Yet, upheaval and volatility often shake up stale processes leading to unexpected positive outcomes. Take training. The generally-accepted objective of professional training courses is to teach new skills and techniques to replace “outdated” skills and techniques: No sooner do learners acquire and apply some new knowledge before a new and improved technique emerges, prompting the learner to forget everything they’ve learned and adopt the latest innovation.

However, in an increasing digitized and intercultural diverse workplace, training must find a way to merge technology with human individuality. Simply piling on new information and technology without carefully considering the human aspect doesn’t serve.

Instead, training must shift to acknowledging the person, recognizing how the individual processes change and adapts, then helping the person to integrate new information with existing abilities, or as I call it, *Individual Focused Training*. By understanding how the *individual* processes new knowledge and change, training becomes much more effective, enriching employee competencies, while encouraging a natural integration and eventual application of new skills.

With *Individual Focused Training*, there are four primary elements to consider and define:

- 1. New skill:** manager-defined objective for training, including desired outcomes, how manager will support employee in implementing new skill on the job
- 2. Individual existing skill sets:** employee-generated declaration specifying both self taught and learned skills, pertinent experience and expertise
- 3. Individual values/beliefs and intercultural aspects:** inter-

active discussions with participants to help define value system as relates to their job

4. Tools & Technology: Digital work tools, online learning and communication (pre and post training), visuals, checklists, sales tools, data access, etc., applicable to specific training

Old-fashioned training courses generally present information, and leave the participants to figure out how to implement it, and make it relevant to their job. But, with Individual Focused Training, participants are encouraged to recognize and use their existing skills, values, and experience to process and integrate new information. This results in natural on-the-job application of the new material.

Last but not least, critical to the success of this process is management support in the application of the new skill – too often, employees are sent to training, but receive little or no support upon returning to their workplace, all but invalidating their training experience, making learning transfer impossible.

It may seem odd that in a digital world, the focus should be on enriching the individual human asset. Yet, cultivating the individual employee has never been more important in a world overwhelmed by the technology, and looking for the human touch. ■

Training is most effective when it embraces how individuals digest information and process change



skills
in
action
ion



behaviour actions m
attitudes manag
self leadership train
confidence empowe
responsibility lifelong
minds at motivation
peer evolution skills
feedback context ma
permitted error culture
information opportu
skill-gap effect netw
map organisation ma



What now? The risks to manage, the opportunities to seize.



**Maria Grazia
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Working on new skills demands a systemic approach that takes account of the everyday reality that people experience in organisations

Skills come to life through actions; they are firmed up through courageous experimentation; and they are honed through everyday practice in a never-ending effort of learning by doing.

Behaviour is an action that is observable (as are acts of omission). It takes a stance, creates impact, and draws a watershed between before and after the act of learning. It is a declaration of intent as to how well we can apply a skill. The outcome of a behaviour is determined by several factors: the values and beliefs that shape it, the attitudes that reinforce it, and the context and dynamics that enable it to exist.

Behaviours don't lie. Increasingly, people responsible for customer or employee experience take time to consider people's customs and habits. Interviews are never enough: it is vital to probe that fascinating space between what we say we do and what we actually do.

An observed behaviour gives us precious details about the person involved. A young lad coming home from school with his friends who waits to help an old gent with a stick hobble across the road tells us something about his upbringing, the values that his family has given him, his trust that his friends will help him stop the traffic. Above all, it tells us about his attitude of looking out for others. He will be able to cultivate this **attitude**

in the future as a doctor or the manager of an innovation centre, for instance; it will serve him well in both situations and will be a firm foundation to build other skills on.

When learning a new skill, we run the risk of it "evaporating" before we have had the time to bring knowledge and action together to turn it into a habit, a regular behaviour.

**The new skills
we learn are at risk
of "evaporating"
until we make them
our own**

I remember all the times I have trained sales teams how to sell solutions not products, using cross-selling as a way to serve the customer and not just to boost your KPIs. There are many factors to master, besides being thoroughly familiar with your products and stock (virtual or physical), namely asking good questions (and listening to the answers) to learn more about our customer, devising the most appropriate way to engage with them and knowing exactly when to do so, and handling objections. Everything comes together in group training, not least because – whatever anyone may say – the training room is a safe environment where everyone is in the same boat. The moment of truth arrives back in the shop, where unfortunately the best approaches are often fated to founder, as we hear in the follow-ups.

**We need to reinforce
a belief that things really
can be done differently
and better**

For example, remembering the old adage “don’t wish for more than you can handle”, when back in the store, our potential cross-sellers find themselves working on a Sunday (“Come on, you’ve had two days off!”), while the store manager (who did not attend the training) sees the seller trying a new way to talk to the customer and jumps in: “Sorry, I’ve known Mr Smith for years, and I know perfectly well what he wants! I’ll deal with him ...”. Only the most resilient will try again; the others need a motivation booster, to rebuild the belief that things can really be done differently and with better results. But that opportunity doesn’t always come. Often, follow-ups are not planned; they are seen as pointless, whereas they are actually essential to help the trainees gain confidence.

This story is a distillation of many (and not only in the sales



arena), and I brought it up to alert you to how vital it is to follow up with people after training, to support them, to provide continuity, and to try to avoid losing momentum.

The main risk, in my experience, is a lack of **motivation**. Doing something new takes effort, and it exposes us, timid neophytes as we then are, to the judgement of others who are often quicker to criticise than to be constructive. Hence trap number two: if a company lacks a culture of permission to fail, then it fails to nurture the first tentative steps towards innovation. In situations like this, new behaviours are unlikely, even after a rich and engaging learning experience. Alongside permission to fail is another idea that is even harder for organisations to countenance (and for people to embrace): permission to slow down, to operate temporarily at reduced efficiency and performance while you learn something new, try it out and make it your own. When I decide, for example, to provide a new classroom course, perhaps one with a challenging and original slant to it, I ask myself “What am I prepared to lose?”.

A final factor that can slow down the process of distilling skills into behaviours is a lack of **opportunity** to apply them – due to demarcated roles, rigid processes and a dearth of suitable projects. This problem often creates a “rebound” effect, which can cause real problems. Take the topic of collaboration, for example. A staple – the little black dress of training – it is often chosen as a safe bet that, they hope, cannot fail to be useful. In reality, though, helping people muster the courage to try, to trust themselves, to believe in the power of generative collaboration creates an energy so

strong that it can easily dissipate into frustration and disappointment if people have to go back to working in silos where individual or role-based objectives trump those of the whole team or company. To ensure, then, that new behaviours take root, spread and motivate people through the satisfaction of seeing that they actually work and produce valuable innovation, it is vital, in my view, to provide opportunities to apply the new skills in a safe environment where people know that they can experiment as the still-“fragile” works-in-progress that they are, ready to grow through feedback from their bosses, colleagues and customers. ■

**To change
the behaviour
in a group,
a safe environment
is vital**





What am I prepared to lose?



Activating knowledge. Learning as a network of relationships.

The Labor 2030: The Collision of Demographics, Automation and Inequality report calls our era the "Great Transformation". Living in such times may well entail bearing the burden of having volatility and uncertainty as constant travelling companions, but it also means we must constantly put a number of fundamental questions at the core of our thinking in order to, hopefully, find new answers.

When talking of skill, one of the questions we can't help asking is, once again, what is knowledge and, consequently, what is learning.



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Like connections,
knowledge
and the creation
of new skills influence
the roots
of the new forms
of learning

**Let's rethink
the concept of knowledge
as a distributed
and connected system
that can extend beyond
the individual**

Are we truly certain that, in age of the Great Transformation, the most appropriate approach in the context continues to be the heretofore dominant one that sees knowledge as an inheritance that is organized into each individual's own knowledge, skills and competencies? As Stephen Downes, a famous Canadian pedagogue, said some time ago, let's continue to treat knowledge and learning as if individuals were required to put their skills into use entirely on their own, on the summit of Everest, and armed -

at most - with pen and paper. It could prove useful instead, in this world that we don't hesitate to define as "increasingly connected", to try to explore the concept of knowledge as a distributed and connected system that can extend beyond the individual.

Networked learning is an approach inspired by various research traditions, such as connectivism, that emerged during the digital era but that are more deeply rooted in the late-1980s investigations by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari regarding the non-hierarchical structure of knowledge. Deleuze

and Guattari use the terms rhizome and rhizomatic to describe a theory of knowledge that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in the representation and interpretation of data.

This view emphasizes the role of the social and cultural context in which

learning takes place and the view of learning as a creation of “activatable knowledge” that does not necessarily reside in the subject, but rather in the network formed of both individuals and objects (books, databases, websites, etc.), with a view to completely eliminating the rigid distinctions between hard and soft skills. The underlying principle is that our ability to activate connections that enable us to access knowledge is more important than the state of our individual knowledge. This does not mean negating the significance of individual expertise in a particular area, but rather not viewing such expertise as being the sole and exclusive aim of the learning experience.

In contrast to hierarchical learning theories, *networked learning* assumes that learning is more efficient when it results in the ability of its beneficiary to react autonomously to an evolving context, thereby fostering a continuous redefinition and evolution of the entire process. According to this view, it is not the teacher who defines the results of learning, but “the community and the curriculum”. The objectives thus do not pre-exist with respect to the subjects involved, but their identification and continual reformulation are part of the process of learning.

Such a view has interesting application possibilities, in particular with the development of the web, of digital learning and of the Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) movement.

The first MOOC based on this method was offered in 2008 and was focused on precisely this topic: Connectivism and Connective Knowledge. Its creators, including Stephen Downes and George Siemens, conceived this teaching experience more as an online event than as an out-and-out course because it stimulated personal exploration and debate regarding a starting agenda that could be progressively integrated and modified.

Beyond such considerations and evidence, the key issue lies in asking ourselves whether we have the cultural capacity for a change of perspective that seems anything but soft. Probably, as we venture into the age of the Great Transformation, we will be forced to rapidly learn to structure our interactions with the community and resources, to interact with the flow of information generated within a given domain, to manage the selection and archiving of information that can be activated later with the greatest skill and promptness. And the difference between hard and soft skill will suddenly become a distant memory from another age. ■

Further reading

**Labor 2030:
The Collision
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bit.ly/we-auto

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Moving mindsets. Towards relevant change.

Even before skills comes aptitude, which without fail becomes the condition for developing relevant skills as well as the driver of pertinent choices.



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What makes actions meaningful?
In organisations, what forces spur us in a new direction? A perspective on attitude, amid a scientific and humanistic framework, as the continual engagement between individual minds and corporate culture

In businesses that can be seen as a system of individuals (colleagues, clients, managers, collaborators, etc.) rather than as the result of processes, the discussion regarding the human being is moving from what people know how to do to why people do what they do, and then finds a way to balance this personal realm with the scope of the company. The economy of experience thus becomes also an economy of behaviours, but one which abandons the pretence of being able to shape a given behaviour and instead embraces the attempt to understand what leads people to decide on a different action. The field of investigation thus moves towards the inner being. Following this move allows us to be the driver and catalyst of actions that go in the right direction, which then leads to a positive encounter between different individuals, between a company and the people that occupy it, between a context and the individuals that cause it but are not willing to submit to it.

The keys to understanding human beings are multiplying before us through the filters of various lenses. From the macro lens – or in other words, the study of the value of culture and the meaning of faith – to the micro lens – namely neuroscientific research and empirical observation. Between the two extremes is a series of planning hypotheses that reinvigorate the scientific thought that resides in each of us. When we are trying to cultivate and enable the aptitude that drives people to act in a relevant and pertinent manner, however, the eureka moment is never obvious to everyone. Because, of course, people are different. But there is one element that I always find in anyone who is trying to help us understand human beings, and that is that the mind is continuously moving along paths that can be recognized and intercepted, and that we can learn to harmonize. But only as long as everyone does so for himself. Deep down, we knew already several thousand years ago that mankind was capable of deciding the direction of his own mind. And we also knew that the most authentic and relevant direction is one that comes from the individual mind, that speaks to us like our inner self.

Neuroscience has identified a crucial triadic system in the brain (between the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala and the ventral striatum) that governs our primary movement: “going towards” something or “moving away from something”. The decision to “go towards” or “move away from” (and to change direction mid-route) is the inalienable right of each of us. We are unlikely to affect the decisions that others take for themselves. But there is

I can participate in and contribute to a culture that is going somewhere significant only if I trust that culture

much we can do as far as the construction of the “something” is concerned, and we can aim to create and guide the direction of movement by means of that construction. The most profound research on the concept of mindset as the enabler of relevant skills is based on a simple observation: with respect to the situation of having to go towards something new and unknown (a new skill or new knowledge to acquire, a new behaviour or a new action to adopt), why do some people decide to set out down the path while others hold back? This question is crucial, because although I cannot know what the relevant skill will be in a context I may find myself in one day, one year or five years from now, I must at least be able to count on two things.

The first is the aptitude that will drive me to seek out skills that will be relevant: I must at least be able to count on a mind that can move and is willing to change direction. The second is that I must learn to build the “something” to go towards in such a way that it is appealing and motivating to me. And even more important than these two things is a third one: creating the conditions in which the mind never ceases to move.

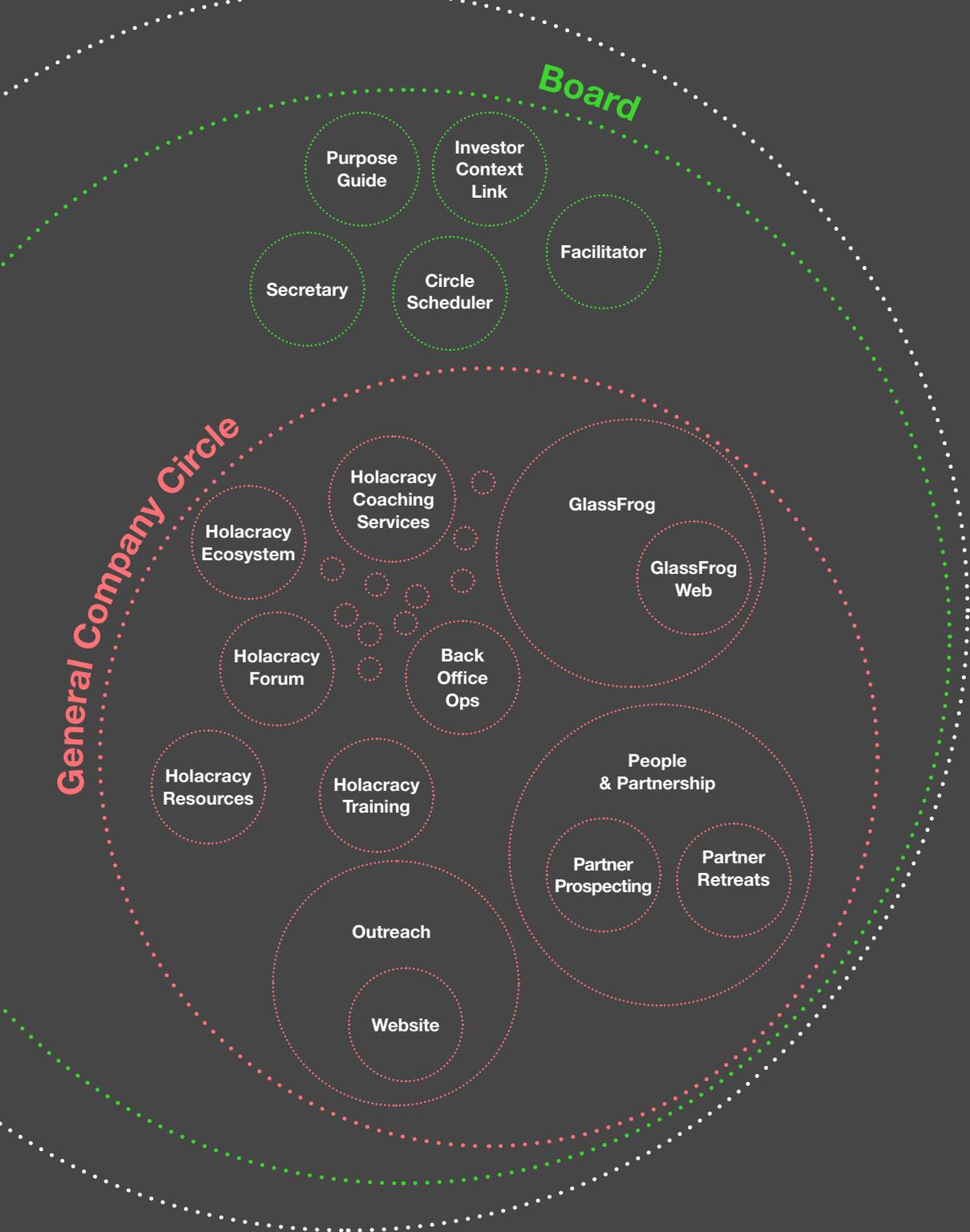
To my mind, this leads to the importance of company culture and of the trust that it is able to build. Because I can only participate in and contribute to a culture that encourages and accompanies people towards the acquisition of something relevant (even if I don't yet clearly understand what that might be) when I perceive and

trust in that culture. Culture is not something intangible. Quite the opposite: it can be seen in the actions that people undertake. And first and foremost we must speak of that relevant culture, foster the accounts of it, make it visible, keep it at hand. One of the specific characteristics of culture is that of being tacit because it acts as the silent language of an evolutive process that shapes people's actions. But if I wish to be able to count on culture as something relevant, then I must learn to talk of it, to make it a meaningful account, or in other words, useful for my fellows in a certain community.

And finally faith, whose significance I grasped when I understood I could not trust in people who are infallible, but only in someone who is strong enough to show their vulnerability (that is to say, who is willing to enter into constructive dialogue when something goes wrong) as well as their benevolence – or in other words, someone who is willing to take care of others. Because what is at stake here is the person: not the knowing or not knowing how to do something.

Thus, while we don't know what skills we are going to need, we look for and cultivate the aptitude of someone who will know how to go about finding these skills, we contribute to the account of culture that promotes that skill-search, and we generate the trust that drives people to become involved. We surround ourselves with designs and services that allow us to do so. ■





Holacracy. This is one of the most interesting and talked-about ways of running a decentralised organisation. Without managerial hierarchies, self-organising teams become the very fabric of the business (the *circles* in the diagram), where people’s *roles* are clear: they are the “what I do”, and everyone has a *purpose* in helping to take meaningful decisions. The rules are set out in a detailed *constitution*, whose aims include enabling individuals to work independently and with a spirit of enterprise.

Holacracy: people, upskilling and the ability to drive the change.

Holacracy seems a good idea, but it really works? How can be measured its success?

There are a thousand companies today doing Holacracy sustainably and I think the ultimate measure is that the leaders are sticking with it. With a change like this is you cannot measure it by just looking at revenue growth. It is a fundamental replacement for management hierarchy. Holacracy is operating at a very base level and it affects the ability for people to drive change. Some great anecdotal measures came out of from a *department* in the Washington State Government. They measured that the number of meeting minutes needed to get clear actions or decisions went down by 90%. They also tried to measure the impact of meetings aimed to change organization *policies* or someone's *job description*. After Holacracy it was an average of 20 minutes, before they couldn't even measure it. Another measure is how empowered people feel to do their job effectively.

Roles are something real, because they are the output of a learning process of the team

Interview with

Brian J. Robertson

Entrepreneur,
organizational pioneer
and business partner
at HolacracyOne

Further reading

holacracy.org

Zappos

One of the largest clothing e-retailers in the world, with a turnover in excess of \$1bn, this is the most famous company that uses Holacracy

Tension

Holacracy has a key role in managing change. It hinges on the perception of a gap between actual progress and future potential. Tensions in organisations are different from tensions in individuals; the former emerge during governance meetings, while the latter concern our preferences

However, some skeptics believe that this framework generates confusion...

I think that those skeptics equate the absence of management hierarchy in Holacracy to the absence of structure at all. Indeed, in Holacracy, the structure becomes more real. People's *job descriptions* and *titles* do not mean much. Holacracy replaces them with a much more clear definition of *what people do and what is expected of them*. So it is really common to see people go look up someone else role, because they can find rules and clear expectations. Roles are real because they are the output of a learning process of the team.

What are the core factors to implement Holacracy?

Holacracy it is such a major shift because changes the way people relate to power. That is why Holacracy cannot be adopted piece by piece, because we are talking about a cohesive set of rules. If you try to learn playing soccer adopting one rule at a time, you will get a confusing mess. Especially in larger companies, to run correctly Holacracy, you should find a team or a department and completely do it. And ideally you have to get a coach, because it's hard to learn a new sport you've



never played and only read a book about. Holacracy is very much a sport. It is not just an intellectual thing it is a practice.

Are there some necessary skills for Holacracy powered organizations?

I think the skill required is *self-leadership* first and foremost, to let people to step up and lead their part of the system. By doing that they learn new skills and practices. Instead, *in most of the management hierarchies it is very easy to defer the hard problems to the boss or look for consensus of the team*. As an alternative, enable people to decide requires more leadership for everyone. Some companies say “we need to develop this skill in our people before we start Holacracy” but, in this case, they will wait forever. It is like saying that we need to wait until our teenager is completely ready to be autonomous adult before sending him out into the world.

Speaking about people development, in Holacracy are there patterns for *upskilling*?

In Holacracy people hold many roles and every role as a clear purpose, so you can shop around and find the right set of roles that works for you. Here is an example of how this worked in **Zappos**. One guy whose job was “*party planning*” had a passion for marketing, that in Zappos it’s in a completely different department. So there were no way he was going to make that shift, even trying might have been a political suicide. With Holacracy he was able to go watch some of the marketing *circles* and look for new roles. At some point, he found a role vacancy that he thought he could do with just 20 percent of his time. He made a pitch to the person in the marketing team in charge

for the assessment process. He convinced him because had a talent for marketing and he built many skills and then he started in some other marketing roles. Now he is in charge of one of the most significant marketing initiatives in the company.

And if someone’s job isn’t needed anymore?

With traditional management hierarchy, removing somebody from a job could be complex. Therefore, these types of decisions are often delayed and people are stuck in jobs the company does not need. And that hurts the organization. And I think it hurts people. Nobody wants to be doing a job that really is not needed. With Holacracy people can fill – for example - 20 roles: if you remove one of them that’s not a curse. It just gives some free time for their other roles or for buying some new role vacancy that could create some growth reasons.

How can people lead the change in Holacracy?

When somebody run into something that’s needed and that nobody is covering people bring “*tensions*” to a *governance* meeting, that every team has. Everyone is invited to show up and bring proposals to change *policies* or roles. Therefore, the burden it’s not resting entirely on the manager.

In the traditional hierarchy, a good manager does not *micromanage* but creates clarity of who does what and then let you go do your work. However, most managers are not very good at that and even when you found one, he get promoted and replaced. There is no guidance and managers feel like superheroes, that is why companies does not get along of them. However, for this function, we just do

Self-leadership is vital to ensure that people keep their part of the system going



Everyone can have a hand in their team's development and thus help to reshape their organisation

not necessarily need to put it in a manager. Holacracy, in some ways, is management without managers. Everybody is processing the tensions they sense and can co-participate to the evolutionary design of the team that takes a new shape one-step at a time.

How does it work this “evolutionary” system?

Holacracy evolves just like an *open source* operating system, like Linux. The last official version is 4 and we're working on 5.0. I think it is one of the beauties of it: it is living. Among the thousands of companies doing Holacracy, some of them form an *open source* community where they find the edge places where the rules don't work as well as they could and use that places to drive changes into the *core* rules of the framework. We did not try to define the perfect system, we just keep iterating it and constantly improving it to fits more cases easily.

In your book, you said Holacracy is not people-centric, but purpose-centric. Could you explain this difference?

There is often not enough focus on people, and being *people-centric* is a modern approach. That is a leap forward, but I think there is another leap beyond that: treating organizations has living systems, with its own entities. It does not mean ignoring people, just putting them in a different context. Instead of it being all about “you”, people are invited to show up, to help steward the journey of an organization to express its purpose in life. To use a metaphor, it is like being a parent, whose job is not focusing on their own pleasure and use their children as property to achieve their dreams. It is not about you, it's about them. And the same thing is in

Holacracy: and all the people can co-parenting an organization. We are not children that a company should take care of; we are parents that are raising the company to express its purpose in the world.

Why in Holacracy takes place a differentiation between people roles and *soul*?

In most companies, there is a fusion between people's personal interests and the companies ones. Because of that, you see decision made by leaders that are personally interested in something that became organizational pet project. One of the things Holacracy tries to do is to differentiate what we need to serve the organization's purpose, where are the roles involved; from what do you need to show up. Holacracy acts as a mirror to help us see when we are stuck in something and identify if it is coming from our egos or from the organization's needs. It is about creating a context to put the ego stuff aside for the sake of serving a larger purpose. ■



Motivation drains. How to defeat the 10 evil skill-killer bosses.

We've done it! We've got through lots of levels, having grappled with obsolete abilities, skills in need of a revamp, new attitudes, mindsets, behaviours and outlooks to re-invent from scratch, along with various other hazards, and now it's us against the big boss at the climax of the video game. It's the final level. Our task? To defeat the ten myrmidons of motivation, one by one! For without motivation, skills are powerless: those you possess will give little reward; new ones will be hard to learn; and the ones yet to be invented ... will stay that way.



Daniele Cerra

*Digital Innovation
Officer, Logotel*

Why designing motivation is vital to develop and maintain skills. And it takes more than just offering incentives and handing out medals

The psychology of motivation

The ideas in this article come not only from experience at Logotel but also from some major psychological theories that are gaining currency in applied business contexts: *Attachment theory* by John Bowlby and *Self-determination theory* by Ryan & Deci. Given how broad and complex the fields of application are, if you want to start exploring this area, our advice would be to search for just a few key texts – which are rather scientific for businesspeople – adding “at work” or “in organisations” to the two theories’ names.

Get Ready...

Here is our list of tricks that will help you defeat the tactics that your ten foes will use to try to prevent anyone in your organisation from finding their own “whys”– the “whys” that will enable them to put their best personal resources into their work, thus creating value for the business and a meaningful, well-deserved sense of personal fulfilment. Are you ready? Then here we **go!**

First Ninja. They will approach motivation from the top down, treating it as a skill that someone has decided to install mechanically in your staff's heads. They will run one-size-fits-all events, courses and audits exactly as if it were a skill to master or a piece of knowledge to memorise. And if no one “learns” motivation, they will shrug their shoulders and ask what more could they have done.

Don't fall for it!... You don't surgically implant “whys”; you help people discover them.

Second Ninja. They will shout slogans about visions, values and challenges, and when they are confident that the message has got through loud and clear, they will use passive resistance to prevent your company implementing it all properly and becoming a real team.

Don't give up! Put everything into creating an environment where those with the knowledge and drive can actually get things done.

Third Ninja. The brainwasher. They will boast that all it takes to motivate everyone is to find a good important reason. They will try to convince you that whatever motivates them and you will also motivate and inspire everyone else – and if it doesn't, then the others are useless and wrong.

When that happens, you must modestly take the others' part. Become a motivation designer and discover what's important both for them and for your organisation!

Fourth Ninja. They will act on the sly, behind the scenes. They will do anything to stop people enjoying their job and to shoot down every personal contribution to the company that contravenes “the way things have to be done”. Their goal is to kill intrinsic motivation, the pleasure and joy of doing your job.

Constantly nurture intrinsic motivation: put people at the heart of the company and move from “this is what you have to do” to “let's build an environment where you can give your best”.

Fifth Ninja. They will try to stunt independent initiative by nullifying people's desire to contribute to the organisation. They will exert control to a suffocating degree, making great play of other people's mistakes and near-misses. They will create a climate of fear by showing what happens when someone steps out of line – so everyone will gradually learn that it's best not to try, and even the self-starters will lose heart.

Lay the foundations so your organisation has enough room for manoeuvre that those who want to take the initiative can.

Sixth Ninja. They will use subterfuge and false promises to trap you. While you toil to create the conditions for everyone to find their own fulfilling “why”, they will offer a shortcut, the one everyone uses to “motivate” people: carrot and stick, focusing exclusively on promises of economic and other rewards

Defeat them by persisting. You have already seen that, when the rewards run out, only those who are truly motivated will still give 100%.

Seventh Ninja. They will use the powerful technique of invisible feedback. Whenever someone gives feedback about a colleague's work, they will blot it out, hush them up and erase the memory.

Fight them by leading by example, by giving clear feedback and asking your team for it in return. Encourage constructive feedback and create a culture where it is welcomed, even when not positive. All feedback (whether positive or otherwise) is a powerful spur for developing individual skills, fuelling intrinsic motivation based on the self-perception of the personal skill.

Eighth Ninja. They will sow discord and try to undermine relationships within the organisation. They will employ their wiles to discourage close-knit teams from forming or flourishing. They will frown on interpersonal relationships that are not strictly linked to specific work activities. And, above all, they will sabotage every chance for people to feel part of a milieu where they are important and can take an interest in each other.

To defeat this ninja, create opportunities



for active listening and trust your colleagues when you need to. Forging relationships is key to intrinsic motivation, and for it to blossom, all you have to do is let it.

Ninth Ninja. They use their mastery of disguise to confuse people. They will muddy the waters by talking of motivation, engagement, commitment and incentivising as if these concepts were interchangeable. They will have you believe, for example, that providing a “gamification” app that awards medals and points amounts to (or is enough to) motivate people. The want to prevent you from creating the conditions where individual motivation can flourish and become the key to engagement and commitment.

Focus on the heart of the problem. Don't be distracted by silver bullets or flavours of the month.

Tenth Ninja. At last. The final enemy: a mirror showing your reflection and the progress you've made stretching out behind you. Unless you believe in yourself and the people who work with you, unless you believe that you can really empower someone through individual motivation alone and that everyone – especially you – can make an absolutely unique, personal, invaluable contribution to your organisation, then all will be in vain.

Find your “why”, and you find the hammer that shatters the mirror.

A secret motivation-boosting tip

Does working on motivation feel like too much of an effort? Don't panic!

Where the tasks that our people are asked

to do are essentially operational, mechanical, repetitive, over-structured, always the same (and always will be), then you have two simple, highly effective alternatives:

1. Use the classic carrot/stick model based on performance.
2. Replace everyone with robots.

What are Logotel communities?

A business community is a working environment that motivates and engages a group of professionals. It supports their commitment to enabling users to perform at their best, in the most fulfilling way, according to the business needs. ■



Growth, innovation, skills. A virtuous circle.



Interview with

Michela Bianchi

HR Director,
Moneyfarm

The vision of a major player in the Italian digital economy about the importance of intrinsic motivation for developing new skills, growing and innovating

Further reading

[moneyfarm.com](https://www.moneyfarm.com)

How does team motivation affect growth (not just numerically but also, and above all, the development of skills)?

Really, they are two very different things. Growth in size is inevitably bound up with how the company is structured. The organisation chart must accommodate new roles in the various departments while taking care to adapt responsibilities and reporting lines without compromising established relationships or accountability mechanisms.

The key issue while an organisation grows organically to maturity is how to adapt its structure, procedures and management processes without losing its speed, its enthusiasm or the agility in its way of working and making decisions. Traits often associated with bureaucratic behemoths – such as labyrinthine decision-making, resistance to change, and tension between new and old staff – imperil a large business's competitiveness.

The second aspect is probably more interesting for a company like Moneyfarm, with our strong focus on growth and innovation. There is a reciprocal relationship between motivation and personal-skills development. Without getting into extrinsic personal motivations (like salary or bonuses) here, the key aspect for us is intrinsic motivations. That is, when you work on something that you find fulfilling and that spurs you to keep getting better at it and to achieve your targets. An innovative fast-growing company needs people who can adapt to an ever-changing context while taking the initiative to look beyond the confines of their own role. That inspires the workforce and incentivises them to keep improving their skills.

A virtuous circle is established: by giving employees the opportunity to take responsibility and progress faster, they obtain greater job satisfaction, and they gain and share new professional skills that are crucial for success and that enhance the general level of satisfaction within the team. In more traditional organisations, this dynamic can be much slower and more complex. Whereas what many modern professionals want (especially but not only young people) is a stimulating, interesting job where they can take responsibility, work independently and have opportunities to learn.

How can we create an environment that encourages teams to learn and pass on skills?

Well, a fluid, agile organisation with a sharp focus on growth naturally has a head start. All obstacles to this process must be removed, of course – like micromanaging and a silo-based structure where different branches are physically kept apart – to encourage an open exchange of ideas and information. It is vital to foster an atmosphere where people have the support to put forward their ideas and enough freedom to learn from their mistakes. We must enable new talents to enter the working world, by providing flexible working, if need be. All that will not necessarily be enough to facilitate a transfer of skills, but it will surely help to spread knowledge, at least. The company can then use more traditional methods, such as training or round-table sessions.

It certainly helps that the business is in the vanguard of technology, because it will often need new types of professional, especially (but not only) those with digital skills. There is a natural impulse, then, to learn and to exchange information. The Moneyfarm management is also involved in this process. It sets great store by internal communication, sharing objectives and plans with the whole organisation and conveying the idea that everyone is part of a process of learning and growth. This can entail, for example, sharing company strategies and projects at an early stage, despite the risk of adverse effects if they fail or do not go ahead as planned.

How a company can bring in new skills?

The company needs to decide on a case-by-case basis whether to recruit someone or train an existing resource. At Moneyfarm, we prefer the latter whenever possible. As mentioned earlier, it has positive knock-on effects in terms both of managing the organisation structure and of staff motivation and personal growth. We like to invest in someone who is already on the team, if we can, making them feel valued by offering them a personalised development pathway. Not only does this boost motivation, it also naturally tends to produce excellent performance. ■

There is a reciprocal relationship between motivation and growth



Error or mistake? From learning to the permission culture.



Jessica Aroni

Senior Manager
Education Projects,
Logotel

The "permission" activator has profound implications.

A reflection on the relationship between the error culture and the role of learning

In the processes of transformation that businesses engage in every day, there are more and more managers addressing speeches to their personnel that plug the concept of error.

Sadly, their listeners almost always have an expression of incredulity writ so large across their faces that, without doubt, when they return to daily life the following day, not a single one would allow him or herself to make an error, even by mistake.

Why?

I don't have an answer, only a theory: if we talk of a culture of error, we are forgetting at least three things.

1. We are forgetting that, for decades, we have pushed the results culture and the culture of execution, in which someone or something has the authority to determine what is right – logically we would say "true" – from that which is not.

These results and execution cultures are still essential in some areas of organizations, but they need to be partially rethought in order to create room for error.

2. We are disregarding a key aspect of business culture: continuity. According to an article in the Harvard Business Review, culture is something implicit, a silent language that directs people's behaviour in the long term.

3. We are taking the negative connotation of the word error too lightly in this "enduring" culture focused on results.

And so, what can we do to accompany the reskilling and upskilling journeys that inevitably lead to the commission of errors?

We can promote the culture of permission, and there are so many good reasons to do so. First and foremost because permission is a beautiful word, a positive word. It derives from the Latin for "let go" and it has a powerful prefix – "per" – that, as well as its meanings in English

**The permission culture
is a culture that lets
go right up to the
completion of the voyage
of learning**

(through/all over/completely/very), has at its Latin roots the meaning: “bring to completion, to perfection”. Thus, it is a culture that lets go right up to the completion of the voyage of learning. In this way, the concept of error is also released from its most literal meaning, that of wandering or straying without a set direction, as if in an experimental itinerary whose fullest meaning can be seen in individual innovation. It becomes a positive error that contrasts with mistake, whose prefix “mis”, means wrongly, badly, unsuitably, and which is perceived as a lack of care or attention.

The culture of permission is thus a culture which is much more likely to be integrated into those organizations where the focus on the values of results and excellence is deeply rooted.

Of course, this is not easy. It requires a great deal of energy, from all sides, in order to activate and nourish the culture of permission.

As subjects of learning, it takes energy to give ourselves permission to experiment and to request this from our organization. It takes energy to accept experimentation error, to take responsibility for it, to gather feedback and to translate all this into learning.

As a manager, it takes energy to determine the scope of the permission, to outline individual limits and to offer support to people during their transformation path, ready to tackle the risks of error and avoid the risks of mistakes.

As organizations, it takes energy to create the necessary conditions for this cultural integration, to gauge its value and to give it back to their clients. ■

Further reading

Error and decision-making

In the famous Cynefin model, the decision-making process is split into four domains. In the third quadrant, that of chaos, there is no cause-and-effect: here, error is aimed at exploring the project boundaries and forms part of the itinerary for advancing from disorder to order. The function of error here is “defining”; it smoothes the path and defines the limits. In this case, eliminating the error phase would entail building a structured process, although it is not yet clear “what to do”

bit.ly/we-cyn

Harvard Business Review
The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture

bit.ly/we-culture



Old or new doesn't matter. Innovation is a continuous process of osmosis.



Interview with
Lea Tarchioni

Head of People
and Organization Italy,
Enel

In order to understand how a large company can deal with change, and to explore the new dynamics that are emerging between people during the transformations

According to one stereotype, it is easier for children and young people to innovate. Is there any truth to this from Enel's point of view?

It is true in concept if we think of startups, because from a structural point of view startups "come into being" with a more flexible working model.

In fact, any entity with a history behind it (even an SME) has to deal with resistance in the face of change, since change in itself involves organizational reviews, and changes in roles, professions and established customs.

The real complexity is found when the innovation is not complete, but is a "graft" on an existing one. Enel is tackling this challenge: placing an Agile structure alongside an industrial and structurally complex organization.

We have created hubs in all our business lines. The hubs have different aims (some are technology driven, while others are customer driven), but the effect they create is the same: they change working practices.

The hubs are organized in Agile rooms, i.e. in teams with variable structures that bring people together according to the skills necessary for developing business initiatives. Using this new method we have noticed some interesting phenomena: people with completely different profiles who collaborate and self-regulate come together in these teams. When individuals with different backgrounds work together, the result is palpable: the product of experiences undergone and of real needs is simpler and more natural to understand (and to use), even for internal or external clients.

We're talking about future compared to past: the people are the same, but intuitions and collaborative practices emerge in the hubs that are then absorbed and disseminated, even when the individuals return to their daily activities. A process of continuous osmosis is created.

Are the new approaches, such as Agile, generating new skills?

The Agile method introduces new roles and skills (scrum master, experience designer, data scientist, Agile coach), but it also brings out a reworking and enhancement of existing skills. If you think about it, collaboration skills are not new, they already existed in the company. The same is true for servant leadership, which gives managers back the role of context facilitator, creator of meaning and enhancer of differences. The thing that encourages people to be responsible and creative does not need a label to exist, it has always been there; but in a fertile context it becomes crucial – it is put into practice and therefore is amplified.

And this is also the case for technical skills. New words do not necessarily equate to new people. Our business translators, for example, are people who already know the company and its business well, and are productively backed by new professionals, such as data

analysts. Thus the traditional skills, too, are re-evaluated and at the same time expanded.

Other than the organizational model, what else is necessary to ensure that the new roles create positive practices and new behaviours?

Without question, a fertile culture is needed. Paradoxically, in a change management process such as ours, this culture is more necessary when the company works in the traditional manner because when the business gives its resources to the hubs, it mustn't think that the new structures belong to another business. If a culture doesn't permeate everything, there is a risk it will be rejected. People need help to understand that the new methods also help in day-to-day life. Here's a positive example: the marketing section is beginning to organize its own "routine" work of pure thought and strategy in rooms outside the digital hubs, because it has noticed that it gets better results in less time by bringing together people with different standpoints.

How can such profound changes be internalized on a widespread level (and how can we make them become practical actions)?

Through a process that consistently integrates a number of organizational dimensions:

- **Culture:** it is necessary to impart values and send clear messages that can help everyone give a sense of fulfilment to their every-day actions. As a first step, Enel has reviewed its values, and defined them in a way that is open, shared and open to the future. In keeping with this, we recently introduced open feedback evaluation: feedback no longer takes the form of "judgements" from a manager, but rather as broad assessments.
- **Training:** change is not possible without "enabling" new behaviours and "professional practices". We have introduced shadowing and coaching, for example, to help individuals express their own value.
- **Working methods:** in private life, we are all used to interacting and sharing virtual spaces (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) and these behaviours should be translated to work. The hubs' smart offices, without typical desks or workspaces, are an example of "physicality" that helps this process of sharing and collaboration.
- **Methods of communication:** in some cases "organizational communications" have replaced the classical "organizational arrangements". So there are no more documents with "cells" pigeonholing responsibility, but instead we have communications that aim to facilitate self-regulation and organizational development, for example by setting up steering committees. ■

**When individuals
with different
backgrounds work
together,
the result is palpable**

What skills does the future need? None in particular, if you think about it.



Thomas Bialas

Futurist

Seven starting points to bring "the art of thinking" back to the centre. Because somewhere between the defence of super-intelligent machines and the threat of a dearth of skill, an essential component is being neglected: what makes us human

On some unspecified day in the future, a competent, good but mindless manager was taken from his loved ones.

He was yet another victim of the ferocity of kill skill. Blood-spattered skills? Let's not go overboard but perhaps, after a century of management trends, we have reached the day of reckoning. Nowadays, it is (once again) important to know how to think and not just how to act by applying rote-learned methods. Not least because the new (self-styled "intelligent") machines speak clearly: "I – me, the real machine – am much better and more rapid than you at doing those stupid things that you learned by rote like a silly little machine". Fair enough. Between the original – the machine – and the copy – the man-machine – the former wins hands-down. Why would anyone choose counterfeit goods? And let's get to the nub of the matter: it's true that there's a shortage of skills in many fields, but there's also a great lack of "brains". That is to say: so many people are concerned with making technology more sophisticated, but very few deal with making humans more intelligent. It's time to fix that, with a few starting points, or rather, thoughts.

Think about tomorrow. Or better, about the future: about how the skills for resolving problems in a self-organized and creative manner develop in people? And how do people prepare themselves for jobs and technologies that don't exist yet? The truth is that, following the post-industrial society, we are already almost ready for the post-schooling/post-university society: a place where schools and universities no longer represent the educational heart of our civilization. A place where education is based on the principle of "just-in-case learning", in accordance with which I arm myself with the tools for a forthcoming need. Especially because, in the digital era, concepts and information are available, to everyone, everywhere. All that matters and all it takes is observational language, critical analysis, and visionary thought: in short, the art of thinking. The end of centralized (and standardized) knowledge marks the beginning of decentralized (and individualized) knowledge based on self-education and online exchange ecosystems with learning that is mutable, fluid and aimed at continuous change, rather than linear learning. In a working world without work only the world remains, which needs people who are capable of conceiving it. What sort of people do we need? We need the self-educated. Forget the old limiting implications of auto-didacticism: "he couldn't have done any better, poor guy: he's only self-taught". Now it's more like "he can do more than that, because he's

an autodidact". We no longer need a fund of knowledge to become executors; we need a supply of skills to become creators. Because, in tomorrow's world, learning is a process of taking control of ourselves.

Think explosive. And not just positive. What is it that lights the fuse? It's intuition obviously, and not the mechanization (of thought). Of course, direct and immediate knowledge cannot be compared to logical knowledge, but rather should be integrated, if anything. Mass ideology, with its almost religious creed of parity, does not look kindly on this quality, and nor do the artificial intelligence gurus who play down the gifts of our mind, subconscious and soul. Anything that can't be measured and replicated doesn't exist. But this isn't logical at all. We are in the midst of a cultural war. Legions of PR and marketing experts, journalists and pseudo-scientists are trying to convince humankind of their inadequacy compared to super-intelligent machines. These labelling lies reflect the same old industrial-society megalomania: "bigger is better" and "more is more". Such nonsense often mistakes form for substance (but no sane person would think a library was intelligent simply because it contains countless books with highly intelligent contents). The knowledge economy needs the best of human knowledge. People think; machines don't. End of discussion. Or as Francis Picabia, the French painter, said: "Our heads are round so our thoughts can change direction", referring to the anarchy of every intuition. Make the numbers tally, but not the thoughts: on the contrary, give free rein to the flow that was so well described by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, or else improvise like a free-jazz musician by blending skill and intuition. Put yourselves once again at the centre of every decision (as an act of spontaneous will). And remember – as a study by Gerd Gigerenzer reminds us – that in "large international companies, about 50% of all decisions are at the end a gut decision".

Think circular. Quantum physics; pornographic comics; Gestalt psychology; chick lit; twelve-tone composition; splatter film; Life: A User's Manual (Georges Perec); the toaster, user's manual (Philips); the theory of gravitational waves;

**What is needed
and what counts
is observational language,
critical analysis
and visionary ideas:
the art of thinking**



the chemtrails conspiracy theory; the structure of the human genome; taco ingredients; the Old Testament; Fantozzi in Paradise; the best of the Greek tragedies: the worst of Lino Banfi; The Confessions of Saint Augustine; packets of Pavesini cat's-tongue biscuits; planning and monitoring; panification and leavening... Devour everything and its opposite, without logic or order: on the contrary in defiance of method, as Paul K. Feyerabend taught. When you have gorged yourself on content, it is time to sleep and dream so as to digest everything and summarize it when you wake. The circular cognitive process is extremely simple: update > dream > install, or rather reinstall, the summary.

Think gut. There are some advantages to being German. Ok, there are also a few disadvantages, since they have Hitler and sauerkraut on their shoulders (and belly). And that's it, thinking (and working) with the stomach. In Germany, *Bauchgefühl* (gut instinct) is taken very seriously in decision-making. We could also call it unconscious intelligence, as compared to conscious intelligence. Working also means deciding and, according to a widespread trend in cognitive science (see Herbert Simon or Heinz von Foerster), the principle

that analytical and logical approaches (even those backed by machines) are excellent for simple decisions but terrible for complex ones is valid in this case. But our gut will save us, since intuition noticeably outperforms automation (especially in the case of radically innovating or imposing one's charisma).

**It will save
our skins,
for intuition
clearly beats
automation**

Think critical. Nowadays, work is only conceptual, relational and emotional. Machines do, and will continue to do, the rest. Or rather,

we are "limited" to thinking, planning, deciding, controlling and producing sense, while "systems" deal (and will continue to deal) with the rest. This is only fair and correct. But then we should ask ourselves why on earth we should learn (again) to do things that machines are already doing better today? Shouldn't we perhaps learn to consciously and critically understand the changes taking place in order to give a deliberate rather than an imposed direction? Towards creatively conceiving the consequences of technology? Towards giving form (Gestalt) to things? Towards giving up the rhetoric of the experts – who, in German are also, rather sublimely,



called *Fachidioten* (idiots in the field, or nerds) – who know ever more things about ever fewer things?

Think debatable. Challenging the indisputable dogmas that paralyse businesses is good practice for innovative managers. We all know this: in every sector there are ironclad rules until some heretic comes along to break them. Some notable examples of “dogma breakers” include: Kiichirō Toyoda’s “toyotism” that broke Ford’s dogma (“Taylorism”), according to which “workers are beings with two arms who also happen to have a head”, by including every worker in innovative and qualitative processes; Anita Roddick (founder of The Body Shop), who broke the cosmetics industry’s dogma according to which “cosmetics must be tested on animals”, by doing without this and becoming a pioneer of cosmetic sustainability; Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who broke the classic media dogma that “information costs money”, by creating a free model based on the exchange of information (and data) when they made Google; Aldi, and discount stores in general, who broke the dogma that “supermarkets must offer a large range of merchandise” by drastically reducing shop-floor space and numbers of products; the low-cost air companies who broke the dogma that “flying is expensive and luxurious” by overturning the entire tourism sector.

Think beautiful. The first time I saw Cirque du Soleil, I thought to myself (like Nino Frassica), “beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but how lovely, how lovely, how lovely”. Great beauty, that’s everything. Once upon a time, Lancia (like the Aurelia B24S Spider from the film *Il Sorpasso*) and Alfa Romeo (such as the Duetto in *The Graduate*) seduced drivers. At one time, the old Olivetti factories (like Pozzuoli) enchanted the workers (thereby increasing their productivity). I don’t know whether beauty will save the world (as Dostoyevski claimed), but it could save a good many companies (as all managers wish, pretty much). Beauty was sacrificed in favour of efficiency and profitability. And yet Apple products are beautiful, while Microsoft ones are ugly (that’s not politically correct, but it is aesthetically true). Products and services that embody the Golden Section or Divine Proportion. It’s fairly simple: beauty satisfies the soul and therefore also satisfies every client, and the “Beautiful Manager” works on this. ■

**Perhaps we should
learn to knowingly
and critically understand
the changes that are afoot,
so we can take a proactive
and not a reactive approach?**



The hackers of training versus the saboteurs of experience.



Nicola Favini

*General Manager,
Manager of Communities,
Logotel*

**The company becomes
a tenderer for projects
that people can latch
on to increase
its own development**

Everything has a use-by date. Milk goes out of date, so do guarantees, and also the registration of a trademark. Every day, knowledge goes out of date, skills expire. The speed that regulates or deregulates the context creates problems when we have to figure out how to regenerate and renew people's "know-how". In our business, Logotel comes into daily contact with situations where companies are grappling with doing something new for the first time, transforming themselves, reinventing themselves to enter new markets. Often, they call on consultants in order to temporarily acquire the necessary skills, and they recruit experts in fields that we've been hearing about for less than two years. Does it work? "... So-so ...", as my son would say.

It's a time of continual experimentation and the recipes are running out, thank goodness. But we're coming across and participating in initiatives that have a different aspect because they are conceived in a different way, so that innovation is becoming the meeting point for triggering new models of learning and for hacking the training system. The company

thus becomes a tenderer for projects that people can latch on to increase its own development. I knew a young woman who had been working in the company for less than a year, who straight away became involved in a strategic project together with three other colleagues with varying levels of seniority and responsibility. By all accounts, it was the most powerful experience in terms of learning things and overcoming paradigms. The project! The project is the new classroom. Allowing someone to fall in love with a problem is training. Creating hybrid teams that encourage different minds to collaborate is

training. If these teams then combine internal and external expertise, even better! Every person is a goldmine. A few months ago, we carried out an event in order to begin a process of internal open innovation in a company that works in three branches across Europe. We realized that this organization

**We're already full
of "how-to-dos";
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is the "why"
and the "who"**

didn't know its own people. People are containers of knowledge, know-how and ideas ... but containers that were not labelled, or else were labelled in haste (are you happy with your job description?). That event gave rise to a social business project to bring out all the submerged and hidden skills, and it works. Innovation hubs and units are being installed in companies. Good. So-called Agile projects are being set up. Good. Is it enough? "So-so"!

We're already full of "how-to-dos"; the dimension we need to work on is the "why" and the "who", without which every experiment remains just a gimmick that creates sweat but not value. In the projects we're collaborating on, we are committed to infecting and exciting our co-workers with a simple but effective mindset. We're convinced that there are three things that people must practice and apply.

Start with those (people) who have a need and stop "virtualizing"; how many people design responses to needs that they don't know or that they think they understand? Collaborate with people who complete and integrate; but in order to collaborate, you need to have a strong "me", otherwise the "we" doesn't work.

See the before and after of every thing/event/moment; we live on stories and experiences and therefore on systemic relationships – so not seeing them is sabotage. The more companies become permanent dojos in which people, designs and decisions are based on this mindset, the better it will be. Some call this "design thinking", but let's keep the substance and discard the label, otherwise it becomes yet another skill to be ticked off in a list of courses we've attended or books we've read. ■

**The companies
must become
permanent dojos**



Do you allow yourself to be frightened of a blank page?

For **Logotel**, a blank page is always the starting point for building original and sustainable answers, in collaboration with our clients.

We are a Service Design Company

Our job is to accompany organizations and companies, to make a difference today and have a positive impact on their own future and that of their clients. We create and foster projects through innovation, with a People and Design-Driven approach, in order to manage transformation through projects that give concrete and demonstrable results.

We bring change to real life, from strategy to implementation

For 25 years, we have been creating services that blend the tangible and the digital, that motivate and empower people to act, learn and collaborate on a daily basis. We design, produce and accompany the development of ideas, processes, content and tools that are capable of interpreting the real needs of companies and people and that give shape to effective answers.

We believe in a “making together” approach

We believe that real collaboration is the first catalyst for change, and for that reason we promote encounters between people both inside and outside organizations, and between different cultures, skills and disciplines. More than 200 people from 11 different countries collaborate in Logotel’s branches in Milan, Paris and Madrid.

Weconomy. Our collaborative research platform

We created Weconomy 10 years ago to meet the demands of the transformations and get to grips with new challenges. Weconomy is an open, shared, multidisciplinary project aimed at encouraging debate between ourselves and our business community. It boasts an international network of 200 authors who include managers, entrepreneurs, designers and researchers. Together, we explore the forefront of change, in order to improve the vision of our designs.

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