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As one reads about the future of the world's workforce, there is one overarching and dominant theme that repeatedly arises and incites turmoil among those in the thick of their careers. The headline reads, "Robots are going to take your job." While this headline is startling and concerning, in The Adaptation Advantage, Heather McGowan and Chris Shipley explain that although robots can indeed take your job, they can also guide you into your next position. To understand how an individual or an organization can learn, unlearn, and adapt to the workforce's evolving changes, we must look back and know how we got here. McGowan and Shipley provide a framework to understand why it's hard for humans to change, how the world will continue to advance, and what individuals can do to make themselves adaptable in a world where everything is constantly changing.

THINK POINT #1: Adapting at the Speed of Change

Technological innovations are accelerating the pace of business to unimaginable speeds. With technological change occurring all around us, there is one thing that isn't changing: how we adapt to it. We are amidst the fourth technological revolution in which cyberspace has thoroughly infiltrated nearly every component of our lives.

On top of the technological changes arising, our society is experiencing fundamental shifts beyond the world of technology. As New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman states in his book, Thank You for Being Late, three fundamental changes are happening in society today: technology, the environment, and the global economy. With all three of these changes coinciding, people are looking ahead and trying to differentiate themselves in the ever-dynamic workforce. McGowan and Shipley suggest that people previously learned in school and then applied it to their work. Now society must shift its focus to continuously learn to harness the full potential of the adaptation advantage.

Although practicing the adaptation advantage may seem daunting at first, you have already taken the first steps towards increasing your human capabilities with technology. For instance, do you remember the last time you memorized a new phone number? Your answer is most likely no, due to the vast competencies and innovations of the tiny computer in your pocket. If you have been able to adapt to a smartphone that guides many aspects of your life, then you are capable of

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mastering the adaptation advantage. Rather than trying to "robot-proof" their careers, workers can outsource dull and routine tasks, such as computing taxes, to technologies while freeing themselves up to perform better and more fulfilling work. Human potential has dramatically increased due to the technological revolution; now, it is up to society to make the most exponential opportunities occurring all around us.

On an organizational level, firms must transition from scalable efficiency to scalable learning to tap into the adaptation advantage. Organizational success relies on evaluating market turns and seizing emerging fads before competitors. A firm's competitive advantage begins by shifting employees to a "work to learn" process. According to McGowan and Shipley, the fundamental idea that gaining knowledge before entering the workforce is the only way for individuals to further their career is an idea of the past. Instead, when you work to learn, there is a continuous cycle of learning from your work and subsequent giving back to your work that provides the most utility to both employee and employer. By fostering continuous learning, firms can provide their employees with the capabilities to adapt to an ever-changing world.

**THINK POINT #2: Letting Go and Learning Fast to Thrive**

Occupations drive human identity. Over the course of one's life, you hear variations of "what do you want to be when you grow up," "what is your major," and ultimately, "what do you do for a living." While these questions can tell us a lot about a person, they also teach you to fixate your identities on your work. McGowan and Shipley implore you to challenge the preconceived notion that your identity relies solely on your occupation.

How do you find the courage to let go of occupational identity? The first step is determining why you have your job in the first place. For example, as a real estate agent, do you work to make a living? Or to be regarded as the best agent in the county? Or better yet, to help people find the home in which they will raise their children? A purpose-driven identity, such as the agent who believes that their purpose is to help people find their home, allows the agent to transcend job title and develop a purpose beyond the scope of one’s job.

While reducing occupational identity is the first step towards harnessing the adaptation advantage, the next and possibly most crucial step is teaching yourself how to relearn. To thrive in the future of work is to develop adaptation skills. This begins by creating an agile and adaptive mindset, while also being aware and fueled by a greater purpose. When agility, adaptivity, awareness, and agency combine, you have developed the agile mindset needed to break education's monotony. From there, you can positively embrace change and develop new skill sets that will advance your career along with your company's agility.

Finally, to combat the headline that robots are going to take your job, you must begin by developing your uniquely human skills. To maximize human potential, humans need to be at the center of every core business and product. Humans are uniquely able to learn and create beyond
that of their technological counterparts; therefore, having a human-centric value proposition is extremely important to our workforce. The fourth technological revolution has forced us to reevaluate our identity in our occupations, yet, with a couple of minor mindset changes, you will be well on your way to raising the adaptation advantage to new heights.

THINK POINT #3: Leading People and Organizations in the Evolution of Work

With the world changing all around us, there is a profound need for a new approach to leadership. The best leaders model their ability to adapt to change. How can a leader effectively display such behavior? Leaders first have to put who they are and what they care about in front of their team members. By introducing and sharing your values with your team, you can build mutual respect that can ultimately help your organization embrace the adaptation advantage.

Effective leaders must be constant learners who are unphased by what they do not know while also accepting being wrong to pursue increased knowledge. As a proficient leader, you do not need to know everything; instead, your ability to learn from complex situations and apply your knowledge to your organization and teammates is what will set you apart from an average leader. Another way to enable your team to adapt is to be a vulnerable leader, which is a means to establish trust within your team. Leaders who hide their weaknesses compromise their team by encouraging them to hide their weaknesses as well as their knowledge. When leaders are vulnerable and show that they make mistakes too, their team members are more willing to take a risk for the organization's overall benefit.

The final piece to the adaptation advantage puzzle is how to position your organization to utilize learners for all levels within your organization. That piece is culture. Culture is the most important tool your company can leverage to gain a competitive advantage in your industry. Organizations should focus on employees by building up their human capabilities through continued learning. In addition, firms can alter their organizational structure to no longer emphasize individual units. Ultimately, organizations that establish a core culture centralized on increasing human capabilities will harness the adaptation advantage's power.
Conclusion

It is undeniable that the world is changing. Individuals and organizations from every industry have to adapt to changes around us. McGowan and Shipley implore you not to look at change as a bad thing. Instead, it is an opportunity to reshape the way we look at the world around us. By harnessing the adaptation advantage, individuals are able to let go, learn fast, and thrive in the future of work.

Recommended Reading


About the Author

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Kristen Koehler is a graduate student from El Paso, Texas. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Medical Humanities with minors in Biology and Business Administration from Baylor University in December 2019. Kristen is currently seeking an MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Administration and plans to pursue a career in the healthcare industry.