

Technology leads transformation, but people are still at its heart

Duke Corporate Education recently hosted its annual Davos of Human Capital 2019 event in Johannesburg, South Africa as an exploration of the intersection of humanity, technology, the future of work and leadership, against the backdrop of unprecedented change and transformation.



Sharmila Chetty with Sophia the Robot

The one-day conference brought together more than 500 senior leaders and HR professionals from across Africa with the goal of defining the future for business in an era of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital disruption.

“Building relationships, empathy, and bringing humanity into the workplace, is the future of work,” says Sharmila Chetty, president of Global Markets at Duke CE.

“Organisations can’t protect jobs which are made redundant by technology, but we do have a responsibility to our people. Leaders have a responsibility to nurture agility, adaptability and focus on protecting people, rather than jobs, through reskilling.”

This year's conference offered a robust line-up of new ideas, fresh insights, cutting-edge solutions, and best practices for any organisation or industry affected by digital disruption.

Understanding how to thrive through digital transformation, identifying new trends, and harnessing the value of technology were in sharp focus throughout the programme as panellists and local and international speakers led discussions on the latest approaches to building human-centred leadership strategies for a better world.

Among the many speaker highlights was Minister of Communications, Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams, who outlined the South African government's various initiatives for enabling Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, and Nedbank CEO, Mike Brown, who offered a unique perspective on how meaningful collaboration between humans and machines can influence better outcomes.

"Technology-driven change is compelling us to become more flexible and open to new concepts and ways of working. We need to adapt to a new work reality in which careers become less linear and far more fluid. Change is accelerated and continuous which is why leadership will have a critical role to play on providing effective support and development opportunities for employees," notes Chetty.

The Davos of Human Capital 2019 also featured a special appearance by Sophia the Robot, the world's first-ever humanoid robot citizen, and her creator David Hanson, PhD from Hanson Robotics.

As innovation and adaptability become ever more critical, Chetty believes that prospering in this new era of disruption requires a distinctly human approach where leaders are intellectually curious, creative and inquisitive about new opportunities to shape a more inclusive and prosperous world.

"Almost every day we see new roles, skills and jobs emerging and while technology can amplify human genius, it can also highlight human limitations. Technology can do a lot of things, but it can't replace the human touch. Ultimately, it's up to us to ensure that technology reflects our humanity, our purpose, and our values," she says.

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