

Why it's important for HR to get out in front of workplace disruption

Some experts believe that more than a third of jobs in South Africa are at risk of being lost because humans are going to be [replaced](#) by digitisation and computer technology. This equates to the loss of about 5.7 million jobs. World Economic Forum [report](#) meanwhile predicts that by 2020, more than a third of today's skills will have fallen by the wayside.

By [Linda Ronnie](#) 3 Jul 2018



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This has significant implications for Human Resource (HR) professionals. How do they manage a workforce that is potentially outdated every two years or so?

Along with everyone in the world of work, HR professionals are going to have to adapt to get ahead of these challenges. They must find ways to work with uncertainty to ensure that their organisations harness the best talent to succeed in the long term.



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They must see the opportunities. Technology is already making administrative tasks easier; from managing payrolls and employee details to keeping track of contracts. HR practitioners can harness these advances to innovate what they do from recruitment through to assessment and reward, creating a more compelling and fulfilling employee experience.

Some companies are already showing how this can be done.



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Making things easier

There is no doubt that future workplaces are going to [look different](#) and that they'll be run differently too. More and more companies are hiring freelancers and remote work among full-time employees are also becoming the new normal.

This trend is likely to increase, bringing with it more consequences for HR departments, like how to measure performance, structure packages and offer incentives.

Monitoring teams and keeping up to date with projects can be done via a number of platforms and more electronic solutions will become available over time. Already, companies are making use of cloud-based solutions, voice technology and machine learning to manage their people. According to the [Human Resource Technologist](#) publication, more efficient and streamlined data processes like these will soon make gathering employee data more efficient. Tasks will be speeded up, like identifying suitable job candidates based on key characteristics, educational qualifications and professional work history.



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Global consumer goods giant, [Unilever](#), is already taking advantage of this. It's launched a pioneering digital recruitment process that's shortened its hiring cycle from four months to just two weeks. This saves 50,000 hours of candidate time while reducing recruiter screening time by a massive 75%. More than that, the process is fun and rewarding for candidates and they get better feedback about their participation regardless of whether they are successful or not.

New ways of rewarding and incentivising

The [new approaches](#) are appealing especially to Millennials and the Generation Zs – young people who are tech savvy and used to interacting on multiple platforms, and who will dominate work spaces of the future.

[Research](#) shows that Millennials are keen too on experiential rewards as opposed to financial incentives. This means they place a high premium on things like travel opportunities, discounted tickets and vouchers to sports and music events rather than on pension benefits and more traditional incentives.

Millennials are also [quicker](#) than previous generations to leave jobs where they are not happy and expect regular affirmation in the workplace.



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Companies can [respond](#) by putting into place automated feedback systems to provide continuous assessment rather than a lumbering annual performance appraisal. Start-ups like Lattice, TinyPulse, and Zugata have taken this [concept](#) to the extreme with short weekly reviews that are fun for employees to complete.

Other organisations have launched collaborative initiatives that help to motivate and engage millennials. Accenture Digital, [for example](#), offers junior staff secondments and opportunities to work on virtual extra mural projects, giving them an opportunity to learn more skills and work with others in a virtual space.

New ways of learning

According to the Accenture Strategy report: [Harnessing Revolution: Creating the future workforce](#), employees are hungry for these kind of opportunities and are positive about the change technology is bringing to their jobs with 87% thinking it will improve matters at work. A telling 85% said they were willing to learn new skills at work.

In line with these shifts, executive education is [shifting](#) too. While in the past it was dominated by business acumen and financial expertise there is now a growing focus on leadership, relationship building, self-awareness, empathy and communication skills.



DIGITAL

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How courses are delivered is [also shifting](#) with face-to-face and full-time learning being augmented with online courses, flexible timetables and adjustable structures offering HR departments more avenues than ever before to train and develop their employees.

In addition to new ways of formal learning, HR has access to a range of innovative software and electronic tools that enable informal learning in the workplace. New technology and apps, like for instance [MyGrow](#), can help to develop emotional intelligence in the workplace at scale while also assisting with managing employees, keeping track of their time at work and on projects.

Far from being a threat, the future is bright and filled with opportunity for those HR professionals who are able to shift gears quickly and think afresh about how they add value. In many respects, as the profession that looks after all others in the workplace, they have an obligation to make sure that the changes ahead are, on balance, good for their people.

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