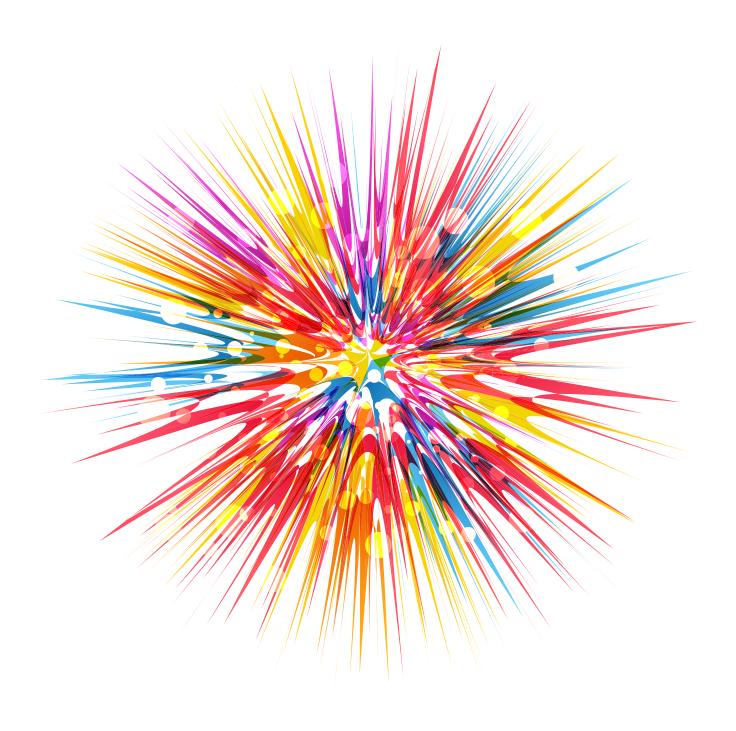# Deloitte.

Flipping the narrative toward a brighter future of work

For years, the dominant "future of work" narrative has been one of divisions, contrasts, and competition. We hear of impending job loss as workers are pitted against smarter AI and more efficient robots; according to some sources, up to 30 percent of workers[1] could be displaced by automation by 2030. There is a perceived widening in the division between "haves" and "have nots," as organizations move more and more quickly to adopt technology that's replacing low-skilled jobs everywhere in the world. And we are increasingly wary of whether corporate and government leaders truly respect and safeguard our trust.[2]

But what if there's a counter-narrative—another, different set of trends and projections that tells the story of a brighter future? What if our future economy is based on technology that augments, rather than replaces, human potential? What if everyone, everywhere in the world could develop the skills and capabilities they needed to leverage technological progress? And what if future leaders, corporate and public sector alike, truly stepped up, reaching across sectors to benefit society?

We're already seeing indications that this brighter future is achievable.

Augmenting, not replacing
The first part of the counter-narrative tells the story of how the most forward-looking organizations are using technology to augment (not replace) humans, freeing up their capacity to leverage what makes them truly human. As described in a recent Harvard Business Review article,[3] companies like Autodesk and General Electric are building and using tools that allow employees to use AI to do their work faster and better. These productivity gains are also being harnessed in developing countries. For example, the GSMA mAgri initiative has helped mobile network operators such as Airtel and Vodafone leverage human-centered design to develop effective, commercially viable mobile services for farmers in emerging markets. According to a GSMA report, "the user-centered design approach helps mAgri service providers get a much better understanding of this customer segment and their ecosystem," making it possible to "drive successful innovation in the mAgri sector and generate services that can be commercialized faster and become more widely adopted."[4]

This example supports what John Hagel and his colleagues at Deloitte's Center for the Edge point out: The future of work is in redefining work so that workers at all levels can focus on finding opportunities and addressing problems, rather than simply performing routine tasks. AI and other emerging technologies are not simply about back-office impacts, but about impacts that extend from the C-suite to the front line.[5]

For organizations to leverage AI effectively, they will need to recruit employees with the necessary skills and capabilities. According to the 2018 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report, the "influx of AI, robotics, and automation into the workplace" is "perhaps surprisingly" creating more demand for "roles and skills [that] focus on the 'uniquely human,'" including complex problem-solving, cognitive abilities, and social skills.[6] The World Economic Forum's list of top skills workers will need in 2020 suggests that today's workers should be focusing not on training and mastering data analytics and computer programming, but on honing and cultivating capabilities like creativity, emotional intelligence, and negotiation.[7]

Less about skills training, more about nurturing human capabilities
The second part of the counter-narrative requires that we revisit our traditional notions of "learning," tipping the balance in favor of nurturing enduring human capabilities over training for technical skills. If human capabilities really are the future, we need to rethink our approach to educating tomorrow's workforce—from classrooms to corporate offices, and in both developed and developing countries around the world. Students will still need to acquire basic knowledge and tactical, context-specific skills. But they will also need to hone enduring capabilities like creative problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking, which are best developed through real life application and practice—through project-based learning with support from enabling technology.

Working together in partnership
The third part of the counter-narrative requires that we rethink the ways we partner across cultures, sectors, and continents. Partnerships across organizations and geographies will play an important role in this effort, as organizations tap into their broader ecosystems to extend their own capabilities.

For example, the nonprofit Team4Tech enables the kinds of partnerships that cultivate the conditions for skills training as well as honing human capabilities. Team4Tech partners with companies to engage employees with global social impact projects that offer immersive leadership development. Through Team4Tech projects, corporate employees bring technology solutions and training to schools and nonprofits to improve the quality of education. The impact of these projects serves to benefit both the participants and the impacted communities. The participants—employees from partnering companies—have the opportunity to apply their technical skills and practice capabilities such as empathy, inclusivity and collaboration through deeply engaging, authentic experiences. Community members are challenged to develop technical skills—from foundational digital literacy to coding and robotics skills—while also developing capabilities such as creativity, curiosity, and problems solving through project-based learning.

One Team4Tech project that illustrates the mutually beneficial nature of the experience involves Kidspire Vietnam, an organization that helps children in state-run orphanages use

technology to develop design skills for expanded economic opportunities. Recently, a Kidspire graduate applied for a factory job as an assembly line worker. After showcasing his digital portfolio in his interview, however, he was hired as a designer, earning more than triple what he would have earned on the assembly line. On the corporate side, the benefit reaches even the most senior leadership in the organization. "As we often hear from our employees, my Team4Tech project was life changing," said Colin Mead, VP Worldwide Customer Support, Pure Storage. "It made me a better leader and a better person. Beyond the job and the tasks, it was about building a cross-cultural relationship, by listening, understanding what the needs were, and then following up."

Corporate social leadership is key

The hallmark of the brighter future is corporate social leadership. We are at a critical time as a society, one in which customers, employees, and society together are looking to corporations to step up. Deloitte notes that surveyed people worldwide place 52 percent trust in business "to do what is right," versus just 43 percent in government.[8] Furthermore, 86 percent of surveyed millennials think that business success should be measured in terms of more than just financial performance,[9] and 67 percent of employees prefer to work for socially responsible companies.[10] Major global players like Amazon, Target, and Salesforce are responding, taking actions like raising worker wages[11] and donating time and profits to social causes.[12]

Is social leadership a long-term sustainable business strategy? Evidence suggests that it is. According to Deloitte's 2018 Global Human Capital Trends report, 55 percent of surveyed consumers will pay extra for products sold by companies committed to positive social impact.[13] The report also cites studies that have demonstrated a direct correlation between organizations' corporate social responsibility index rankings and their financial profitability, and that "purpose-focused companies…outperformed their S&P 500 peers by a factor of eight." The correlation is rooted in more than just "cause" marketing—social responsibility affects hiring and retention, too, especially as millennials make up more of the workforce. According to research cited in Forbes, one-third of millennials define success as "doing work that has a positive impact on society."[14]

As companies take on larger social leadership roles, employees at all levels will need strong leadership capabilities to ensure that these corporations can achieve broader social impact. Fortunately, social impact projects are one of the best avenues for employees to hone those capabilities, as they provide unique opportunities to collaborate across sectors and geographies while developing enduring capabilities like empathy, adaptability, and cultural intelligence. One Team4Tech volunteer, a software engineer from Box, said that working in

a classroom in Costa Rica gave her a new "kind of scrappiness, a creativity, a growth mind-set, a work ethic" and helped her and her colleagues hone their empathy and compassion.[15] Corporate partnerships with education-focused nonprofits offer an especially notable multi-pronged payoff: as employees build leadership capabilities, they're simultaneously helping underserved learners develop the skills and capabilities they'll need to succeed in the future of work. At the same time, they enable organizations to add richness and depth to the employee experience, demonstrate their commitment to being a social enterprise, and enhance their brand.

A brighter future of work

The future of work is often cast in the light of "robots taking our jobs." While automation and AI will certainly play a role in shaping the global future of work, we also have an opportunity to create a future that reflects and celebrates the best of what makes us human. Taking advantage of this opportunity will require businesses to commit to a social leadership agenda that supports workers in building the human capabilities they will need to succeed in a new technological era, and fostering collaborative partnerships that ensure all learners develop the skills to participate in the workforce of the future.

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