

Cracking the Code for An Automated Workforce in 2020 and Beyond

Michael Wong 17 September 2017

If 60 percent of all occupations have at least 30 percent of activities which can be automated with current technologies, what three steps should communities take today to better prepare their populations' career prospects? In this Q&A, Sam Girard, Vice President and Senior Global Client Partner for IBM, shares his top recommendations for cracking the code to an evolving workplace. Mr. Girard earned an Executive MBA from Loyola University Chicago and a BA from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

Q. With accelerating automation as well as changing work force dynamics (some reports project that by 2020 nearly 40 percent of the American workforce will be contingent workers /independent contractors), how can community leaders pragmatically prepare their citizens?

A. Frankly, given the complexity and speed of these changes, I believe it requires a cross-section of leaders across the entire community. For example, I recall scanning a recent World Economic Forum report on jobs and a point that really stood out for me was as new

technologies are enabling innovations such as remote working and teleconferencing, the result is that organizations are likely to have a smaller pool of core full-time employees. This change has huge ramifications for today's, not just tomorrow's, workers. Think about it, 2020 is just three years away; it's right around the corner.

So, given this velocity of change, I believe that future career paths need to be redefined. The redefinition process can be challenging though as individuals need to gain skills that are projected to be in demand for this new workforce. That's where community leaders can play a role. For instance, IBM has joined Impact2030, whose mission is to mobilize human capital globally to advance sustainable development goals. Working in conjunction with the City of Philadelphia and Girls, Inc., IBM will be deploying 100 IBM senior consultants with 100 girls to teach them coding through a combination of classroom and practical exercises. Specifically, we'll be tapping into a pool of IBM consultants of whom many are recent college graduates and are part of a development program that takes place in Philadelphia. A key target outcome is to provide not only projected high-demand skill sets but also coaching by IBMers who can help the students to navigate an ever-changing workplace.

Q. It's interesting how you mention that a number of recent college graduates are part of the solution; but do they really have the depth required to lead such change given that they've graduated just a few years ago?

A. Fair question, but I do believe and frankly IBM does as well. IBM's college recruitment process is extremely selective (e.g. Philadelphia's University of Pennsylvania is one example of the targeted schools for our talent recruitment efforts) and onboarding training as well as continuing education have always been ongoing focal investments for the firm (new collar). Two key points: First, is that we will select employees who can "learn and apply quickly" since technology is moving so fast. Second, is that our consultants need to understand how ecosystems are impacted by technology. Cognitive and robotics are no longer constrained to a set of processes or a supply chain. These technologies will remove barriers across ecosystems, which then requires all of our talent to understand industry ecosystems and how they operate.

Q. So, what top three recommendations do you have for community leaders to better prepare their citizens?

A. First, as a leader, provide some context around these upcoming uncertain times so that communities don't unnecessarily waste time and energy. It's a given that automation, AI, and robotics will disrupt so many industries and jobs. But, provide available research and data points to help your communities understand potential career opportunities for those who prepare.

Second, build a community engagement model that includes in-person communications. While social media and other technologies are, and should be part of the

engagement model, face-to-face dialogues are crucial to providing the candid conversations that will be needed to deal with these imminent changes.

Third, work on problems that make a difference in the community. The more we make it real for our youth, our citizens, and employees in the community; the more technology will be used to solve basic problems.

Works Cited

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