

The Future of Jobs —Anticipate Job Needs in an Increasingly Tech-focused Economy

When it comes to the future of your industry, how secure do you feel, not only in your position, but in your career, your abilities, as a whole? The era in which a professional could go to school for a specific skill or trade, develop his or her acumen and skills, and stick with that skill set to establish and grow a career until retirement has passed. Now, the future of your career doesn't depend on whether employment is available at any given company; it depends on just how employable you are. And this requires constant learning, being proactive in making sure the skills you have fit the market in its current state, as well as its varied demands for employees with up-to-date skill sets.

As the Three Accelerators (bandwidth, processing power, and storage) grow at an exponential pace, new positions are emerging in the tech sector, and traditional jobs are getting tech-related overhauls. This means the skills required to do these jobs are always changing, and it's up to both employees and employers to keep up with these trends.

In an August 2014 Harvard Business Review article, "Employers Aren't Just Whining – The 'Skills Gap' Is Real," journalist James Bessen — citing a report by ManpowerGroup — claims that "many employers might actually have difficulty hiring skilled workers. The critics cite economic evidence to argue that there are no major shortages of skilled workers. But a closer look shows that their evidence is mostly irrelevant. The issue is confusing because the skills required to work with new technologies are hard to measure." These new hard and soft skills, asserts Bessen, are difficult to qualify and quantify, but they're necessary for our developing economy and many would-be professionals lack them.

What does this mean for you? Well, we're living in transformational times, and if your job description isn't already changing, it probably will in the near future. You can't afford to stand still in your career, as many used to in generations past; you can't simply coast along and be complacent in terms of not pursuing more training or a better education tailored to the skills you'll find yourself needing sooner rather than later.

Even though most economists, backed by statistics, concur we've made it through the so-called Great Recession, many unemployed or underemployed folks are still having difficulty landing jobs — moreover, even people with jobs who are looking to make a move, whether lateral or upward, are finding it difficult to locate open positions suited to their particular abilities. But thinking the economy is still bleak is somewhat of a misperception: In our ever-shifting economic landscape, factoring in technology that's constantly evolving, many once-common jobs are beginning to disappear, and new roles are opening up — but companies are, more and more, experiencing difficulty filling these positions.

Even many traditional roles are becoming harder to fill because of a lack of up-to-date skills. According to ManpowerGroup — a multinational HR consulting firm — the 10 most difficult roles to fill are: skilled trade workers (eg. electricians, chefs, butchers, mechanics), sales representatives, mechanical and civil engineers, technicians, drivers, management/executives, accounting or otherwise financial professionals, office support staff, IT staff, and production or machine operations workers.

Now, these are relatively common jobs in our economic landscape; they shouldn't be too difficult to fill. However, most of these jobs call for developed, nuanced skills that can grow in lockstep with our technologically advancing economy. And it's starting to look like many professionals aren't keeping up with the evolving skill demands of their industries.

In addition to these more traditional jobs being difficult to fill, a slew of new roles and professions are offering untapped potential for workers with the right technical know-how. In the tech sector, the ability to negotiate and manipulate data is quickly becoming invaluable. Freelancer, "the world's largest freelancing, outsourcing and crowdsourcing marketplace," is looking toward our rapidly expanding tech environment; they claim data scientists are in high demand, along with people experience in the eCommerce arena. Some trends they've pointed out include the transition to and increasing dependence on video for social media platforms, and the advent of wearable tech. Anyone skilled in these areas is likely in high demand in this economy.

However, this disconnect between talent, necessary skill, and employment doesn't hinge entirely around employees. Many employers, themselves, are having trouble addressing what's now being viewed as a serious talent shortage. These employers are failing to meet the changing needs of the economy, especially with respect to finding people with technical skills or teaching these skills to new hires. As the needs of our economy develop, employers are having trouble filling positions because many applicants lack requisite hard and soft skills, as well as experience; even when applicants are talented and available, many of them are looking for higher starting salaries than most talent-strapped companies are willing to offer.

According to the results of a talent shortage survey from ManpowerGroup, 20 percent of employers aren't pursuing strategies to address talent shortages; only 10 percent are adopting new recruiting strategies to find untapped talent; a miniscule five percent are redefining criteria for "teachable" employees and incentivizing prospective talent with added benefits or increased starting salaries; and only a fifth of employers are providing additional technical training to their existing teams.

The solution? ManpowerGroup suggests employers overhaul best practices when it comes to recruiting, like redefining qualifying criteria and conveying the image of their organization as a destination for valued talent with a culture of learning and employee encouragement. Adopting an agile methodology when it comes to pulling talent from nontraditional areas is also tremendously helpful.

For both employees and employers, education is key. Prospective employees need to continuously augment their skill sets and pick up new hard and soft skills in order to remain employable; they can do this, in part, by studying the Hard Trends I've outlined, which will help career-minded individuals predict what sorts of skills they'll need to develop and where opportunity for employment may lie. As for employers facing a talent shortage, they need to develop new recruiting methods and be willing to provide necessary additional training to new hires. From both sides, it's clear that the most important aspect of this talent and employment shortage is the pursuit of modernized knowledge.

So, what are you doing to stay ahead of the curve in your industry? How are you growing and protecting your career by being anticipatory? Just how employable are you, exactly?

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