



Ready for Your 4th Industrial Revelation?

It seems that every networking event I attend lately is themed around the 4th Industrial Revolution. It's not exactly surprising - we've been hearing for a while now that we live in a VUCA world (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) and you simply need to read news headlines to know that this is true (in fact, I'm more inclined to say that the world's gone a little mad!).

But, what does the 4th Industrial Revolution mean for our workplaces, and more specifically, for HR practitioners who have to navigate their way around these changes? As I listen to the questions, concerns and general millennial-bashing expressed at these events, it's obvious to me that many in the HR profession see these changes as daunting, even threatening. I want to suggest, though, that getting caught up in the fear of the unknown could result in missing out on one of the biggest opportunities for HR so far!

When I was employed as an HR Exec, one of the things I would bitch about was how I so often got sucked into transactional "stuff" and wasn't able to focus on elements that would make a true difference in the business. Now, however, we have the opportunity to let the technology do what it does best, so that we can be freed up to really engage with our people and create the type of culture that makes people want to stay.

So, what can we start doing right now to ensure that our organisations are riding the 4IR wave? Let's look at some of the elements of the employee life cycle:

Recruitment

A lot of technology already exists to assist in the recruitment space, with more and more tools making it

easy to apply for positions using smart phones. There are companies that are also starting to use Whatsapp for this purpose, making it far more accessible to lower income earners and school-leavers. These systems are great for separating the wheat from the chaff when doing bulk recruitment, but we must not forget that there is always a person at the end of the line. How can we ensure that the process of applying and short-listing people is efficient without losing the element of engagement? It may also make sense to conduct first-round interviews via Skype or Zoom, assisting those who may not have access to transport and alleviating the awkwardness of candidates having to arrange time out of the office.

On-boarding

A large element of the on-boarding process is administrative. By using technology cleverly, we can ensure that new joiners have access to an online portal where they will be able to electronically complete and sign off on all documentation, as well as complete certain elements of the induction programme. This means that when they physically arrive for their first day, their on-boarding will focus more on assimilating them with the culture, allowing them to engage with people and hit the ground running in terms of the actual work a lot faster. It will, of course, also save a lot of wasted time for the HR team.

Structuring and Agility

Gone are the days of having a fully permanent workforce, working a standard 08:00 to 17:00 day, where everyone had their own desk or office. We need to become a lot more creative around how we construct our workforces. A blended approach, with a combination of permanent, consulting or freelance workers could be highly efficient and cost effective. Agility around where and when we work should also be a serious consideration (if it isn't already). Numerous studies have shown that workers are not only a lot happier when given the option of agile working, they are also far more productive. Many employers shy away from this as they assume worker will take advantage of their new-found freedom. In my experience, the opposite is true, however it is useful to create an agile working policy, which defines the boundaries within which people can operate.

L&D

I heard an alarming statistic recently - by 2040 all jobs as we currently know them could be replaced by some form of AI. Our children are also currently being schooled based on a system established during the 2nd Industrial Revolution (late 1800s), and the jobs they'll be employed to do don't even exist yet! In addition, the World Economic Forum has identified 10 key skills required for someone to thrive in the 4th Industrial Revolution. They are:

- Complex Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Creativity
- People Management
- Coordinating with Others
- Emotional Intelligence
- Judgement and Decision Making

Service Orientation
Negotiation
Cognitive Flexibility

What this says to me is that we should be focusing on developing these previously considered “soft skills”, rather than technical skills, creating a more flexible workforce who can adapt to changing job requirements. We should also be doing this using agile learning tools (online, rather than classroom learning).

Engagement

I remember a time when a company’s employee brand (or EVP, to use the HR term) was what the company said it was. Now, however, it’s what your people say it is. During interviews, company’s are being interviewed just as much as candidates. Culture is critical, and the only way an organisation can hold itself accountable to its Values is by engaging with its people. And yes, those long, in-depth engagement surveys that tap into all elements of the business are helpful, but they can only really be conducted every 18 - 24 month. I would rather suggest running regular, targeted surveys that speak to the heart of what our people are experiencing and allow for improvements to be made relatively quickly for maximum impact. Tools like [Hi5](#), with their Pulses feature, are really useful for this.

Rewards and Benefits

Our recognition and reward programmes (if they exist at all) still tend to revolve around complicated performance management systems linked to elaborate incentive schemes resulting in some form of financial reward. But (believe it or not), money doesn’t motivate everyone. By engaging with our people we can identify what I like to call values-based incentives, that feed into the things that matter for individuals. For some it might be assisting with studies, or additional days off to travel, or assisting with children’s school fees. And let’s not forget that data is a hot commodity! If we’re expecting our people to engage with us through various online or mobile portals, we need to make it possible for them to do so. The general office environment and equipment provided could also be set up in such a way that they are considered benefits.

The reality is change is inevitable, and changes should be made sooner rather than later. But it doesn’t have to be a daunting or even expensive process. HR practitioners must be the ones driving the change. If you need help in identifying creative ways to establish the space and culture for the new world of work, [get in touch](#).