

Populating your organisation in the face of rapidly advancing technology

 By [Aadil Patel](#)

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Society is currently experiencing the beginnings of a revolution that will fundamentally change the way we in South Africa live, work and relate to one another. Driven by technology, this transformation presents diverse and fascinating challenges - as well as opportunities, not only for the evolving human resources (HR) function.



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Due to its scope, scale and complexity, the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is unlike anything we have ever experienced before. The question becomes - is an organisation ready to face this new era of work and associated resourcing?

What is the 4IR?

The 4IR is the fourth major industrial era since the initial industrial revolution of the 18th century and is characterised by a merging of technologies that 'blurs the lines' between the physical, digital and biological spheres – all of these together known as cyber-physical systems.

What makes the 4IR even more disruptive than the revolutions that have preceded it are its speed (everything happens at a much faster pace than ever before), breadth and depth (with a great number of radical changes occurring simultaneously), as well as the complete transformation of entire systems.

How the 4IR is disrupting the traditional model of HR

The main drivers of change in the 4IR are high-speed mobile internet, artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics and cloud technology – all disrupting industries at a rapid rate, including the modern workplace and its resourcing. Locally, the traditional model of work is being challenged by 4IR and its associated technologies from the perspective of:

- Place of work - with the rise in connectivity and remote working opportunities.
- Hours of work - the ability and preference to work beyond the traditional hours of work.
- Job description - how automation and artificial intelligence are changing people's roles and responsibilities.

What does the 4IR mean for the future of work in South Africa?

When it comes to populating a growing organisation with the required diverse skills, some of the main considerations and changes we can expect from the 4IR include:

- Accommodating an ageing workforce.
- Talent will be able to compete in an all-inclusive, global market. HR will need to design work around differentiated practices, policies, practices, pay and benefits.
- Automation and innovation will reduce jobs of full-time workers by 2022, as technology-fuelled disruption and automation substitute capital for labour. However, the demand for new goods and services will increase and lead to the creation of potential new occupations, businesses and industries.
- Reskilling and upskilling employees becomes crucial, since employment will grow in cognitive and creative jobs, but will diminish for routine and repetitive jobs.
- Increase in productivity-enhancing roles.
- Increased human and machine collaboration.
- Increase in the use of short or fixed-term contractors for task-specialised work.
- Processes to streamline work processes (and administration) creating efficiencies and freeing up time for other strategic work.

A new measure of value - adaptability quotient (AQ)

There is a new buzzword in the business world - adaptability quotient, or AQ. AQ is loosely defined as 'the ability to adjust course, product, service, and strategy in response to unanticipated changes in the market'. Along with traditional measurements like intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ), AQ is another factor increasingly used to determine an employee's value in a world that demands innovation and necessitates change.



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How an organisation should proactively embrace the 4IR

We are still at the beginning stages of the 4IR, and it will require entirely new organisational and economic structures to grasp its full value. What we do know is that to remain competitive, companies must be at the frontier of innovation in all its forms. Strategies, which primarily focus on cost reduction, will be less effective than those that are based on offering products and services in more innovative ways.

HR departments are required to re-evaluate their job descriptions and they need to recruit for a world which does not yet

exists. Monies must be effectively spent so as to enhance those skills which will prepare a workforce for the 4IR. Populating an organisation with a mix of fixed-term employees, independent contractors, part-time employees and permanent employees will be the new normal. The one size fits all model will cease to exist.

Companies who wish to thrive as we enter 4IR must be able to adapt to a changing workforce, one which will comprise both machines and humans. The role of HR will need to be realigned with the way work essentially 'gets done', pushing boundaries to bring new solutions to a business. Organisations will need to look beyond technology to find ways to give more people the ability to positively impact their families, organisations and communities.

ABOUT AADIL PATEL

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