

How to Survive the Race Against Technology in the Era of Automation

Heraclitus' words "*The only thing that is constant is change*" are ringing truer than ever in today's age of technology and information. Today, change is visibly at work, and one of the main catalysts is technology. Technology has enabled miniaturization of devices, wider sharing, accessing, recording and analyzing of information than ever seen before. Yet every technological advancement is but a temporary achievement, waiting for the next breakthrough to further revolutionize the way we work, play, and live. This relentless pace of technological advancement is thrilling to many, generating trepidation to some, and striking fear in those whose work that they may be displaced by technology. What can you do? What are the implications of this constant technological change for the human and working toward a successful career?

The truth is that technology will enable widespread automation. Artificial intelligence, fintech and robotics will all play a part of the Next Industrial Revolution¹, and automation will become the solution to a relentless drive toward efficiency and productivity. This, of course, will impact every aspect of people's lives whether they be consumers, employees, business owners, or just industry in general. 3D printing is one of the most real examples of this impact - a one-step, flexible, mass-customizable manufacturing approach that eliminates the need for assembly lines, tools and moulds². The pressure then shifts to people, to individuals, to remain necessary in an increasingly automated world.

Our only choice is to embrace this change and adopt an open-minded attitude toward an ever-advancing environment. To start recognizing that while we do not own other people, or the company we work for, we *do* own our career, our abilities and skills, and our livelihood. We must accept that change will persist, that the future will be largely unpredictable, and that the science

fiction of today will likely become the reality of tomorrow. This mental shift is the first step toward surviving the era of automation.

How Many Generations Between Today and When you Retire?

A proven project management technique that enables successful project delivery is looking backwards. What does success look like? How do you define it, measure it, and control it along the journey so the project can achieve it. This technique can be used on a grander scale. Ask yourself, how many years will you work between now and when you retire? For my students, the answer lies somewhere between 40-50 years, and if human longevity or the necessity of human labor productivity is extended further, then it is conceivable to envision a working life of 50-60 years.

What would the world look like at the end of that long duration? Let's assume a generation is twenty years. That means 2, 2.5, or 3 generational shifts. For someone in their 30's today, think of the world in the 1950's and 60's and the state of technology. Some would say, "That wasn't too bad. There was cars, trains, planes, televisions, and telephones." But technology moves faster, much faster. Thus, what is "a generation" in technology years? Let's do a quick comparison: radio took 38 years to reach an audience of a half million, television took 13 years, computers took 16 years, the internet took 5 years, and it took the iPhone 74 days to reach a million. Let's be generous and use 7 years as in the case of "dog years". One dog year is equivalent to 7 human years. This means that for most of my students, their work life will span between 6 to 7 generations. From this perspective and looking back, seven generations means looking at the world in the 1860's in the era of steam engines, horse and buggies, pony express and carrier pigeons. Worse, the speed of changing is accelerating, so even the seven years per technology generation is likely to be wrong. Now that's different. What can you do to survive automation?

Surviving Automation

Continuous learning, growth and development will become key to the future. And people, as employees and business owners, will need to adopt a less traditional, less conservative approach to how they shape their careers. Some of the most important career moves for people today will be planning strategically for the future, continuously adapting to technological advancements, willingness to reinvent their skills, and commitment to lifelong learning.

1. Plan strategically and act tactically. Most people have to work around 40 to 50 years of their lifetime (if not more). And gone are the days where a loyal employee works the same job, for the same company, for the better part of their lives. Today, as customer needs change and competition increases, so organizations change and adapt internally³. This means different jobs, requiring different skills, and different personalities. With this in mind, we need to start shaping our own careers by considering where we are going, or what we are actually working toward. And what the best course of action for achieving our near-term goals will be.

2. Become and remain techno-savvy. Yes, we have come a long way since the first handheld Blackberry. But we will go further yet. And as the old adage goes, if you can't beat them, join them. So while automation may appear as a threat to employment, technology is ironically the secret to remaining necessary. Technology will advance into new forms, and organizations will want and require the newest technology to remain competitive. This makes it important for people to remain technically savvy, and comfortable enough to use and leverage technology in their jobs and careers. As an employee, a freelancer, or a business owner, technology of all sorts will be a valuable career tool.

3. Be excellent at something, but willing to start all over again in something new. Many of us have invested years into becoming an expert in our field, a specialist in our practice. But knowledge and skills can no longer be viewed as a filled cart. No, skills must become replenishable. New technology will continuously require new skills and knowledge, which may mean that experts abandon and reinvent their expertise a number of times throughout their working lives⁴. Skills advancement will need to be guided by the demand of technology⁵.

4. *Commit to lifelong learning.* As skill sets become obsolete, and new skill sets arise, so an emphasis on adult learning and continuous development will become increasingly important⁶. We will need to broaden our peripheral vision to sense new opportunities and maximize their value. And it is those who adopt lifelong learning to continuously replenish their skills that will be eligible for new opportunities and roles as they arise⁶.

Conclusion

Thus, as automation continues to shape our environment, so traditional career paths will become something of the past. Successful players will be agile, strategic, and collaborative in their relationship with technology. They will recognize education as a lifelong process, rather than a one-off event. And in this way, they will continue to remain valuable and necessary in the face of automation.

For a full version of this blog, visit <http://www.pmoadvisory.com/blog/how-to-survive-the-race-against-technology/>. Also, in our last blog on this topic, we also discussed this theme. Click here to read it: <http://www.pmoadvisory.com/blog/race-against-technology/>.

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