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1. *Leaders must adapt to the changing nature of work*

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Leaders must adapt to the changing nature of work

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Body

India, Aug. 26 -- An extraordinary two-century-long arc of the industrial revolution can broadly be represented by a set of four images. Industry 1.0 by the 1784 mechanical weaving loom, industry 2.0 by the 1923 Ford moving assembly line, industry 3.0 from 1969's first programmable logic controller (PLC) and industry 4.0 from the 2011 real-time self-optimising connected systems. Each of these eras represented gigantic leaps in technology and human capacity, and brought on tectonic transformations.

Today, the world of ***work*** is ***changing*** drastically again, with greater applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Smart manufacturing, widespread use of AI and digital transformation have become commonly accepted vocabulary among business ***leaders***. Just as in social networks, the current advances in technology make it possible for machines, humans, and unseen resources used in manufacturing, to communicate with each other. The facilitation of communication among human and non-human parts has improved efficiencies and opened several non-existent and imagined possibilities. The bountifulness of quickly emerging technologies has made it possible for manufacturers and supply chains to improve their processes in real-time, and customise solutions for businesses and customers. Appropriate adoption of currently advancing technology has the potential to curb waste and design sustainable solutions. There are already examples of such gains and possibilities in mines, supply chain efficiencies, and the discharge of waste into rivers and oceans.

Yet, the pace of these ***changes*** can appear daunting. It took us approximately 150 years (1780-1920) to transition from IR 1.0 to IR 2.0. In comparison, it took less than 50 years to move from IR 2.0 to 3.0 (1920-1970) and 40 years to move from IR 3.0 to 4.0. In most cases now, we are not even sure if we are at the end of IR 4.0, or on the cusp of IR 5.0.

Given the gentle pace at which we have evolved as a civilisation over 5,000 years, humans feel anxious and inadequate in the face of snowballing technological ***changes***. The lives and experiences of people at the workplace are undergoing a transformation. Such ***changes*** will impact health, well-being, and the ability to function for a large number of people. The Future of ***Work*** reports from the World Economic Forum (WEF) shows that 23% of the jobs we know will ***change*** in the next five years.

Against this backdrop, it is critical to examine what business ***leaders*** need to do if they want to be able to craft ***work*** in a way that can help people stay ahead of inevitable ***changes*** and exploit oncoming technology for the good of business and society as a whole.

IR 4.0/5.0 involves an interplay of human, technology, and organisational processes in the context of economic growth, and the political and legal aspects of society. It has been pointed out that a new category of technology-enabled systems is necessary to handle the coming together of physical and computational systems. The ***leader*** needs to, thus, understand three modes of exchanges - human-to-human interactions that would need to ***change***;

human-to- technology interactions that would need to be nurtured; and human-to-organisation interactions that would undergo ***change*** with the greater adoption of cyber-physical systems. ***Leaders*** who focus on only one aspect of this relationship, or look for ***changes*** in competencies in a single domain, will fail.

Thus, ***leaders*** need to be system thinkers. Prof Caberra's research shows that systems thinking is characterised by the ability to do four things - distinguish between what is part of the problem and what is not; organise systems that comprise both the parts and the whole; perceive relationships between cause and effect, and the iterations of the same; and step back and take a perspective and create a thesis of what might be happening and what might be needed.

Based on available research, and thinking ahead, ***leaders*** can do well by taking charge and understanding the ***changes***. They need to involve those people who will do new forms of ***work*** to develop scenarios in which their function is going to ***change***. What can the team do more of? What do they need to learn? What can they allow the machines or robots to do? These are some of the questions whose answers can help people be prepared to face rapidly ***changing*** scenarios.

An active engagement with the ***changes***, developing plans of action, engaging in reskilling, and supporting the team to reskill are some of the ways in which ***leaders*** can take charge. ***Leaders*** may not have the answers to all problems, but need the skill to help the group to maintain focus on the problems that need urgent attention.

Such problems cause discomfort and require focussed engagement. The advent of IR 4.0/5.0 and AI is one such problem. The skills of the ***leader*** to absorb the anxiety of the team, keep stress under control, and allow conflicts to emerge are most relevant in the adoption of ***changes*** brought on by technology. Only when people direct their attention to what is happening around them can they start to address it. The ***leaders*** need to keep the issue of ***adapting*** and surviving the ***changes*** on the frontburner, no matter how many other fires need to be doused.

Research conducted in Brazil has shown that more than business skills, ***leaders*** of industry will need the art of negotiation and persuasion to navigate IR 4.0 or 5.0. ***Leaders*** should be able to negotiate with their teams and other stakeholders to experiment with new ideas for the possibility of making their ***work*** easier and more meaningful. They also need to be perceived to be sincerely ***working*** on behalf of the team and the organisation, rather than acting as a puppet on behalf of unknown and invisible powers.

The ability to think at the whole system level and manage the interdependencies, proactively communicate, and engage in ***work*** crafting, negotiation and persuasion are the most important skills for ***leaders*** to face the challenges posed by the horizontal, vertical and cross-integration of machines, humans, and data in a ***changing*** world.

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