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Competencies for a new world – article for NZ Herald – Jan 2012

The nature of work will have changed forever within the next 10 years according to many researchers and commentators. Our world is changing dramatically as aging and expanding (and contracting) populations and consumerism put major stresses on our ecosystems. The current system of economics with growth as its aim is at threat, and money, which has become central to survival, may soon be in question as the key driver of change.

Big global challenges that call for a whole new way of thinking about what work is and why we do it are here. How to manage life itself in ways that are restorative and more meaningful will become an important question when constant and rapid change becomes the new 'normal'.

By the time this article is published I will have read Sir Richard Branson's book "Screw Business as Usual". I'm looking forward to discovering his views on turning business as we know it upside down to address the issues we are facing. Branson terms this new approach to economics as "Capitalism 24902", in that "every single business person has the responsibility for taking care of the people and the planet that make up our global village, all 24902 circumferential miles of it."

Excerpts from Branson's book suggest that such transformative change, implies that 'work' will not be the same as we know it by 2020. In fact, the Future of Work Foundation (based in Australia) proposes that we may be forced to re-configure work to be a "desirable activity in its own right". They believe that a shift in the way we use and value money and address the increasingly critical needs of our planet will have to happen.

Future Work Skills 2020, a paper published by the Institute for the Future for the University of Phoenix Research Institute (2010) reckons there are six drivers of change. These are, *extreme longevity* (people are living longer); the *rise of smart machines and systems* (taking away repetitive tasks); *a computerised world* (new communication tools); *super-structured organisations* (social technologies and new forms of value creation); and *a globally connected world* (placing flexibility and diversity central to operations).

Here in New Zealand we have a revolution happening in the business, creative, social and environmental sectors; entrepreneurs who are driven by values more than money. They are engaging in new ways of working, using technology and more flexible and collaborative practices. Co-working hubs are sprouting up all over the place where entrepreneurs are clustering to collaborate and share resources and knowledge.

Corporates are promoting collaborative multi-disciplinary teams, and service industries are sharing systems of knowledge and expertise involving multi-disciplined practices to offer integrated services.

The old structures of siloed, hierarchical organisations are almost gone; we have leaner, more agile businesses that through technological advances are reducing their need for bricks and mortar. Employees want flexibility and now, with remote access, can work from anywhere. People want more autonomy, more variety and greater lifestyle balance.

Collaborative enterprises offer people lifestyle choices and connection with like-minded people. An example of such collaboration is the Enspiral group of entrepreneurs <http://www.enspiral.com/>. Enspiral is a collaboration of highly talented and multi-disciplined people who work on their own projects within an agreed framework of trust, clear values and business support. Their talented entrepreneurs (41 people, in 12 cities, in 6 countries) operate web design and e-commerce projects; have practices in law and engineering involving product prototyping and production co-ordination.

At Enspiral they “work for love – not just money”. In this group, Sir Paul Callahan’s dream of “New Zealand being a place where talent wants to live” is manifest. Contributors are essentially their own business managers who set their own work timeframes and pay. The collective has vast networks and supports contributors by linking them with the “world class” talent they need who are also committed to working purposefully. Their point of difference: “Changing the world is Enspiral’s passion”.

Sam Rye, one of Enspiral’s entrepreneurs, believes that “extrinsic inducements such as money are in fact, de-motivating for anything beyond the most simplistic of tasks. Whereas when intrinsic values are nurtured through autonomy, mastery & purpose – motivation skyrockets”.

Our collective motivations are changing. I believe that purposeful working activities involving collaboration, entrepreneurship and making a difference will be key motivators underpinning our work activities into the future.

The potential for the creation of new opportunities for people to get involved with is huge. Evident already is a phenomenal interest and growth in green jobs sprouting many new businesses. Local initiatives in sustainable communities and horticulture, aging support, health and well-being will become more and more evident.

Academia and research institutes are bringing science and business together too, nurturing new startups that bring huge potential to solving real-life problems in new and better ways. Services in health, education and community development are finding better ways to build greater levels of collaboration in order to more effectively address the need to do more, with less.

Many of the standard careers such as in medicine, law, education, business, community services etc. will remain, however the rate of change and the greater need for restoring communities and the environment with less, will require somewhat different competencies. These are:

Social Intelligence

The ability to work collaboratively, respond and communicate with understanding and engage constructively with a wide audience through social media. With high levels of transparency in our interconnected world we need to manage our personal brand with integrity.

Embracing diversity

People will work longer in order to afford a retirement. Migration patterns will increase to fill resourcing gaps. It is predicted that only 36% of Auckland’s population will be European by 2050. Valuing what diversity brings will be essential.

Critical thinking and knowledge management

Constant new problems to solve in ways that are different to how they have been solved before will require strong skills in abstract reasoning and innovative thinking. Free access to information will present a greater need to be discerning about what is truth and right for the world we live in.

Ethical entrepreneurship

Populations are becoming more discerning. Businesses without an ethical foundation are being exposed. With transparency and the need for greater corporate responsibility, business and personal accountability will become a major driver.

Self-management and composure

Mindfulness and composure in the midst of chaos are skills we will want to develop. Personal wellbeing, connecting with others and nature, and valuing time away from technology to remain grounded, will help us to mitigate burnout and build resilience.

When the likes of Richard Branson offer an optimistic vision for the future we need to pay attention. There may be difficult times ahead but there will be increased opportunities to make a difference and create new ways of doing things too.

If the money system implodes there will be no choice but to learn the value of consuming less. People are already, demanding accountability and answers to the 'real' issues, and will want to be involved in the changes. There will be plenty of good work to be done.

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