

The Human Aspects of the Future of Work

Sarah Krasker, July 2019

Executive summary

Although no one knows what the future of work will bring, two things are certain; first, that it will be different from anything we have known before, and second, that humans are heavily invested in finding ways to ensure that there will be a human aspect to it.

Three factors are generally considered to be key both in shaping the future of work and in helping us prepare ourselves to contribute to it: the speed of change, advances in technology and the growing size of the alternative workforce. Learning ability and emotional intelligence have been identified as essential skills for humans to develop and master in order to maintain their ability to add value in the workplace.

If we are to develop these skills to the necessary level of competence, we need to redefine what learning is and what conditions are necessary to allow it to happen. Whether this is driven by organisations or individuals, it will not happen without a change in attitudes towards learning and a subsequent shift in priorities to put learning on an equal level of importance with productivity. We also need to look for new and effective ways of developing emotional intelligence, particularly the skills relating to the domains of self-awareness, self-management and empathy. Equine-assisted learning, a relatively new discipline in which exercises with horses are used to generate data and insights, offers a potentially impactful way of developing these skills.

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution gets underway, work is an integral part of most people's lives – inextricably linked not only with our ability to earn a living, but also in many cases with our very identity. The looming fear that robots, machinery and artificial intelligence will make humans redundant in the workplace has, not surprisingly perhaps, given rise to a huge volume of research, statistics, predictions and opinions on the subject of 'the human aspect of the future of work'.

While the experts (and non-experts) may have differing views about what the workplace will look like in 10, 20 or 30 years' time, one thing they all agree on is that it is changing, and changing both fast and dramatically. However, given the human propensity for innovating, inventing, creating and adapting, the general consensus is that there is a strong probability that there will be a role for humans in the workplaces of the future – just not necessarily the role, or any of the roles, that we recognize today.

If we accept that there is a human aspect to the future of work, and that the human contribution to the workplace of the future will be different from what it is today, an important question that arises is 'how can humans prepare themselves to thrive at work in the future?' – especially when it is so hard to predict or even imagine what that future will look like. This paper will explore two important changes we need to make and how we might set about making them in order to continue to work effectively into an uncertain immediate future and beyond.

The research

The following sources of information were used in research for this paper:

- Questionnaires, individual personal interviews and related discussions with upwards of 30 individuals from a variety of professional backgrounds, including multi-nationals, start-ups and NGOs; and ranging in age from mid-teens to mid-60s;
- Published reports, studies, insight papers and additional literature;
- My own observations from delivering traditional classroom-based learning programmes and workshops over the last fifteen years;
- My own observations from delivering equine-assisted learning workshops with individuals and small groups over the last six years.

What does the 'future of work' look like?

Looking at data both from big global studies and personal interviews with individuals from multinationals, start-ups and NGOs, one major factor influencing how we predict and prepare for the future of work is **the speed of change**. Change in itself may be nothing new, but today we are experiencing change at a pace which is faster than ever before. This brings with it a sense of fluidity, with things no longer being defined as they once were – a feeling that we are no longer on solid ground but on "moving sand", as one interviewee¹ put it. There has been a shift from certainty to uncertainty as the day-to-day 'normal', with stability in the workplace being the exception rather than the rule.

There are other key factors which will have an impact on the future of work, including demographics, the global economy and the environment. However, perhaps the most influential

¹ VP HR in a large multinational FMCG company, currently based in Switzerland.

of all is **technology** and its potential ability to take over many of the jobs that humans still carry out today. Scientists and researchers are moving in leaps and bounds to come up with assisted, augmented, automated and autonomous intelligence tools and systems², all or any of which may end up in the workplace of the future and which will inevitably affect the type of work that humans will need – or be allowed – to do.

Another trend identified across different studies is that of the growing importance of the so-called **alternative workforce** (although to quote the Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2019³ report, “It’s now mainstream”). The traditional relationship between employer and employee is increasingly blurred, with organisations looking outside to fill specialised or short-term needs and workers no longer expecting or wanting a linear career path, much less one that is restricted to one or two organisations. Since 2000, there has been huge growth in the number of full and part-time freelance or independent workers, while on the other hand 67% of organisations with more than 250 employees are having trouble filling open positions.⁴

While the exact picture of the future workplace is unclear, the consensus of opinion is that everything about organisations as we know them today – the size, number, purpose, structure, physical makeup – as well as the kind of work and the jobs that exist within and outside them, will be different tomorrow from how it is today. And more importantly, that whatever the workplace of the future looks like, there will be a role for humans in it.

“The technological or robotized workforce [will be the biggest impact on the way we work] but the human work will always be a unique and determining factor in any organization.”

Engineering & Construction sector worker (37), USA

Quote taken from PwC report Workforce of the Future: the competing forces shaping 2030⁵

² Briefing: Artificial Intelligence

³ Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2019 (Deloitte Insights report)

⁴ idem

⁵ Workforce of the Future: The competing forces shaping 2030 (www.pwc.com/people)

What will humans contribute to the future of work?

Across the studies and interviews there was a range of different ideas regarding the roles that humans will play and the attitudes, knowledge and skills that will be of value in the workplace of the future. However, two key sets of skills were mentioned in all the studies, and came up in one form or another in all the individual personal interviews as well as in many of the general discussions: **learning ability** and **emotional intelligence**.

Learning ability

All of the studies and insight papers used in research for this paper put learning ability high on the list of necessary skills for the future of work. In the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs 2018 report⁶, active learning and learning strategies was number two in the top ten trending skills for 2022. The Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2019⁷ report states that “86% of respondents believe they must reinvent their ability to learn.” In the individual personal interviews, not everyone mentioned learning ability specifically, but all of them talked about different aspects of learning – adaptability, flexibility, the importance of keeping up to date with new knowledge and skills, and openness to other cultures and ideas – as key skills for the future of work.

A related common theme across the studies is the need for individuals to manage and drive their own learning. Even if organisations recognise and address the need to support lifelong learning in new ways in the future, workers who choose to remain independent will still have to constantly re-skill and up-skill themselves without necessarily being able to access that support. As stated in the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs 2018⁸ report, “For workers, there is an unquestionable need to take personal responsibility for one’s own lifelong learning and career development.”

The importance given to learning as an essential skill for the future is not surprising, given that the speed of change in the world today was deemed to be one of the most significant factors affecting the future of work. In order to keep up with technological advances, apply new knowledge and manage the new ways of working required by a constantly shifting environment, workers will need to be both comfortable with, and adept at, learning new skills and behaviours, and with doing so on a regular basis.

“As individuals – actual human beings – what do we need to do to thrive and prosper in whatever the new world brings? The secret for a bright future seems to me to lie in flexibility and in the ability to reinvent yourself.”

Carol Stubbings, Global Leader, People and Organisation, PwC

Quote taken from PwC report Workforce of the Future: the competing forces shaping 2030⁹

⁶ The Future of Jobs Report 2018 (World Economic Forum Insight Report)

⁷ Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2019 (Deloitte Insights report)

⁸ The Future of Jobs Report 2018 (World Economic Forum Insight Report)

⁹ Workforce of the Future: the competing forces shaping 2030 (www.pwc.com/people)

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) as a key skill for the future is also mentioned directly in the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs 2018¹⁰ report – number eight out of ten on the list of trending skills for 2022. Furthermore, skills that come under the EI umbrella, such as collaboration, empathy and the ability to motivate and inspire, were all mentioned in different studies, research and insight papers as skills that will be essential in the future. Emotional intelligence and in particular empathy also came up in the individual personal interviews, with 2/3 of the interviewees mentioning one or the other. Others talked about different aspects of EI, such as self-confidence, integrity, and the ability to bond with and inspire others. Communication skills were also widely mentioned by interviewees, but when questioned further they talked about honesty, trust, the ability to understand others and the ability to adapt the style and content of messages to individuals – all of which are aspects of emotional intelligence.

The 18 EI Competencies in 4 Domains	
SELF-AWARENESS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional self-awareness• Accurate self-assessment• Self-confidence	SOCIAL AWARENESS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empathy• Organizational awareness• Service orientation
SELF-MANAGEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional self-control• Transparency• Adaptability• Achievement• Initiative• Optimism	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing others• Inspirational leadership• Influence• Change catalyst• Conflict management• Teamwork and collaboration

Source: Goleman D, Boyatzis RE, McKee A. *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*. Harvard Business Press; 2004
NEJM Catalyst (catalyst.nejm.org) © Massachusetts Medical Society

Table shown on catalyst.nejm.org website, source Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence¹¹

The consensus on the importance of EI for the future of work is not surprising. As technology is increasingly able to replace humanity in certain areas, it is likely to be human skills which are currently too difficult or complex to replicate with artificial intelligence¹² - like those linked with EI – that will determine the value of our individual human contribution to the world of work in the short-term future. Furthermore, with the rise of the alternative workforce and the corresponding need for those within organisations to work with those outside, skills which appear in the domain of relationship management, such as the ability to build relationships and collaborative networks outside the framework of a mutually accepted hierarchy of authority, will also become more important.

¹⁰ The Future of Jobs Report 2018 (World Economic Forum Insight Report)

¹¹ Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence Goleman D., Boyatzis R.E., McKee A., Harvard Business Press 2004

¹² 7 Job Skills of the Future that AI and Robots Can't Do Better than Humans Bernard Marr, 6 August 2018, www.forbes.com

Preparing for the future of work

Learning to learn

Learning involves change – change in behaviour as we apply new skills or make use of new knowledge, and also physical changes in the brain as new neural connections and networks are created. Only when the physical changes in the brain become established does the new behaviour become automatic, and we feel that we ‘know’ something, or ‘know’ how to do it.¹³

This learning process, the storing of new data as a long-term memory which can be accessed without conscious thought, takes both time and effort. It takes months for an infant to learn how to talk, or for an adult to become completely fluent in a new language. In both cases, it also takes sustained effort in the face of challenge and often frustration.

How learning happens

Research into how the brain works has identified certain processes which occur when we learn naturally. To start with, we tend to learn what we pay attention to – limited levels of cortisol, a hormone often associated with stress but also secreted when we are stimulated or excited, help with memory formation by facilitating neural connectivity. Paying attention also means that we are not distracted when we receive the new data, so we are more likely to be able to retrieve it accurately and without distortion in the future.

The more we do with new data, the more the whole brain is involved in processing it, and therefore the bigger and more robust the neural network that will be created around it. A bigger neural network makes it easier to retrieve the data, because it can be accessed from different starting points or triggers. The more we work to make sense of new data, connect it to existing knowledge, challenge it and reflect on what it means to us personally, the more neural connections are made in the brain and the bigger the neural network built.

An essential part of the learning process is repeated practice and review. Physically, building the neural connections is like making a track across a grassy field – the first set of footsteps will vanish without a trace, and it is only after many repetitions that the grass will start to be worn down, leaving an established path. To reach a level of unconscious competence, we need to put in the effort of reviewing and practising regularly and over time. It also helps build the neural connections and networks when we review actively, by trying to recreate the new data rather than passively reading or listening to the original material. Studies have also shown that spaced review and practice for shorter periods – for example, an hour a week over several months – is most effective when it comes creating a robust neural network.

Main source: www.human-memory.net¹⁴

Have people lost the ability to learn?

Whatever they are learning or not learning at work, in their personal lives people continue to learn new things – they take up new sports and hobbies and become proficient at them, they move to different countries and learn to speak new languages fluently; they learn to parent, care for pets and collaborate with others as members of social groups. All these are skills, both hard and soft, that people are able to acquire more or less successfully, even when they involve

¹³ www.human-memory.net

¹⁴ idem

shifts in mind set and changes in attitude as well as the acquisition and application of new knowledge.

It seems, then, that people have not lost the ability to learn; but in the workplace perhaps we need to refocus and clarify what learning is, when and how we need to do it and how it is prioritised, if we are to reconnect with this skill in the context of the workplace.

One of the big shifts in learning and development at work over the last decade has been the introduction of micro-learning. Thanks to advances in technology and a proliferation of online content, employees are now able to access exactly the information they need to solve a problem or deal with an issue in the moment. In his 2018 article A new paradigm for corporate training: learning in the flow of work¹⁵, Josh Bersin describes micro-learning as a strategy for “I need help now”, while macro-learning is for when “I want to learn something new”. The term ‘micro-learning’ has become a buzzword in learning and development, and micro-learning solutions are being touted as the latest, most efficient ways of training employees, to the detriment of more traditional macro-learning options.

Micro-Learning Is Born

Micro-Learning	Macro-Learning
<i>I need help now.</i>	<i>I want to learn something new.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 minutes or less • Topic or problem based • Search by asking a question • Video or text • Indexed and searchable • Content rated for quality and utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several hours or days • Definitions, concepts, principles, and practice • Exercises graded by others • People to talk with, learn from • Coaching and support needed
<i>Is the content useful and accurate?</i>	<i>Is the author authoritative and educational?</i>
<i>Videos, articles, code samples, tools</i>	<i>Courses, classes, MOOCs, programs</i>

Josh Bersin A New Paradigm for Corporate Training: Learning in the Flow of Work¹⁶

Micro-learning involves almost no effort – it achieves the result without the need for reflection, review or even repetition if the problem is an one-off occurrence - and usually very little time. Today, and it looks to be increasingly the case in the future, micro-learning is an excellent solution to plug gaps in technical skills and knowledge, especially in jobs, organisations or industries where the rate of change is so fast that there is literally no time or need for macro-learning – where the time it would take to learn how to use a tool or system is longer than the shelf-life of the tool or system itself.

¹⁵ A new paradigm for corporate training: Learning in the flow of work Josh Bersin, published 3 June 2018, updated 8 July 2018 (joshbersin.com)

¹⁶ idem

“With cloud-connected mobile and wearable devices becoming almost omnipresent, and the introduction of augmented reality devices, organizations will be able to explore new approaches to virtual learning in which learning occurs in small doses, almost invisibly, throughout the workday

Quote taken from [Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2019](#)¹⁷

By contrast, macro-learning as described by Bersin involves the whole-brain process described in the *Learning to Learn* section above, and takes time and effort on the part of the learner. In order to learn, re-learn or develop soft skills, macro-learning would definitely be required if learners are expected to reach levels of unconscious competence.

But macro-learning – learning new things – has benefits over and above the skills or knowledge learned. There is evidence that learning in general – regardless of the topic – can increase the brain’s capacity for innovative thinking¹⁸. Innovation involves solving problems by looking at things in a different way, and the wider the data banks within the brain, the more resources it has to draw on to find new patterns and perspectives. Not for nothing do companies renowned for innovation, such as Google¹⁹ and Pixar²⁰, encourage their employees to learn and teach everything from baking to meditation as well as knowledge and skills directly related to their daily jobs.

One important requirement for macro-learning is adequate time and opportunity, not just to receive new data, but also to interpret it, reflect on it, challenge and discuss it with others. Once the learner has made sense of it, the new data and new concepts formed around it are used to plan new behavioural strategies, which then need to be practised. A common criticism of traditional classroom courses is that there is no ‘application of learning’ back on the job, so the two or three days spent out of the office ‘learning’ are a waste of time. This has been described as a lack of follow up to learning, whereas in fact learning has never been allowed to happen because some of the activities essential to strengthening and reinforcing the new neural connections (reflecting, challenging, practising) have not taken place. Once the employee is back at work, she or he is expected to revert to dedicating 100% of his or her time and effort to being productive, with no provision for time and opportunity to effectively complete the learning process.

While the delivery of high-quality, free or low-cost content is now here, what persists is the impression that most employees are so snowed under with business as usual that learning and development is forced to become an extra-curricular activity rather than a core part of one's work.

So long as that continues, it's hard to imagine the conflict between short-term, business as usual, and long-term learning for tomorrow being resolved. While employees might be able to pick up byte-sized chunks of knowledge around easily absorbed topics, knowledge requiring more involved study will continue to be frozen out, very much to the detriment of both employee and employer alike.

Adi Gaskell [Do we need to set aside time for learning at work?](#)²¹

¹⁷ [Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2019](#) (Deloitte Insights report)

¹⁸ [Inside the Learning Brain](#) Nick Dam, TD magazine (www.td.org/td-magazine)

¹⁹ [How Googlers Avoid Burnout \(and Secretly Boost Creativity\)](#) Brad Stulberg & Steve Magners, 6 November 2017, www.wired.com

²⁰ [The Culture Code: the secrets of highly successful groups](#) Coyle, D. RH Business Books 2018

²¹ [Do we need to set aside time for learning at work?](#) Adi Gaskell, 20 July 2017, www.forbes.com

How can we put learning back on the agenda?

The idea that organisations should give a higher priority to learning is nothing new. According to Arie de Geus, a former head of planning at Royal Dutch Shell, writing in a 1988 article called Planning as Learning for the Harvard Business Review, 'The ability to learn faster than competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage.'²²

But in spite of the recognised positive benefit of learning to the health and longevity of organisations back in the 1980s, it is still the exception rather than the rule to find an organisation that truly embraces learning and acknowledges the time employees need to learn. In 2010, in a book called Be Excellent at Anything: the four keys to transforming the way we work and live, author Tony Schwartz wrote: "There are now 'chief learning officers' in many large companies, but time allotted to employees for their development typically remains scarce....it's difficult to convince most leaders that meaningful change is possible only if they're willing to give their people the time to reflect on, discuss and metabolise new ideas and to experiment with new practices."²³

In 2017, an article in the McKinsey quarterly entitled Putting lifelong learning on the CEO agenda states: "If you are anything like most corporate leaders we know, you say (and mean) the right things when it comes to learning, such as "Our people are our most valuable asset, and their development is a top priority." But if you are honest with yourself, you also know that your actions often emphasize financial over human capital, and you may leave it to individuals to find the learning opportunities they need."²⁴

Not only do researchers and thought leaders understand the importance of learning time, but the example set by business and world leaders reinforces the message. Those at the top take time out of busy schedules to read and reflect on a multitude of subjects, not necessarily related to their professional field – according to a CNBC interview, Bill Gates' five favourite books of 2018 included one about meditation and mindfulness, as well as Yuval Noah Harari's 21 lessons for the 21st century.²⁵

Former President Obama perfectly explains why he was so committed to reading during his Presidency in a recent [New York Times interview](#): "At a time when events move so quickly and so much information is transmitted," he said, reading gave him the ability to occasionally "slow down and get perspective" and "the ability to get in somebody else's shoes." These two things, he added, "have been invaluable to me. Whether they've made me a better president I can't say. But what I can say is that they have allowed me to sort of maintain my balance during the course of eight years, because this is a place that comes at you hard and fast and doesn't let up."

The New York Times Obama's Secret to Surviving the White House: Books²⁶

If top-down change in attitudes towards learning is not happening, perhaps we need a bottom-up 'revolution of learning', with individuals following the exhortation of the World Economic Forum to '...take personal responsibility for (their) own lifelong learning'.²⁷ What if people were

²² Quoted in Arie de Geus: the Thought Leader Interview Randall Rothenberg, Thought Leaders 2nd Quarter 2001 Issue 23

²³ Be Excellent at Anything: The four keys to transforming the way we work and live Schwartz, T., Free Press 2010

²⁴ Putting Lifelong Learning on the CEO Agenda Amy Edmondson & Bror Saxberg, McKinsey Quarterly, September 2017

²⁵ Bill Gates says these are the 5 best books he read in 2019 Kathleen Elkins 3 December 2018 (cnbc.com)

²⁶ Obama's Secret to Surviving the White House: Books Doug Mills, 16 January 2017, The New York Times

²⁷ The Future of Jobs Report 2018 (World Economic Forum Insights Report)

to commit at a personal level to learning something new, take the time necessary to learn it, and proudly proclaim their achievement to current and future employers? Maybe we all need to give ourselves permission to learn, instead of asking for it, and seek forgiveness afterwards while demonstrating the benefits of our learning. If continued lack of organisational support means people choose to take those benefits out of the organisation and into the alternative workforce, maybe organisations will finally wake up to the need to rethink the role and status of learning at work.

“I adored this lunch and learn. It made me remember that when I was a child, I loved to learn, and draw and now I understand why.”

“This really made me think about giving myself time and space to really think and learn differently.”

“I am going to start taking breaks and giving myself space to learn.”

“This gave me permission to learn.”

“I loved having this time to really just leave work behind and think about something completely else.”

Feedback from participants of an interactive ‘Lunch & Learn’ session called ‘Learning to Innovate’, exploring the similarities between innovation and learning from the perspective of what happens in the brain.

Feedback from a ‘lunch & learn’ session entitled ‘Learning to Innovate’, delivered in July 2019 in the EMEA head office of a multinational FMCG organisation

Emotional Intelligence

Today, emotional intelligence (EI) is widely acknowledged to be a differentiator of performance in many areas, both personal and professional.²⁸ A lot of soft skills development addresses the domain of relationship management, targeting teamwork, collaboration and conflict management – not to mention leadership, the development of which is a billion dollar industry in itself. However, it is more difficult to find effective ways of developing things like emotional self-awareness, self-confidence, emotional self-control or empathy without shifting emphasis from the professional to the personal.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the advantages of using equine-assisted learning (experiential learning using exercises with horses as a reference point) to provide opportunities for development across all four domains of EI while still staying within a professional context.

²⁸ Primal Leadership: realizing the power of emotional intelligence Goleman D., Boyatzis R.E. and McKee, A., Harvard Business Press 2004

What is equine-assisted learning?

Equine-assisted learning is a form of experiential learning in which groundwork exercises with horses are used as the basis for soft skills development.

Participants are invited to carry out exercises with horses either individually, in pairs or as a group; the facilitator uses questions to raise awareness of how changes in their own inner state instantly cause changes in the behaviour of the horses. Follow up discussions are held to debrief the experiences and make the connection with what happens in the work place so that learning from the exercises can be applied to the participants' professional context.

Horses are well-suited to this type of activity because they have a highly-developed instinct for picking up and reacting to sensory cues provided by the emotions, energy and confidence of those around them. They can therefore provide immediate, agenda-free feedback on participants' underlying inner state and how it impacts and influences others, which is difficult to get from other development methods.

Advantages of using equine-assisted learning to develop the four domains of EI

1. Opportunity for real practice.

The main challenge of developing EI-related skills through formal, structured training is being able to practice. As described in the *Learning to learn* section above, making the physical changes in the brain that result in unconscious competence at a new skill or behaviour depends on repeated guided practice. But, to take an example, how do you 'practise' trusting others? Answer: by trusting a horse first, which is easier to do because in the safe environment of the practise arena there are no catastrophic emotional, professional or physical consequences if the horse proves itself unworthy of your trust.

2. Opportunity to practise feeling as well as thinking.

In our daily lives we tend to be very cerebral, especially at work; many of us have been conditioned into valuing the logical-rational over the emotional. However, research indicates that 'gut feeling' is a real phenomenon which we should take into account when it comes to decision-making. Equine-assisted learning takes verbal communication out of the equation, and forces us to pay attention to what our bodies and senses are telling us and communicating to others.

"I was able to recognize that I have the potential to adapt my leadership style according to the different situations and environment. To do so, I had to open my senses and mind to analyse the situations I was involved and the goals I wanted to achieve. Without losing the focus, I was able to trigger a change in attitude and behaviour to naturally synchronize with my environment and get the tasks done.

Clearly, emotions and common experiences are powerful elements that will help me connect with the people I'm surrounded by. Printing some drops of these ingredients into my presentations will allow me to engage and connect with the audience. During the sessions I identified that I have the ability to do so. My challenge moving forward is to find opportunities to practice presentations where I can master the amount of emotion I should bring to the table to connect with people while maintaining the engagement throughout the presentations without losing focus."

Feedback from participant on a course using equine-assisted learning to develop empathy, focus and passion

3. Opportunity to receive immediate, agenda-free feedback.

Feedback from a horse is instant and very visible. Horses have no hidden political agenda, so they respond primarily to behaviour and physical signals – body language, pheromones, heart rate, skin temperature – which are affected by things like emotions, confidence and focus. If the signals change, the horse will respond differently, unlike humans who often persist in responding to a first impression of someone even when whatever triggered that impression has changed or disappeared. Because horses have no hidden agenda, it forces the learner to take responsibility for what is happening – nine times out of ten the horse's behaviour will be a direct response to the person who is directly working with it (on the tenth occasion it is likely to be something external like a sudden loud noise). By contrast, another person can always be perceived to have a hidden agenda, so if their feedback about us contradicts our own view of ourselves, it is much easier to dismiss it by attributing it to that person's agenda.

4. Lots of useful data generated in a short time.

An exercise of 10 – 20 minutes with a horse provides a lot of information about the learner's behaviour in a certain situation. No matter how typical the learner feels this behaviour is or is not (of how he or she might behave in a meeting, say), it is authentic – this is how the person is actually behaving with the horse, not what she or he is being asked to demonstrate (as for example in a role play), or wants to show (as might be the case if a coach observes a manager in a real business situation). The reactions of the horse are also authentic, as opposed again to a role play or even a real business situation where the presence of the observing coach might cause others in the room to behave differently towards the person being coached.

“Leading the horse and making the horse follow me around the arena in a span of 20 minutes reveals several characteristics that could describe how my leadership style could be affected in a VUCA environment where there is little or no preparation - I confuse my team because I am unable to provide clear directions and my words and body language are inconsistent with each other. When I was given the rope, which for me symbolizes an anchor, a compass, a tool to focus my energy, I became the opposite - I became certain and acted with conviction - my buddy heard me say "No, I am sure" which was the point when I fought the resistance of the horse, that according to the coach, was a sign that the horse was challenging me and therefore I needed to show that I am the leader - and I gave clear directions and was consistent in my words and my body language as a leader. As horses act based on what they perceive and receive from the person making them follow, it is a self-revelatory exercise that will help leaders work on their self-awareness, self-management, empathy, building rapport and mutual trust, ability to communicate clearly and congruently and being and dancing in the moment.”

Feedback from participant on a course using equine-assisted learning to develop leading and team-working skills

5. Opportunity to self-correct and try again

Because the horse is responding to the behaviour and not the person, as described in point 3 above, each time the learner changes something and tries again the new behaviour will elicit an authentic response from the horse. A horse will never give the 'right' answer to the 'wrong' behaviour in order to get to lunch quicker, or because it doesn't want to make the learner feel bad. This makes it much easier for the learner to assess the impact of even very small changes in him or herself on others, knowing that whatever the horse does, it is responding authentically each time.

6. Provides a relevant context for professional development

In equine-assisted learning exercises learners can be asked to do things they would normally be expected to do at work – build trust relationships with others, set objectives, communicate congruently and explicitly, collaborate in order to execute tasks and achieve objectives – in an unfamiliar environment and without recourse to a common language or set of social norms. This pushes them out of their comfort zone, but offers a safe environment with no serious professional consequences for perceived failure. Coaching during the exercises and in follow-up sessions helps learners to reflect, interpret and eventually apply what they have learned to their behaviour in the workplace.

“What I really liked about this workshop it was how in a completely different environment from the work place I was doing the same mistakes I do at work and make them conscious so I can fix them. Saying this I would definitely recommend the workshop to other people.”

Feedback from participant on a course using equine-assisted learning to develop empathy, focus and passion

In spite of the potential benefits of equine-assisted learning, it is still rarely considered by either organisations or individuals as a method of developing emotional intelligence or related soft skills. This is partly because it is still largely unknown – it is a relatively new field of study and practice, and often confused with equine-assisted therapy (a form of treatment for a range of mental and physical health issues). As yet, it lacks a significant body of research which objectively evaluates the impact on behaviour, so the vital question of whether or not equine-assisted learning achieves results is still answered mainly subjectively and largely based on anecdotal evidence.

So far, there is no difference between equine-assisted learning and any other new development method. Looking back to the 1980s, executive coaching was in a very similar position – a new, relatively unheard of, unproven professional discipline, lacking reputable qualifying bodies and standardisation. Today, coaching is widely accepted as a valid development method²⁹, but it has taken several decades to reach this level of respectability.

However, in contrast to other methods, equine-assisted learning is perceived as both costly and logistically complicated, which may be a deterrent for those who would otherwise be tempted to try it.

To some extent this is true. Equine-assisted learning may be slightly more expensive than for example a facilitator-led workshop or training, because as well as the facilitator there are the costs of the horses, the horse-handlers and the facilities. It inevitably involves some travel to the facilities – this is one activity that really cannot be run in the office, no matter how well equipped the training rooms are. It is also weather-dependent, as in most climates there will be seasons or times of the year when being outdoors is not an option, and even if the venue has a covered or indoor arena, it is unlikely to be heated (air-conditioned possibly, in some parts of the world at least). Finally, there are physical issues to consider, such as participants being allergic to horses, having an extreme fear or phobia of horses, or having a physical condition that would make working on an unstable surface (usually sand) difficult or impossible.

Equine-assisted learning is slowly becoming more widely known, as business schools and organisations start to include equine-assisted learning in selected programmes. At the same time, research studies are being carried out to evaluate the results of equine-assisted learning.

²⁹ 2016 Global Coaching Study commissioned by the International Coaching Federation (coachfederation.org)

From the logistics point of view, there are a growing number of associations training, certifying and supporting equine-assisted learning facilitators around the world³⁰; and with a global horse population estimated at around 60 million animals³¹, there is no shortage of potential venues, either. The cost of using the facilities, horses and support staff at an equestrian centre is usually within the same range as renting conference facilities at a hotel – that is to say, it varies according to the level of luxury required.

As far as the physical deterrents (allergies, phobias or limiting physical conditions) are concerned, there are safe and workable solutions for all of these if the willingness to attend a session is there. I have personally had participants in equine-assisted learning sessions with allergies, a genuine phobia of horses, and a physical condition that required the participant to use a walking frame. With a little creativity (and the loan of a couple of Shetlands – a breed of pony which is a little bigger than a large dog – in the case of the person with the phobia) all of them were able to participate to a greater or lesser extent in the exercises, and contribute to the debrief discussions with the rest of the group.

Allergy + EAL – some examples of how to manage it

- 1. One member of the management team of a small NGO is severely allergic to horses, but decided she still wanted to participate in a team retreat involving equine-assisted learning exercises. She made sure to bring her medication, and also took the precaution of bringing a fresh set of clothes to the workshop with her. Once the exercises with the horses were finished, she showered (having checked beforehand that there were facilities available), changed clothes, and at the end of the day gave her horse-contaminated clothes to a colleague to take home for her, as she knew that having the clothes in the car with her on the 45' drive home would have triggered her symptoms. A lot of effort, perhaps, but for this participant it was worth it to share the experience with her team!*
- 2. A participant on a leadership programme of which one module included equine-assisted learning exercises chose to observe from a distance (in this case, a gallery above the arena where the exercises were being carried out). She was able to contribute to the debrief discussions, and felt that she had some actionable takeaways from the session even though she was unable to do the exercises herself.*
- 3. Another participant on the same leadership programme described in example 2 is severely allergic to horses. Following discussion with the facilitator, she consulted with her doctor to assess the risks, and on his advice remained in the training centre during the equine-assisted learning module, not even venturing to the stables. Because the situation was addressed in advance, the programme organisers were able to offer her an alternative activity. They also made sure she was integrated into the follow-up discussions later in the week that built on the takeaways from the equine-assisted learning session.*

The only thing needed to try equine-assisted learning is a development need involving EI, a facilitator, and an open mind – everything else can be managed. If the outcome of a first session is positive, it may open the door to a potentially enriching development tool for a wider population; if not, there are lots of other tools and methods out there.

In the race to maintain the advantage over artificial intelligence when it comes to emotional intelligence, a powerful ally could be an invaluable aid. Humans and horses have a working relationship that goes back thousands of years – horses helped mankind make huge advances

³⁰ For example, EAHA (www.eahae.org), EAGALA (www.eagala.org)

³¹ Info-graph: Global Horse Populations www.horsenation.com

in transport, warfare and agriculture, only to be supplanted by machinery as the first Industrial Revolution got underway. Now we are entering the fourth Industrial Revolution, perhaps the moment has come to rekindle that relationship if we are to avoid being supplanted ourselves.

Gen Z and the future of work

“It’s impossible. You can’t take today’s managers and make them ready for a new world..... You would have to break them completely and rebuild something new, which is not a good option.”

Quote from individual personal interview³²

While the above may be an overly pessimistic view of affairs, it does serve as a reminder that as well as re-skilling or up-skilling those who are already established in the workforce today, we also need to consider how to help the next generation – those who have yet to enter the workforce – build the necessary skills to contribute and thrive.

Overall, expert research and answers from individuals interviewed agree that Generation Z will require an important investment in time – their own, but also that of those around them – in order to develop. This is partly due to the changing nature of entry-level jobs as technology takes over more and more of the repetitive ‘grunt-work’ tasks that have traditionally been a large part of such jobs. Increasingly now, and even more so in the future, entry-level workers will be asked to do work which requires creativity, critical thinking and collaboration with others. Added to this is the acknowledged need to develop interpersonal skills in a generation that has grown up interacting via digital platforms in many situations which would previously have been face-to-face, therefore missing out on opportunities to hone these skills in childhood and adolescence.³³

Some of the ways suggested by experts and individual interviewees to develop Generation Z workers as they start their careers include giving them A-Z responsibility for selected projects, allowing them to take ownership and learn from mistakes, providing one-to-one mentoring or coaching opportunities, and a need for formal soft skills development programmes from entry-level (as opposed to later in a worker’s career, as tends to be the case today).

All of these options require not only a significant investment of time on the part of managers or other more senior employees, but also a changed attitude towards learning, to allow it to take place gradually, over a longer period, and incorporating discussion, challenge, reflection and opportunities for practice into the process. Those who are involved directly in developing new employees’ skills will also require emotional intelligence – certainly empathy, to understand the needs of the new generation, but also self-awareness and self-management in order to maintain their own equilibrium throughout the challenges and potential frustrations of the generation gap in the workplace.

It appears that, whether we are re-skilling or up-skilling today’s workforce, or preparing the next generation to become tomorrow’s, learning ability and emotional intelligence are key skills for everyone who wants to take his or her place in the future of work.

³² 32-yr. old co-founder and CEO of a Swiss group of hospitality companies.

³³ [Generation Z enters the workforce](#) Deloitte Insights article, 19 September 2017

Cited references

A new paradigm for corporate training: Learning in the flow of work Josh Bersin, published 3 June 2018, updated 8 July 2018 (joshbersin.com)

Arie de Geus: the Thought Leader Interview Randall Rothenberg, Thought Leaders 2nd Quarter 2001 Issue 23

Be Excellent at Anything: The four keys to transforming the way we work and live Schwartz, T., Free Press 2010

Bill Gates says these are the 5 best books he read in 2019 Kathleen Elkins 3 December 2018 (cnbc.com)

Briefing: Artificial Intelligence Chris Curran and Anand Rao, usblogs.pwc.com 22 January 2018

Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2019 (Deloitte Insights report)

Do we need to set aside time for learning at work? Adi Gaskell, 20 July 2017, www.forbes.com

EAHAE (www.eahae.org), EAGALA (www.eagala.org)

Generation Z enters the workforce Deloitte Insights article, 19 September 2017

How Googlers Avoid Burnout (and Secretly Boost Creativity) Brad Stulberg & Steve Magners, 6 November 2017, www.wired.com

Info-graph: Global Horse Populations www.horsenation.com

Inside the Learning Brain Nick Dam, TD magazine (www.td.org/td-magazine)

Obama's Secret to Surviving the White House: Books Doug Mills, 16 January 2017, The New York Times

Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence Goleman D., Boyatzis R.E., McKee A., Harvard Business Press 2002

Putting Lifelong Learning on the CEO Agenda Amy Edmondson & Bror Saxberg, McKinsey Quarterly, September 2017

Workforce of the Future: The competing forces shaping 2030 (www.pwc.com/people)

The Culture Code: the secrets of highly successful groups Coyle, D. RH Business Books 2018

The Future of Jobs Report 2018 (World Economic Forum Insight Report)

7 Job Skills of the Future that AI and Robots Can't Do Better than Humans Bernard Marr, 6 August 2018, www.forbes.com

2016 Global Coaching Study commissioned by the International Coaching Federation (coachfederation.org)

www.human-memory.net

Examples of research papers investigating the impact of equine-assisted learning on emotional intelligence

Equine Guided Leadership Education: Leveraging Somatic Intelligence in Learning Leadership Competencies Lissa Pohl

<https://www.e3assoc.org/resources/Documents/EGLE%20Paper%20-%20Leveraging%20Somatic%20Intelligence%20updated%202015.pdf>

The Effectiveness of Equine Guided Leadership Education to Develop Emotional Intelligence in Expert Nurses: A pilot research study led by Patricia Dyk

<https://www.e3assoc.org/resources/Documents/EGLE%20Research%20Pilot%20Report%20Final%205-20-13.pdf>

Horses for Courses: Exploring the Limits of Leadership Development through Equine-Assisted Learning Simon Kelly

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270701145_Horses_for_Courses_Exploring_the_Limits_of_Leadership_Development_Through_Equine-Assisted_Learning

The Effect of Equine-Assisted Learning programmes on perceived professional development outcomes Leigh Anne Pentecost

<https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2680&context=doctoral>

Additional background reading

<http://www.bteam.org/plan-b/new-ways-working-report/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/louisefron/2018/10/14/three-future-workplace-realities-you-must-be-prepared-for/#5efe1a86500e>

https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/mx/Documents/human-capital/The_digital_workplace.pdf

<https://hbr.org/2019/03/educating-the-next-generation-of-leaders>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2017/03/27/the-future-of-leadership-and-management-in-the-21st-century-organization/2/#18a6383d764e>

<https://trainingindustry.com/magazine/nov-dec-2018/trends-2019-adapting-the-training-function-to-the-complexity-of-todays-business-environment/>

<https://www.leadershiplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Emerging-Trends-in-Leadership-Development-in-2019-and-beyond-Stratx-2018.pdf>

<https://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2017/04/trends-in-leadership-and-leadership-development/>

https://hbr.org/2016/03/the-most-important-leadership-competencies-according-to-leaders-around-the-world?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=hbr

<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/essential-leadership-skills-for-tomorrow/>

<https://www.grantthornton.global/en/insights/articles/leadership-2030/>

<https://www.tsc.nsw.edu.au/tscnews/what-is-experiential-education-and-why-is-it-important>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303791686_Effects_of_Stress_on_Learning_and_Memory

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-analytics/our-insights/what-ai-can-and-cant-do-yet-for-your-business>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/why-humans-will-remain-central-to-the-future-of-work/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763485900168>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertadams/2017/01/10/10-powerful-examples-of-artificial-intelligence-in-use-today/#6e6dc39c420d>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/charlestowersclark/2019/01/28/making-ai-more-emotional-part-one/#1732a9775fc1>

<https://www.nominet.uk/digital-generation-gap-remains-wide-open-older-generations-fail-embrace-new-technology/>

<http://www.novaspivack.com/uncategorized/the-digital-generation-gap>

<https://www.digitalhrtech.com/aging-workforce-challenges/>

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-challenge-of-scaling-soft-skills/>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/how-to-separate-learning-myths-from-reality>

<https://www.peoplemattersglobal.com/news/global-perspective/challenges-faced-by-leaders-while-future-proofing-employees-19894>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/retraining-and-reskilling-workers-in-the-age-of-automation>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/what-is-the-future-of-work>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302350842_Experiential_Learning_Theory

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/HumanCapital/dttl-hc-english-opentalentecconomy.pdf>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/insights-intelai/2018/11/29/is-your-company-soft-enough/#30badf9c552e>

<https://issuu.com/educationsmediagroup/docs/uk-ld-report-issuu>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307167579_Teachers'_emotional_intelligence_The_impact_of_training

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316915882_How_Efficient_Are_Emotional_Intelligence_Trainings_A_Meta-Analysis

<http://www.gaaaccounting.com/hard-demand-for-soft-skills/>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298024170_Employing_improvisational_role_play_to_train_the limbic_system_to_enhance_emotionally_intelligent_awareness_and_behavior

<https://www.improvthis.com/improvthis-teamed-up-with-the-red-cross/>

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/what-is-a-horse-allergy-and-what-are-the-treatments-82713>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5809771/>

<https://www.trainingjournal.com/articles/feature/why-executive-coaching-back-vogue>

<https://www.amanet.org/assets/1/6/i4cp-coaching.pdf>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/deeppatel/2017/03/29/10-ways-to-prepare-for-gen-z-in-the-workplace/#331aca4d29ee>