

## EDITORIAL

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# Future skills at work: a perspective on critical skills

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Organizations need employees who are high achievers and have adaptive capacities. Employees want to experience work-related well-being and engage in meaningful tasks in their work roles while aiming for performance in their roles. The dynamics of organizational life, considering economic and societal challenges, has been influencing the perception of work performance. This means that the two classical dimensions — task (related to completing job tasks) vs. non task performance (or extra-role) (e.g., citizenship behaviors) — seem not so distinct anymore. Behaviors such as helping others or offering suggestions about new ways of working are not indeed perceived as “extra,” but as a significant part of the job role. Because the current work environment is quite complex and the working relationships are essential, skills related to leadership or working in teams are very relevant for organizations’ positions in a competitive market (Ritter, Small, Mortimer, & Doll, 2017). Therefore, more comprehensive ways of measuring performance are used, encompassing features focused on proficiency (at the individual, team and organizational level), and also adaptivity and proactivity at all three levels (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). This approach draws attention to the importance of measuring proficiency and how good individuals are in

performing individual tasks, and also analyzing employees’ performance regarding various organizational levels and actions that move beyond regular tasks. This is important because components like innovation, complex problem-solving and adaptiveness to new roles and organizational contexts are part of what are called the future work skills. So, where do employees learn this skills that are related to their well-being, adjustment to complexity and performance? Are organizations dealing enough with this learning process, along providing training for specific task-related skills? Should higher education, and not only, consider more seriously forming this skills as good and as early as possible? Future skills are considered essential for business, as various drivers of change or disruptive shifts — as presented by the Institute for the Future (IFTF, 2011) — can be game changers. Just to name a few, *the rise of smart machines and systems* (posing challenges for redefining work, replacing or augmenting human skills), *computational world* (high quantities of data that influence decisions and outcomes), *new media ecology* (virtual networks, several perspectives for events), *globally connected world* (service outsourcing and associated challenges) not just the way performance is defined, but how employees are prepared for performance

(IFTF, 2011). Such issues affect the roles within organizations, some positions being considered as stable (e.g., data analysts and scientists), others rather redundant (e.g., bookkeeping clerks), whereas others are newly formed (e.g., big data specialists) (World Economic Forum, 2018).

Moreover, other challenges are considered necessary for organizations, such as shorter and faster business cycles, talent-light corporations or Freemium business models (Kowry, Lazarova, & Talwar, 2016). In this context, organizations are making considerable efforts and adjustments to deal with the pressure of delivering in a shortened time, put efforts into retaining with a small number of crucial talented stable employees and use technologies or contracted parties for the non-essential work, and offering critical products without charging money and selling premium products with additional features.

The challenges are quite high, and they keep coming. Therefore, a priority is attracting and retaining employees that are competent, capable of performing the tasks efficiently, and also able to face changes and business and technological advancement. First thing first: we need well-trained professionals. And we need to hire them properly, assessing mainly the general mental ability, the level of integrity and employing structured interviews (Schmidt, Oh, & Shaffer, 2016). This approach makes the anticipation of performance somewhat predictable, though not necessarily organizations use evidence-based selection procedures. However, drivers and challenges that organizations face can affect the focus on performance, even though the predictors exist. Therefore, we need analyze closer how the schools and universities are preparing future employees for such a complex future, having them ready to perform and also flexible and attentive to the complexity and working relationships. One perspective advances the idea that school teachers need to act as coaches and help pupils understand concepts and theories by exploring topics and discovering, as opposed to offering information in a direct manner (Rizzoli, 2015). Developing students' soft-skills for a efficient

teamwork can be considered a consistent and an essential part of a course (Ritter et al., 2017). Therefore, future skills need to be first understand by the teachers and they should be the ones who enact them in the first place, to model and teach the skills. The educational approach needs to reformed not only regarding the methods of teaching and creating knowledge but also to integrate in educational tasks real organizational challenges and problems. Moreover, what could make a difference in educating for business is building collaborative structures and learning processes for school pupils and university students where educational institutions and business environments closely collaborate. How? By creating course content and tasks that reflect real organizational problems, by having organizational representative teaching and sharing experience, by engaging students in company's projects so they can actually work and learn on site. Preparing individuals for high performance in a challenging business environment cannot be solely the responsibility of schools, but all parties interested in work competencies: task-related skills and transversal competencies, such as cross-cultural competency, cognitive load management or social intelligence (IFTF, 2011). Many jobs will need both type of competencies, considering the expectation that employees will have to deal with more complex and novel tasks that might also imply more autonomy and participation in decisions (The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2012). The arguments for such a collaborative approach are ample. What is needed is high commitment and engagement for building an education for a good future of us all.

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