

Could you automate a CEO?

As digital transformation takes hold, traditional career paths are also changing...



In 2014, Oxford University published a report on what the most likely jobs to be automated were.

Unsurprisingly, jobs perceived to be less skilled were most at threat. Telemarketing came top of the list with a 99% chance of automation. At the other end of the scale, recreational therapy is thought of as the job with the least risk from being automated with a 0.0028% risk.

Perhaps surprisingly, CEOs weren't the least under threat. Chief Executives came 631st on the 702-strong list. Enough to prick the ears, not enough to worry – at least not for now.

Whilst predictions regard wholesale automation has not quite come to fruition there are changes to the employment marketplace.

Jobs which once required specialist human expertise are now under threat. Black cab drivers – who held something called 'the knowledge': an intricate knowhow of how to navigate London's backstreets and alleyways – have since been threatened by taxi-app drivers with GPS and a smart phone.

Whilst one set of lawyers are defending the skillsets of cabbies, other legal experts are working to create legislation that will allow the proliferation of driverless tech and couriers alike. It's an employment landscape at a serious juncture.

So, it begs the questions, what does this mean for talent? James Isaacs, Consultant at Eric Salmon, explained that in Executive Search he "sees the professions continuing to recruit well but differences between sectors" as they seek to deal with disruption to traditional norms.

He continues that law, accountancy, teaching and medicine are still developing and promoting staff through a series of near-vertical and linear layers of management – the traditional way.

Yet, Isaacs notes, other sectors are modernising and embracing the new business praxis. He said: "They have a desire to employ individuals who think more horizontally across, not only their own business structure, but also their own and adjacent industries within an increasingly technological environment.

"By applying themselves in this way, business leaders believe that efficiencies can be found, optimisation achieved whilst processes can be streamlined – improving customer experience and disrupting exiting business models. We can see this as big banks open their data to smaller 'challenger banks' and Fintech firms."

The business marketplace has changed too, Isaacs adds. Many companies are now seeking to become 'platforms' in order to monetise and grow. Just look at the manner in which some firms allow others to use their infrastructure to trade - Amazon, eBay, Facebook and Amazon are a particularly interesting example, according to the Eric Salmon consultant. "Amazon, who used to sell books online, moved to becoming a platform for other retailers to sell books and pretty much anything else that you might want – they are now setting up their own bookshops. It is this ability to think horizontally, to see the opportunities and join the dots that has resulted in their dominance."

But what does this change in business practise mean? Isaacs tells Executive Grapevine that “at leadership recruitment level, there are new Chief Platform Officers emerging at Board level and the role of the Chief Digital Officer has gone into retrograde.

“It is the role of the Chief Platform Officer that will challenge the Chief Financial Officer for the role of Chief Executive.”

“In my opinion, this will provide a well-deserved boost to equality and diversity at the Board level due largely to the desire for a mix of skills, new approaches and creatives sources of talent.”

So, whilst CEOs might not yet be automated, there is a change in how they will have to direct and operate their firms – at least for forward-thinking companies – as well as in the type of careers the top candidates might have had.