

Title: Workforce 2030: How AI is disrupting the Contact Centre

The topic of AI elicits a potential fear response by most – especially those of us not verse in the language of augmented reality, development pathways, source codes, chatbots etc. Our immediate response is “how do we remain current & relevant?” We are left feeling inadequate and this is applicable at all levels of the workforce spectrum. CEO’s feel the need to develop their knowledge base related to aspects like programming, and agents wonder if self-service and chatbot will take over their jobs? In the book Exponential Organisations, Ismail, Malone & Van Geest state that: “Now in 2014, we are hard-pressed to identify any industry that hasn’t been fundamentally disrupted. And not just business, but jobs as well.”

Fast forward to 2018 and the fear response of the seemingly unknown AI disruption is more prevalent. This fear response needs to be replaced with insight and ultimately a deep understanding of expansion opportunities that exists within AI. With technology there are more sophisticated and advanced work-based opportunities. We need to break the AI fear cycle if we want to remain current and become exponential organisations (ExO).

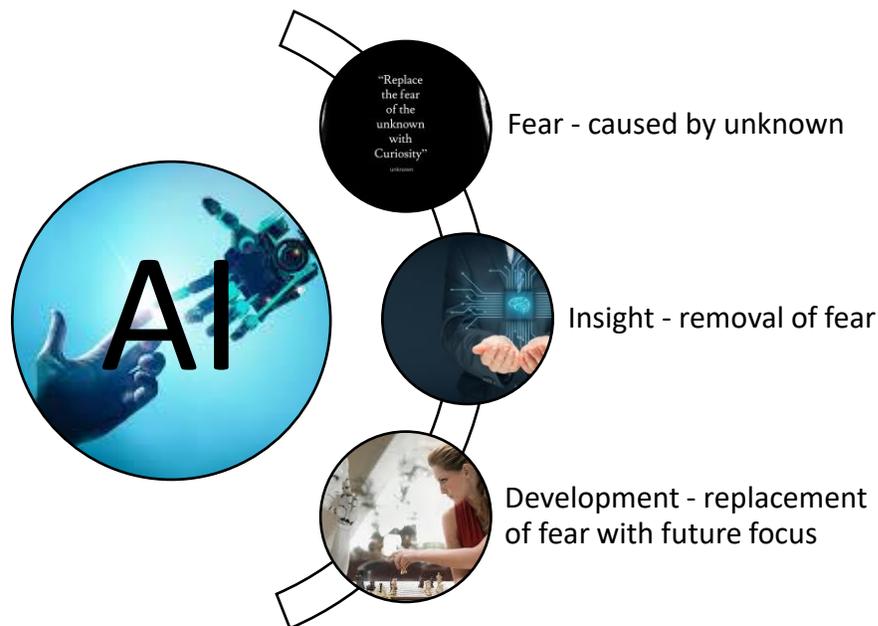


Figure 1: AI Fear Cycle

The advancement of AI will have a significant impact on the workforce. To gear, Contact Centre's need to be aware of the future skills and nuances required for the South African workforce to function at an optimum level. AI is expected to change the way we operate and conduct business. It is going to be disruptive and we need to prepare for it. A recent Gartner study predicts that by 2020, nearly 85% of customer interactions will not be through humans. As a result, the Call Centres of the future will be more efficient, high on performance and predictive.

Virtual Customer Assistants (VCA) will be able to predict customer queries and provide them a customised solution, which will lead to an enhanced customer experience. In the context of Contact Centres, AI shall augment at three levels.

1. Predictive Queries

Big data - bots will be able to predict and analyze questions based on past behaviour of the customer

2. Enhanced Communications

Chat bots / VCAs will be able to perform instant query handling irrespective of the time and location

3. Automated Operations

AI will be able to automate operations even further

AI is continually evolving. It is not about some far-off reality of change – change is happening now and at an increased pace and accelerating. Plan for a dynamic rather than static future, flexibility will be key. Be prepared to make giant leaps, exponential, otherwise you will be left behind in the lateral development curve. Don't leave AI and the 4th Industrial Revolution debates over to IT and HR; insight and understanding is critical to enable informed decision making and planning. Develop agility, adaptability and re-skill your people to deal with this change. Jobs might become redundant, but we have an ethical obligation towards our people; develop them for the future disruptions and consider what this kind of development enables in terms of workplace-based opportunities.

Collaborate at all levels to ensure preparedness for change, disruption, innovation and an increased pace of development. "ExO, almost by definition, think BIG." states Ismail in the book Exponential Organisations.

To meet the demand and disruption, we will need a more human kind of leadership. The digital age will create an opportunity to reinvent work and the workplace. As Professor Klaus Schwab (World Economic Forum) notes, “We need leaders who are emotionally intelligent, and able to model and champion co-operative working. They’ll coach, rather than command; they’ll be driven by empathy, not ego. The digital revolution needs a different, more human kind of leadership”.

Jack Ma, founder and executive chairman of Alibaba Group, a high-technology conglomerate states that: “People need to develop soft skills to compete with AI. AI should support human beings. The technology should always be doing something that enables people.”

The skills that will be required from our workforce is captured by The Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum. They list the top 10 skills required by 2020 as:



Top 10 skills

in 2020

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Service Orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive Flexibility

in 2015

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Coordinating with Others
3. People Management
4. Critical Thinking
5. Negotiation
6. Quality Control
7. Service Orientation
8. Judgment and Decision Making
9. Active Listening
10. Creativity



Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum

And these skill priorities will continue to evolve as AI evolves.



To deal with this disruption and to support the development of a “more human kind of leadership” Omni has developed a Master’s in Business Aptitudes¹. The MBA has taken the form of a Hero Academy. We want to develop Superheroes for our industry. The programme is divided into three phases. Each phase deals with changing the DNA of the human to that of a Superhero. This change is intentional to develop the essential skills which the future workforce will need. Call it our “upgrades” – just as we upgrade software and run critical updates; surely, we also need to ensure our staff, human capital, receives upgrades, especially if we want to remain current and ensure our Call Centre has a skilled workforce that can integrate and assimilate with AI.



Figure 2: Hero Academy©

The skills sets required by our workforce for the future will be “upgraded” through a 3 phases approach:

¹ The programme takes the form of a Masters and the principles is used to develop aptitudes. Not to be confused with a Master’s in Business Administration.

Phase 1 – Discover your Core Hero Abilities – what is your operating system? We all have our own unique DNA= DYNAMIC NATURAL ABILITY² that enables greatness in us. We need to be clear on our operating model and what our natural talents and gifts are. Phase 1 requires an assessment of these natural talents and deals with an enhanced understanding of self.

Phase 2 – Outer World Impact, your DNA moves from natural abilities to natural aptitudes, the 10eXo factor (exponential multiplied of your outer world). The operating system is understood (Abilities), and we now can work on specific upgrades and enhancements required to survive in the changing environment of augmented reality, big data, AI and the 4th Industrial revolution. We focus on the development of self through collaborative social awareness models. What aptitudes does your unique model need to be a Superhero in the disruptive environment?

Phase 3 – Here we move from abilities and aptitudes to Dynamic Natural Application, skills development that is linked to the specific demands for our Superhero's. The development tracks are selected based on critical business requirements, and development curves within the environment, as the skills development pathways are directly linked to actual business challenges. Some of the skill development areas are:

- Complex Problem Solving (complicated or intricate, hard to understand or deal with)
- Critical & Computational Thinking (managing massive amounts of data)
- Creativity (original ideas for creating out of the box solutions / blue sky thinking)
- People Management (management, leadership and influence)
- Collaborative Management (cross functional and complex initiatives)
- Emotional Intelligence (self-awareness & regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills)
- Judgement and Decision Making (thinking, cognitive process or act of reaching a decision, drawing sound conclusions, forming an opinion through assessment, comparison, and/or deliberation)
- Service Orientation (ability and desire to anticipate, recognize and meet others' needs before it is articulated)
- Negotiation Skills (priority classification and compromise discussions for results)

² DNA © Juan Nel

- Cognitive Flexibility (adapt strategies to face new and unexpected conditions in the environment)

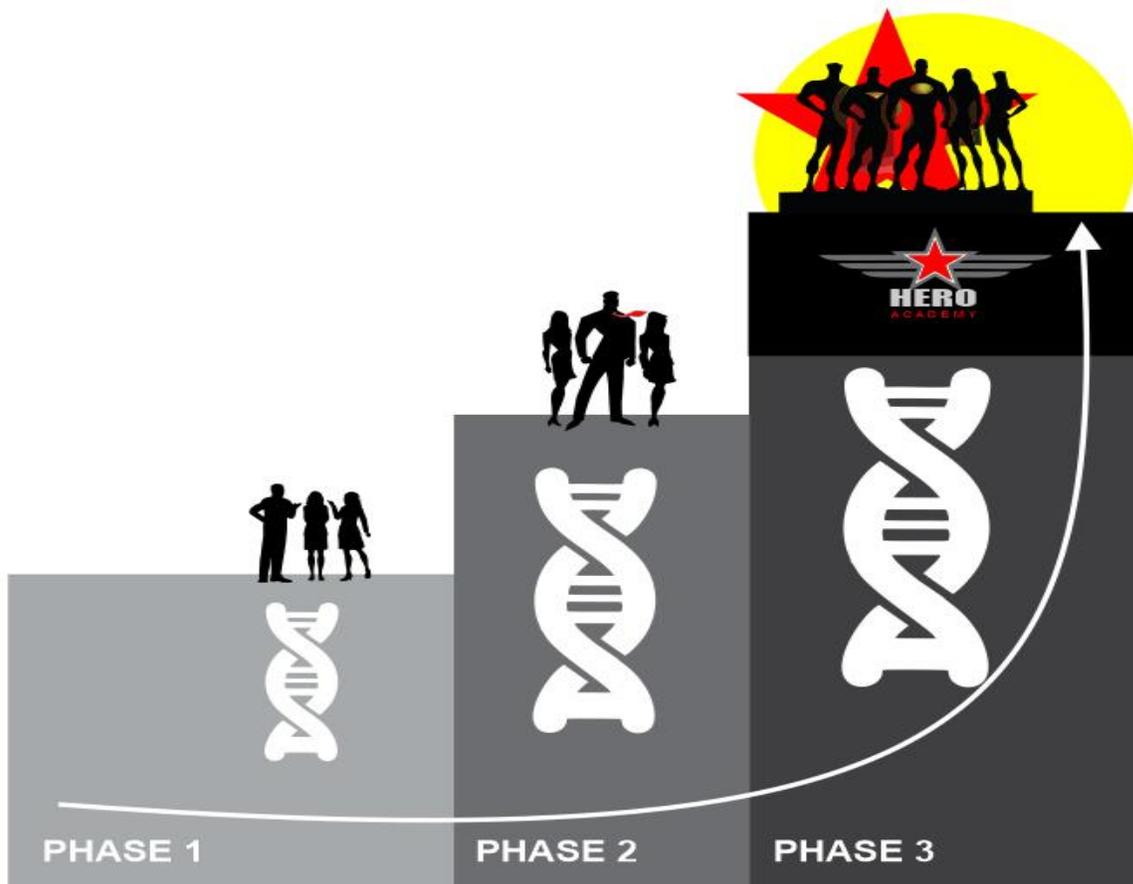


Figure 3: Hero Academy Development Pathway©

This development pathway is underpinned by a work-integrated learning (WIL) model. The phases can be accelerated or implemented concurrently. Currently we have a predominant lateral education system and not an exponential one. We need to move away from knowledge base to applied competence that specifically works on integrating the competence requirements to remain current in this environment. PACE is just going to accelerate, and CHANGE strategies alone will not be enough; we will need Massive Transformative Purpose (MTP). We need to pursue business strategies that achieve rapid growth and our people are at the heart of our ability to adapt to the future requirements.

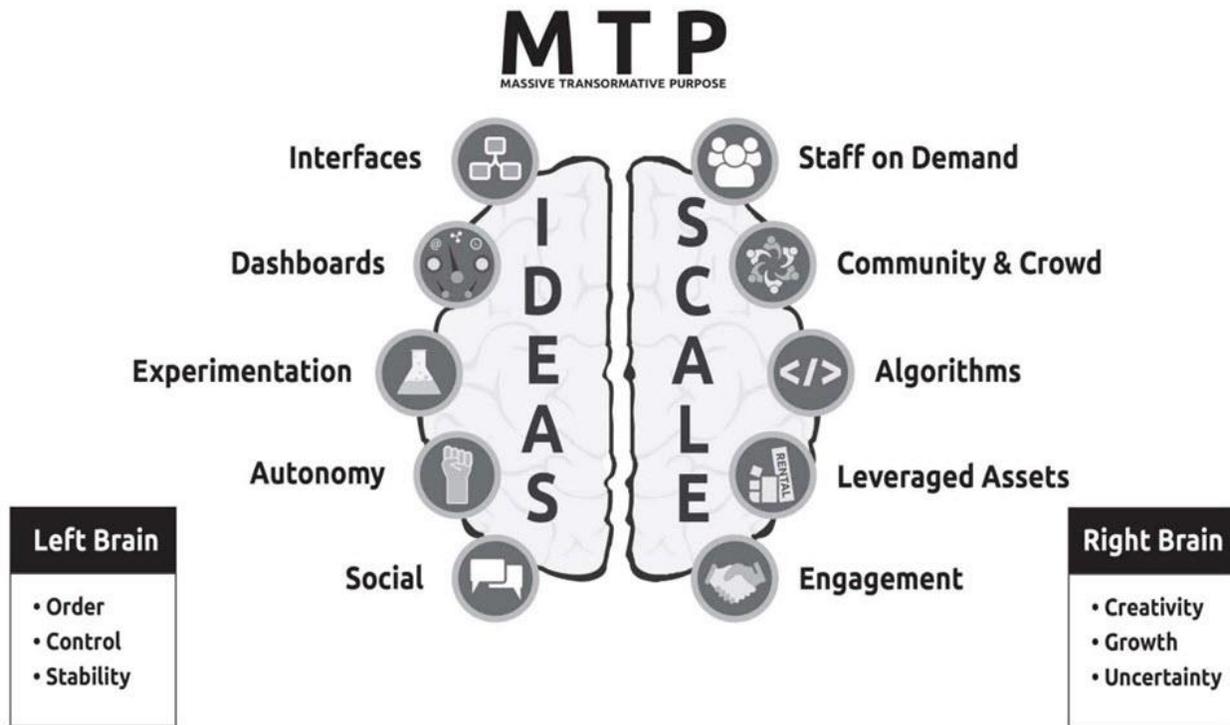


Figure 4: Massive Transformative Purpose (MTP) – source Exponential Organisations by Ismail, Malone & Van Geest page 52-84

We no longer have the luxury of time, what we are witnessing is a new breed of organisation that is scaling and generating value at a pace never seen before (Law of Accelerating Returns – LOAR)³. They are using enhancements in automation, AI and disruption as their allies and we need to be prepared for the impact it will have on our workforce and industry.

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- Is your transformation and skills development strategies integrated with MTP's?
- Have you considered the disruptions that the “2 guys in the garage” will cause?
- Is your leadership being transformed to deal with the future?
- Are you ready?

³ First, the doubling pattern identified by Gordon Moore in integrated circuits applies to any information technology. Kurzweil calls this the Law of Accelerating Returns (LOAR).

Source:

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