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McKinsey Global Chief Learning Officer Nick van Dam says few organizations are prepared to navigate the onset of economic and technological change.

The 10 Critical Job Skills of the Future, According to McKinsey's Global Chief Learning Officer

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By Dave Hendrick

The world sits on the precipice of the fourth industrial revolution, as a coming wave of disruptive technology in fields like artificial intelligence, machine learning, the mobile internet and 3-D printing remake entire industries and open up untold possibilities in

the workplace and marketplace.

According to Nick van Dam, global chief learning officer at McKinsey & Co., the rapid advancement will lead to massive job losses, as entire industries and companies and the workers they employ cease to exist. Van Dam's research suggested seven million jobs will disappear between 2015 and 2020, with two million new positions created from the disruption. Highly predictive work, in particular, will be vulnerable, with positions such as telemarketing likely to be completely displaced.

Speaking to students at the **University of Virginia Darden School of Business** (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/>), van Dam pointed to a host of evidence supporting the coming tumult, noting the increasingly rapid acceleration of technological advancement and the increasingly short life time of companies on the S&P 500, for instance.

“Lifetime employment doesn't exist anymore,” van Dam said. “Companies will only be around for so long.”

Van Dam, who holds professorships at both Nyenrode Business Universiteit in the Netherlands and the University of Pennsylvania, cited examples of technologies such as driverless vehicles that seemed like science fiction as recently as a few years ago but are now present and poised to revamp entire industries.

It's the sort of rapid onset of change that few organizations or employees are prepared to navigate, with relatively low-skilled workers poised to bear the brunt of the changes.

“This is the best time for people who have the right skills and right education because there are tremendous opportunities,” van Dam said. “It's also the worst time in history for people with ordinary skills and education.”

While digital competencies will be the foundation upon which the job skills of the future are based, technological know-how will not be enough to compete effectively.

Van Dam suggested that a variety of “human or soft skills,” will help workers embrace the rapid onset of change, allowing them to think creatively and collaboratively and more effectively future-proofing themselves from disruption.

Darden Professor **Ed Hess** (<http://www.darden.virginia.edu/faculty-research/directory/edward-d-hess/>) explored similar **themes** (<https://ideas.darden.virginia.edu/2016/09/leadership-in-the-smart-machine-age-the-4es/>) in his 2017 book, *Humility is the New Smart: Rethinking Human Excellence in the Smart Machine Age*, and the creation of agile, creative and critical thinkers is a key goal of the Darden curriculum.

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Citing World Economic Forum **research** (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-10-skills-you-need-to-thrive-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>), van Dam said the Top 10 skills that will be in demand in the near future are:

- Complex problem-solving
- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- People management
- Coordinating with others
- Emotional intelligence
- Judgment and decision-making
- Service orientation
- Negotiation
- Cognitive flexibility

“It’s all about how we can do things differently,” van Dam said. “How can we come up with new products and business models and use technology to work smarter? It’s all about ideation, and ideation is driven by creativity.”

Van Dam said McKinsey had recently purchased two design agencies, a nod to the fact that clients want to work with creative people who can help them co-create the products of the future.

The rapid pace of change, and the fact that most people will be in the workforce for an average of 55 years also means that lifelong learning would be a key ingredient to sustained career success. That's an onus that falls on both individuals and companies, van Dam said.

"Companies, in order to stay relevant, need to step up and do way more in order to develop their people," van Dam said, adding that work should ideally be designed in a manner such that people are learning something new every day. In Van Dam's words, "turning the workplace into a learning place."

The chief learning officer noted that McKinsey was spending well in excess of \$130 million to further develop its people, seeing it as critical to remaining strong and relevant.

Van Dam said ingredients for developing a lifelong learning mindset include becoming a "serial master," stretching beyond one's comfort zone, and building a personal brand and network, among others. In addition to remaining gainfully employed, van Dam said the ultimate goal involved doing what one loved and discovering *ikigai*, a Japanese concept that roughly translates to reason for being.

Studies show that people who are lifelong learners are more successful professionally and lead happier and more fulfilling lives. Van Dam suggests taking a free assessment at: www.reachingyourpotential.org (<http://www.reachingyourpotential.org>). The assessment will measure one's score on seven different mindsets of lifelong learners.

About the University of Virginia Darden School of Business

The University of Virginia Darden School of Business delivers the world's best business education experience (<https://news.darden.virginia.edu/2018/10/25/no-1-education-experience/>) to prepare entrepreneurial, global and responsible leaders through its MBA, Ph.D. and Executive Education programs. Darden's top-ranked faculty is

renowned for teaching excellence and advances practical business knowledge through research. Darden was established in 1955 at the University of Virginia, a top public university founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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