

RESEARCH

Automation of management jobs on horizon

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They are coming for the managers. Image credit: Gartner

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Automation of management roles as artificial intelligence tackles repetitive activities and normal supervision tasks will soon redefine white-collar jobs in luxury and other sectors.

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A new "2020 Future of Work: Hidden Trends" report from market researcher Gartner suggests that unethical use of employee data, elimination of on-the-job learning, falling barriers to access, radical transparency and remote working are trends on the horizon for businesses. But the among the biggest things to watch for is what happens to managers at all levels in organizations.

"The automation of management tasks will require businesses to rethink their manager roles do they want to increase the value of managers by shifting the role to focus on strategic activities, or do they want to take advantage of the scale opportunity this trend presents and reduce the number of managers at their organization?" said Emily Rose McRae, Arlington, VA-based director of quantitative analytics and data and leader of the Future of Work team in Gartner's HR practice.

Gartner is one of the leading market researchers and advisory firms worldwide.

Cut and thrust

The research revealed that a startling 69 percent of a manager's time is currently spent doing tasks that could potentially be done by technology.

For instance, new expense management systems are replacing the need for a superior to sign off on an expense report.

In another variation, and aided with artificial intelligence (AI), chatbots can take on the role of coaching.

Successful luxury businesses will have to ensure that their human resources teams are collaborating with IT to help automate manager tasks. Doing so could free up a manager's time for more strategic work or could reduce the number of managers necessary to run a department, per Gartner.

Companies should support career paths that promote employee responsibility without necessarily taking on management workflow that can be replaced by automation.

"A company that has decided to be an early mover in automating the administrative and repetitive elements of the manager role could highlight in their job postings the newly elevated strategic role of managers at the company," Ms. McRae said.

Another key finding from the report is that 45 percent of large companies will misuse employee data by 2022, which could result in a scandal that negatively affects the brand image and employee recruitment.

To overcome this challenge, chief human resource officers (CHRO) will need to proactively define internal data ethics to protect employees and the company.

Health information and performance data are especially sensitive subjects. HR professionals need to ensure that this data is protected.

"These hidden trends will have a significant impact on how work gets done, which businesses will need to prepare for now," Ms. McRae said.

"Today's work generates an enormous volume of data on employees' activity, performance and network," she said. "As companies begin to decide how to leverage this vast data trove, they will need to make decisions about their ethical standards for using the data.

"Companies will also need to decide how they want to share the data with employees. Increasing transparency can help employees make more informed career decisions and accelerate their ability to innovate and improve processes, but it also creates risks."



Emily Rose McRae leads the Future of Work team at Gartner's HR practice

Transparency and remote work

Digital has driven consumers to expect brands to be more transparent about their practices and the same is true of employees.

The Gartner report revealed that 71 percent of employees expect employers to increase their transparency. The study found that by 2025, most companies will live up to these expectations.

People working for luxury brands will expect more transparency from their employers. Those companies that are able to embrace this transparency without resistance will be better at retaining employees.

HR leaders should therefore proactively identify and overcome issues of transparency to attract top talent.

"How companies approach these hidden trends has serious implications for their employer brand and how they differentiate themselves from their talent competitors," Ms. McRae said.

"Companies should take advantage of this by highlighting their approach to the hidden trends in their employer branding and internal communications," she said.

Another key finding from the report is that as Gen Z enters the workforce, demand for remote work will increase by 30 percent by 2030.

Currently only 56 percent of managers allow employees to work from home. Companies that do not support remote-work will be challenged with attracting top talent.

"This may require increasing openness to where work is done, enabling more remote work to attract Gen Z, while also reducing barriers to employment," Ms. McRae said.

"For many organizations, increasing remote work and remote-first hiring policies where location is not a consideration, finding the top talent is the priority will require a cultural shift," she said.

AI to change access and learning

AI and emerging technologies are opening up job opportunities to people with disabilities, as technology can support people with challenges completing tasks.

Gartner predicts that the number of people with disabilities in the workforce will triple by 2023. This more inclusive talent pool will help organizations that face challenges finding new employees.

To address these changes, luxury brands may need to adapt their recruiting and internal talent management processes and ensure that they are accessible for workers with physical and mental disabilities.

HR executives will need to ensure that managers are trained in how to work with people with mental or emotional disabilities.

"AI is rapidly reducing barriers to employment for people with disabilities, and the organizations who take advantage of this opportunity will have greater retention, productivity and revenue growth, but they must also make sure their organizations' culture is prepared to enable employees to be successful," Ms. McRae said.

Additionally, the research revealed that 73 percent of CHROs said they currently use on-the-job learning to help employees develop new skill sets. This will change in the future, as this important tactic fades.

In fact, by 2025, almost half of internal training will go away, as repetitive tasks are automated and no longer needed.

This could mean that companies will return to classic approaches to training employees.

For example, luxury brands may consider returning to live-classroom training to help employee growth.

Additionally, HR departments will need to review how they are tracking employee advancement opportunities, as completing tasks will no longer be a good marker for when to promote an employee.

"[A] company might choose to focus on evolving their learning and development strategy to account for the loss of nearly half of on-the-job learning opportunities by using mentorships and apprenticeships to develop talent, which could make the company a particularly appealing employer for non-traditional talent," Ms. McRae said.