

Introduction

All of us are born with a desire to contribute; we are hard-wired to be useful to each other and to society as a whole. If you think about it, there are few things more satisfying than a job well done. Having a sense of purpose, mastering a task and having others approve of, or even admire what we achieve is highly motivating. It feels good.

Problem is, as we grow older and our experiences build over time, many of us become disillusioned, disappointed or just plain bored by the work we do – we get in a rut. The joy diminishes from the day-to-day piling up of things to do that do not align with personal values, personal motivations, aspirations and/or the types of skills we wish to master. There are few things more demotivating than this.

Of course, this happens to everyone at some point; however, when dissatisfaction lasts months, and months turn into years, something has gone wrong. Why continue doing something that does not align to one's personal motivations and desires?

There comes a time when you ought to start doing what you want. Take a job that you love. You will jump out of bed in the morning. I think you are out of your mind if you keep taking jobs that you don't like because you think it will look good on your resume. Isn't that a little like saving up sex for your old age?

WARREN BUFFETT, INVESTMENT GURU, CHAIRMAN
AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY

There is a certain truth to what Warren Buffet says here; however, when one must worry about a mortgage, school fees, a car payment or a student loan to pay back, the mind becomes focused on this at the expense of aspiration and desire. The real reason that so many of today's workforce end up in a rut is far more complex than just pulling up your bootstraps and going out to find that perfect job. In fact, many of the reasons people fall into uninspiring work are outside of their control.

If you think about the economic realities the vast majority of people face on a day-to-day basis it's no wonder that we sometimes fall into a trap of taking what is on offer at any given point. Often the dilemma starts from a young age: Do we go to university? Can we afford it? Can we make the grade? Or do we skip further education and go for an entry-level position and work our way up? This is a profound decision for a 17- to 18-year-old. However, this is where most of us start our quest for that perfect job, the ultimate career. To add to the daunting task, perfect jobs do not grow on trees, so even if a teenager has a clear view about what they want to do, how do they find that job? And what do they do to support themselves until that job is discovered? After all, it can take years to get where we want to be.

Additionally, if you think about the current state of the world of work, the method by which people find careers and careers find people is largely unchanged since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. True, today we have LinkedIn and some digital job posting boards, but largely the process is the same as it has always been: employer posts job, prospective employee finds posting (mainly online, these days) and applies. From there, the process of interview and assessment, selecting candidates and getting them onboarded is also largely unchanged. It's a very two-dimensional world controlled by supply and demand, navigated with a bit of luck (for both employee and employer). It's highly inefficient, time consuming, and rarely gets the right person, with the right skills and the right motivations in the right job at the right time. Throw in the whims of the normal business cycle – growing economy followed by shrinking economy (supply and demand) – and the complexities multiply. This traditional way of finding and deploying the workforce in constantly changing market conditions, I would argue, is the fundamental reason why so many people find themselves doing uninspiring work and feeling trapped in it. Pull up your bootstraps and go find that job! Good luck with that.

The other challenge today's workforce deals with is how to get stuff done while living at the centre of a maelstrom of data and technological change. With all the 'amazing' technology that we have, one would think

we must be significantly more productive than we were, say, 20 years ago. Unfortunately, this is not the case. It is true, studies show, that technology and gadgets have made us more productive at home, but when we get to work, it's like 1997 all over again. We sit at a desk with a PC, a mouse and most of us still use Windows or Mac as our interface to the organization. Additionally, most organizations are constantly throwing new systems and processes at the workforce, with very little training or explanation of what they are supposed to do with the latest system. So, it's no wonder that most economists are finding that increases in human productivity levelled off around 2004 and are now heading downward (Guillemette and Turner, 2018).

Everyone has been made for some particular work and the desire for that work has been put in every heart.

RUMI, ANCIENT PERSIAN POET PHILOSOPHER

What would the world of work be like if we could turn technology and technological change to our advantage and use it to match the perfect person to the perfect job; a job that gives purpose, the opportunity to master new things, and the opportunity to be left to get on with that work without too much interference by others? What if we change the mindset (and processes) to think differently about bringing in new talent and deploying it at the right time and right place with the right skills and right motivations. Most would say this is impossible in today's workplace – the tools we have are very one-dimensional, and do not help us to think and do differently. And you can add to this today's economic realities, where there is a complete focus on quarterly results, profits, cutting costs, growing the top line, and saving the taxpayer money (in the public sector) that override many people's desires and motivations: just get on with the work! Produce *more* with *less*, meet objectives, meet the deadline, and at all costs, deliver! Most of us get caught up in these whirlwinds and we put our heads down and plod through, quarter after quarter – a treadmill.

But does the world of work have to be this way? Is there a different way to do things, a different way to look at things? Maybe the simple 'equation' given in Figure 0.1 can illustrate a way forward.

What if we created a workforce 'marketplace' that not only balances supply and demand of resources, but also maps people's skills, motivations, and aspirations to the right job at the right time (PEIP)? If we can achieve

FIGURE 0.1 People engagement, innovation and performance (PEIP)

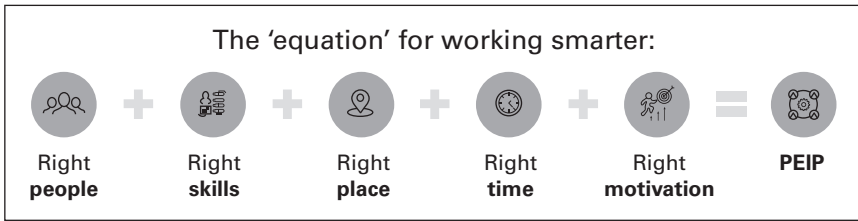
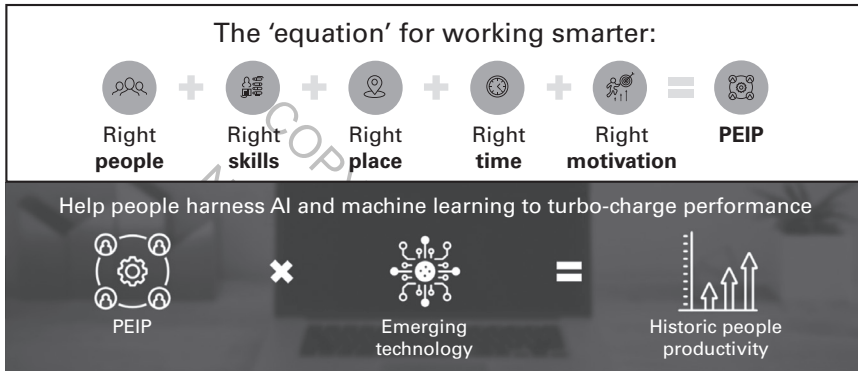


FIGURE 0.2 Turbo-charge PEIP



this, then (as postulated by Rumi) the chances that people ‘made for some particular work and the desire for that work’ find and succeed in that work go up dramatically. The benefits for individuals, and society at large, would be tremendous – even miraculous.

Imagine, then, if we ‘turbo-charged’ this equation with emerging ‘intelligent’ technology, as pictured in Figure 0.2, using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to further maximize the efficiencies of PEIP – a new way of working where individuals and organizations use smart technology to find each other, to get the right people in the right role. People doing jobs they love for organizations they love will be highly engaged and create great places to work. Imagine that, once PEIP is in place, people could leverage smart technology to help them be even more productive than they are today; robots working for us, and with us, to make work more fun and fulfilling. Let the robots do the mundane work and free up the humans to do higher-order work. Sounds like science fiction, but it’s not – the technology to make

this happen is available today, and the time for this to happen is here and now. Demographic and other trends in the work environment are rapidly emerging alongside the latest technology trends and are creating a ‘perfect storm’ of challenge, but also *opportunity*.

Consider trends such as the elongation of human life-span, the realization that people on the autistic spectrum bring incredibly innovative ideas, there are more senior and experienced women in work, and the fact that we have a much better scientific understanding of the workings of the human brain and what truly motivates people. These trends, combined with PEIP, demonstrate that we may be on the cusp of a truly transformative time in the world of work. One where ‘everyone has been made for some particular work and the desire for that work’ can be realized.

There is no doubt that the challenges that organizations and the workforce face today are myriad and growing in scale and complexity. It is easy to get overwhelmed and feel buffeted by the workplace transformation that is well underway; it feels like we are barely maintaining control of the day-to-day, let alone the future. However, in this book we are going to be pragmatic and open about the challenges we face, while at the same time combining new ideas with concrete, proven solutions to address the challenges; to harness them to our advantage. As we unpack PEIP and other concepts throughout the six chapters of this book, new ways of thinking and doing will emerge and the fog will begin to clear. True, some of the new ways of thinking and doing will require some fundamental, even radical, change in how we operate today. However, others will be more a matter of tweaks in our approach to work.

We will unpack each component of PEIP in turn, building on each section, while also presenting real examples of what many successful organizations are doing today to leverage the concept. This is not a theoretical book of ‘what-ifs’ and ‘wouldn’t it be nice?’, the ideas here will be grounded in the art of the possible. Additionally, we will focus on the *value* of improved people and organizational performance. Making change work requires investment of significant amounts of scarce resources and funds. It’s no good coming up with new ways of thinking and doing if the resources required to make it happen cannot be justified by concrete returns. Demonstrating clear value and a realistic roadmap for how to make change happen are critical in taking the ideas here and making them a reality. Success will be dependent on two key things: first, the courage and commitment to embrace new ways of thinking and doing; and, second, grounding programmes of change in

what humans can realistically absorb as well as in the fiscal realities of our age. It may seem like these are two very big asks, so let's put them in the context of some modern, Irish wisdom to lighten the load:

The world is more malleable than you think, and it's waiting for you to hammer it into shape.

BONO, MUSICIAN

Reference

Guillemette, Y and Turner, D (2018) The long view: scenarios for the world economy to 2060, OECD Economic Policy Papers, 22, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b4f4e03e-en> (archived at <https://perma.cc/AE5Y-4969>)

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