

The Future of Work: Technology and Inclusiveness

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Reliance on technology and the expansion of the digital workforce present challenges every employer and policymaker faces as they explore how to build the workforce of the future and a world that considers gender equality a key element of inclusive economic growth. Complicating the role technology plays is an aging population and demographic changes that raise the question of the impact technology will have on women in the workforce.

Inclusive economic growth demands economic benefits that include every segment of a society. The World Economic Forum (WEF) published an Inclusive Growth and Economic Development report in 2017 on which the inclusive economic growth framework presented at the 2018 Davos meetings was based. According to the WEF, the pillars of solid economic growth include policies and strategies that address: 1) Active labor-market policies 2) Equity of access to quality basic education 3) Gender parity 4) Non-standard work benefits and protections and 5) Effective school-to-work transition. These five factors are the institutional underpinnings of a well-functioning labor market, according to the WEF.

Thus, how technology impacts women is a critical question in conceptualizing the future of the workforce. Equally important when assessing the inclusiveness of economic growth are gender parity and equal-access to education and work benefits. This makes sense because women are 49.7 percent of the global population and over 57 percent of undergraduate (McKinsey) degree earners which means women represent half of society and more than half of the skilled workforce. Despite these statistical advantages, a battle for gender parity in the workforce remains an unfulfilled challenge that is most pronounced at the leadership levels. Women comprise [46.7](#) percent of the workforce, but less than [6 percent](#) of CEO positions in fortune 500 companies.

These numbers beg the question: will technology play a role in closing the leadership gap, or hinder progress? How can we leverage technology to ensure women have access to the workforce and also the ability to rise into leadership positions across the economy?

- **Stimulate entrepreneurship**

In the first place, technology will stimulate a new era of work for entrepreneurs and startups. Technology has facilitated business startups and has expanded the scope of business enterprises. Entrepreneurship in general is on the rise, without regard to technology. Recent studies done by Bentley report that 67 percent of students said their career goals involved starting their own business, while only 13 percent intended to climb the traditional corporate ladder to become a CEO. Female entrepreneurs are on the rise also, and are doing well. A [2016 BNP Paribas Global Entrepreneur Report](#) found that 90 percent of female entrepreneurs that took part in the survey expected to see an increase in profits within the next year and were reporting higher revenues than their male counterparts.

Technology also has made entrepreneurship accessible to a wider cross-section of the population. The rise of crowdfunded businesses, such as Uber and Lyft, mobile phone and money transfer businesses highlight the role technology can play in driving and expanding the scope of entrepreneurship.

Arguably technology is not accessible to everyone. More than 60 percent of the world does not have access to technology of any kind according to the UN. By the same token, the spread of mobile phones and related mobile services cannot be denied and for those who do have access to them, the type of work has changed.

- **Flexibility for Output**

A second point to consider is that technology provides flexibility in terms of hours and location. It enables people, particularly women, to work from home, share office space, be mobile and – as a consequence of these workplace innovations -- balance their lives. The impact on women in the workplace is that this change in the traditional way of working means women are less likely to experience marginalization than is the case in the traditional workplace. This is important in terms of retention of women in the workforce.

On the other hand, the rise of technology and artificial intelligence can and do result in a loss of administrative jobs which are primarily filled by women. At the same time, technology also expands opportunities and methodologies for how people learn.-This is likely to allow for more women -- and men also --to develop new skills. Technology not only improves efficiencies, but also facilitates learning and increases flexibility in the way we work.

According to Intuit, an estimated [40% of the US workforce expected to be entrepreneurs by 2020](#) and one hundred million new businesses created yearly on a global level, indicates the shift to a more entrepreneurial workforce bodes well for women who can transition out of traditional business roles and into new challenges as a result of automation. While society is not homogeneous, new technologies are impacting the issue of economic inclusiveness and arguably democratizing the workplace with more women enjoying access to economic empowerment.