



I Come with Money...

~~Do You Whitewash^{*} Your Colleagues Performance?~~

In brief:

This article will claim that about two-third of your employees are 'passive' and largely underperforming and that management most often are in denial, whitewash people's performance, or simply can't comprehend the scale of the challenge

10 years ago, 40% of today's jobs weren't created – the pattern will continue, and to stay current for the future it will require a massive retraining effort on part of the employees.

Today about 45% of job activities can be automated with current known technology. Many of these jobs are in mid-tech jobs occupied by the 'passive' types of employees.

The essence – on your doorstep lies massive profit opportunities - both short and long terms, but equally so does in-efficiencies accumulating costs if you don't start demanding higher standards, change of attitudes and willingness to become current.

All yours to consider to take...

Observations:

Economic value in companies are created by 4% of the employees. May be 10%, in best cases 15%. No more. They are high-performers of the extraordinary art:

- An IT-programmer doing 10 lines when others do one.
- Your customer service person answering 4 calls against average of one.
- Or, your accountant who processes 5 times the vouchers versus colleagues.

Outliers are ordinary folk who just get things done, they don't have to be in management positions.

The challenge is their colleagues, the remaining 85-odd-% whose performance lie below company average. What do we do?

You are double paying for many of these individuals; under-performance being one, the second is that they are often un-ambitious, quiet, lacks the drive for innovation and change, or willingness to self-engineer training and learning.

Just some weeks ago I asked a group of executives:

"Do you recognize this colleague? A kind, loyal person, maybe with 8-13-20 years of experience, someone who have seen most in the company, a carrier of history, an 8am-5pm colleague who goes about work with little fuss or trace, maybe a quieter type who possess deep functional understanding of work and processes. Some may call he/she a bit 'passive', a piece-time employee if you will. A performance score of 4, maybe 5 on a scale of 1-10" (10 being highest) would be a typical score"?!"

And now to you - do you recognize this person?

In my world, a performance score of 7 represents that you fulfil all requirements of the job, of expectations put to you – what you are supposedly paid for. An 8 indicates extraordinary performance, someone of standards beyond the job class, potentially above industry standards.

If this holds water – what is then the accumulated performance value of your employees, colleagues – the company versus their salaries?

It automatically raises the next question – what are we to do for/ with the 'passive' type?

The before-mentioned executives:

"FIRE THEM!" was the immediate response from the offensive few to which the cautious replied – "but, WAIT, we need them to back up the high performers, do the 'boring work'. Here the moderates stepped in: "DEVELOP THEM, and if they won't then let them go"!

You can imagine how the debate took off from here. In a heated and fascinating discussion, what intrigued me most was that everyone could identify the colleague but few had meaningful ways of bringing the person out of the shadow and to the forefront of learning and development.

These executives need take no offense as they represent a similar pattern across industries and geographies – either not knowing what to do, or daring to take the right decisions.

What would you do in your company?

You see, all the above are past challenges. Legacies. The real challenge is the future. Here are just scenarios:

One:

In 2015 McKinsey undertook to understand the degree to which work places can be automated[†]. While only 5% of full time jobs can be directly automated, about 60% of occupants could have 30% or more of their activities automated, and in general 45% of all activities can be converted with already known technology.

As an example – which activities does a bus driver do and which technologies can support them?

- Driving dynamics – observing the traffic, speeding, braking etc. – self-driving technology is just about to break thru in full scale...
- Meet/ greet, check of tickets – in the subways it's called self-service or pay the fine when get caught.
- Information service – Screens and automated speak does most of that today.
- Security = Remote controlled cameras...
- Etc...

Analyzing about 2,000 different activities up against already available technology the overall picture is that significant, and surprising, chunks of many jobs can be converted to technology. File clerks, for instance, has an approx. 80% conversion rate, and at C-level 20% of activities can be automated.

Add to it, when technologies that process and “understand” natural language reaches the median level of human performance; an additional 13% of work activities could be automated.

That's an average automation degree of 45% + 13%.

And, in a further twist - many of the convertible activities are found in so-called mid tech jobs. The ones the 'passive' type occupies.

Two:

Social media manager, sustainability manager, app developer, millennial generational expert, cloud computing specialist, big data analyst/data scientist, YouTube content creators, Uber drivers, drone operators, driverless car engineer are just ten new job titles to arrive since 2016[‡] and many more are expected in the years to come.

But, do they have to be occupied by Millennials only - are you willing to re-school yourself?

At the same time, I know traditionalists will claim need for local hands in accounting, HR, admin, customer service, production, planning, procurement, sales etc. so why ever bother about the discussion?

Well, when your competitors reach work place automation degrees of +30% a cost advantage will start impacting the market balance, and you will be 2-3 years late to the party.

So, what do you choose to do?

A potential solution?

HBR October 2016[§] tells the fascinating story of AT&T where a workforce of 280,000 people must stay updated in a constantly changing technology sector. AT&T's perspective is that every 4th year approx. 140,000 employees must have migrated to new jobs due to change of technical demands. To that end the company has set up a massive training facility/ program where employees on their own initiative, and outside work hours, can seek to upgrade knowledge, skills etc.

It is a massive and admirable undertaking carried on the social contract with its employees 'upgrade or die' which in real terms goes for both the individual and the corporation.

Critics would say "very American" – I say "It's coming to you too", and I will further claim that this is exactly the issue many companies come to face; a technological evolution staring into the faces of managers and very few taking decisive and firm actions, until it is too late.

What do you intend to do?

Going back to the group of executives. "Listen", I said to the group of executives, "I come with money..." and went on to explain how we need to design jobs 3-5 years out in the horizon, calculate our way backward to today's environment and simply ask what we need to start doing with every single job and each person in this organization to ensure they evolves into a meaningful function and resource 5 years from now.

Once you venture on the path of development you are beyond the point of no return meaning when you gently lay out plans for change and ask your 'kind and loyal employees' to come along you cannot go back. You have effectively decided for your employees, if you are willing to learn, develop and change, then you are welcome onboard the future – otherwise we implement the plan of a "40 years divorce in our collaboration"! Because if you go back you have effectively accepted mediocracy, half solutions or at least the ones that won't let you win.

To me, whitewashing performance of peoples are one of the last big, dirty, secrets in all of management. You allow yourself to become a prisoner of status quo. You show that you don't dare to take steps to develop people and your company until when you absolutely have to. It's called crises. Lay-offs.

To be candid will serve you and your colleagues well. Tell people the real world. We must change now. Not tomorrow. "I will lay out the plans for the company – you bear the responsibility to train, acquire skills – to stay relevant – I will support you in whichever way I can, but work rests with you!"

It will be 180 degrees change from today's social contract. Now it must read "Stop asking what the company can do for you, instead ask; what can I do for the company".

In conclusion, stop whitewashing your colleague's performance. Look to the inevitable evolution of technology and workplaces. Present the hard facts to people and ask them how we develop together. Set targets and draw consequences as otherwise times ahead can become very expensive for you.

In short, it is my offer to come with money to you...

Thank you for your time and attention!

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* Metaphorically, whitewashing refers to suppression or "glossing over" (possibly a close parallel construction) of potentially damaging or unwelcome information. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitewash>

† <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/four-fundamentals-of-workplace-automation>

‡ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/06/10-jobs-that-didn-t-exist-10-years-ago/>

§ <https://hbr.org/2016/10/atts-talent-overhaul>