

Future of Work in the Digital World: Preparing for Instability *and Opportunity*

Robert W. Lent

Despite conflicting forecasts about the pace and extent of technological changes that lie ahead, it is difficult to dispute the impact that advances in automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence have already had on work in the United States and globally. Hirschi (2018) provided an excellent discussion of these developments and what they may mean for career clients, practitioners, and researchers. The author aims to complement Hirschi's contribution by (a) amplifying the nature of the challenges faced by workers, both currently and in the foreseeable future, and (b) considering steps that may be taken by career development experts, both individually and collectively, to meet these challenges. These steps include advocacy for displaced workers, participation in dialogues to transform educational institutions, and efforts to extend the range of counseling interventions to prepare clients for a career future that may be far less stable for increasing numbers of workers.

Keywords: technology, work, career preparedness, advocacy, social cognitive career theory

Only a few years ago, I had written that “these are both challenging and exciting times for the field of career development and counseling. . . . Wrought by sweeping change in such areas as technology, the global economic environment, and demographic and immigration patterns, the work world has become faster paced, more diverse, and less and less predictable for more and more workers” (Lent, 2013, p. 2). This passage had been occasioned by a major economic recession. Yet, despite notable signs of improvement to the U.S. economy, many workers continue to face diminished employment opportunities and stagnant wages, and many more may face an uncertain work future. As practitioners and researchers devoted to career development, we need to be prepared for the changes that have been forecast because of the impact they will have on our ability to both prepare students to enter the workforce and assist workers to adjust to work and adapt to changing economic conditions.

Hirschi (2018) provided an excellent overview of career development problems owing to rapid technological change, along with proposed solutions. In this article, I attempt to build on his foundation, first by considering the current and projected magnitude of the challenges for students and workers and second, by suggesting additional steps that might be taken to better prepare ourselves and our clients for what has been variously called the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016), the third digital revolution (Gershenfeld, Gershenfeld, &

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