

# How do you get a job that doesn't exist yet?

Laurent Haug



Automation won't take away all jobs Image: REUTERS/Jason Lee  
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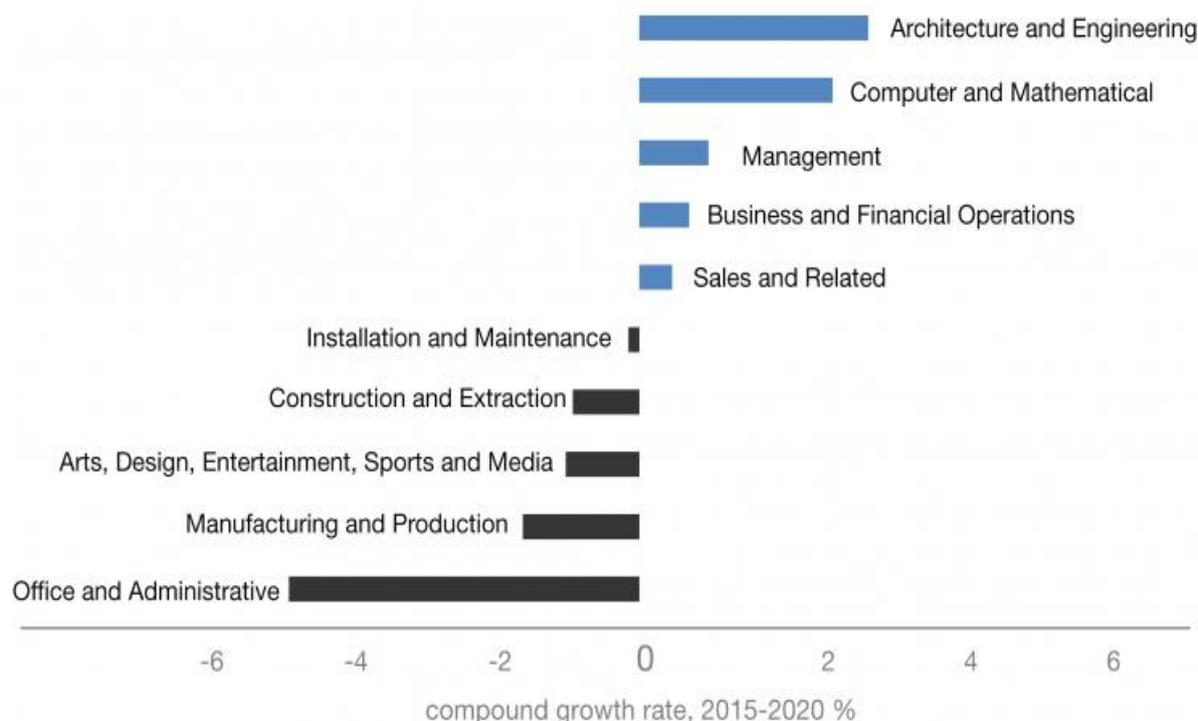
## More on the agenda

It's almost impossible to anticipate which occupations will thrive in years to come. The parents of today's social media managers and search engine evaluators – openings currently advertised in the *New York Times* – couldn't possibly have known those roles would exist when they were helping their children decide which subjects to study at school.

So how *do* we prepare for jobs that don't yet exist?

As a legendary hockey player once said: success comes not from skating to where the puck is, but to where it will be. The following high-level trends can give us an idea of where to focus our attention.

## Job families in decline and on the rise



Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum

### Shock of the new

Jobs seem to be becoming more abstract. As we spend more time in the virtual digital world, we see more new occupations arising. Making, creating and operating those very digital platforms, for instance.

But whole ecosystems are also emerging. Advertising on Google used to be something a small business owner could do herself, but has now become so complex and specialized that millions of consultants make a living from managing online advertising services. Facebook, meanwhile, created the social media consulting advisory business. Video games gave rise to gold farming and the increasingly massive eSports industry. There are even students earning

their rent cheques by walking people's smartphones around to hatch Pokemon Go eggs.

And if you think these aren't proper jobs, ask yourself what someone growing up in the 19th century would have made of the fact that in 2016 some of the world's highest-paid people are running around after footballs. What would they have made of job titles such as psychologist, space lawyer, personal trainer or brand consultant?

At the same time there's a movement in the opposite direction, towards the tangible and authentic. The food industry is abuzz with enterprises that extol the virtues of local, seasonal, farm-to-table products and services – among them pop-up restaurants, street-food trucks, microbreweries, urban farms and cooperative shops.

Much like the Arts and Crafts movement, born as a reaction to industrialisation in the 19th century, the resurgence of artisanal, "old world" values signals not only a nostalgic desire for handcrafted goods, but a desire for a different model of social and economic progress.

### **From man or to machine**

No one really knows which jobs will be automated in the future. But one thing is clear: as machines become more pervasive, so too do the humans who teach and interact with them. As we've already seen in the airline business, autopilot didn't put pilots out of a job; instead it foreshadowed an increasing collaboration between human and machine on complex tasks.

As automation gains ground, the human workforce has the intriguing possibility of further developing uniquely human skills that machines cannot match or replicate. In an unusual twist on industry practice, automotive giant Toyota is removing robots from its factories because human workers can, unlike their machine counterparts, propose ideas for improvement.

Machines, it seems, are not very good with innovation. They're not very good at certain types of agility, either. Watch Parisian waiters in action and ask yourself how long it would take for robots to put them out of a job.

Then there's empathy, creativity, leadership, intuition and social intelligence. If I were to give younger people an idea of the skills they'll need, these would be on the list, as well as advice to pay attention to how machines function and think.

A piece of wisdom I gleaned from the father of a friend who once fled from the USSR was: "Learn your enemy's language." If machines are coming for us we need to understand how they function.

### **Lessons from history**

The problem with the changing world of work is not so much the loss of opportunities as the period of transition.

A few years ago, I sat down with the CEO of a 40,000-people company and asked him to list the skills he thought would be needed in a digital, data-driven future. He mentioned programmers, designers and online marketing specialists. I then asked him to list the skills his company had on the payroll. The difference was painfully obvious.

For those whose training is becoming obsolete, and organisations needing completely new skills in a short amount of time, the transition will be complicated. As the author Alvin Toffler once predicted, the future belongs to those who can unlearn and relearn.

History tells us that technology creates more opportunities and jobs. The state of the world might look confusing and worrying, but it is not. Virtual or tangible, automated or humanised, work is changing in many ways, but the fundamentals remain: acquiring skills and doing things that people need.

Skating to where the puck will be is much easier than it seems, as long as you stick to a few basic rules: being curious, open, and ready to experiment and to follow the direction the world is moving in.