

Chapter 1

Redefining Higher Education and Work

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ABSTRACT

This chapter and book provide the foundation for executives, academic leaders, faculty, and students to analyze the realities of higher education today, strategies that would ensure success of academic institutions, and factors that would lend to student success. In particular, the book addresses essentials of online learning, strategies to ensure success of online degrees and courses, effective course development practices, key support mechanisms for students, and ensuring student success in online degree programs. Furthermore, the book addresses the future of work, preferences of employees, and how work can be redesigned to create further employee satisfaction, engagement, and increase productivity. In particular, the book covers insights that would lend to ensuring remote employees feel valued, included, and are being provided relevant support to thrive in their roles.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has changed significantly over the last few decades. Traditional face-to-face degrees are being revamped in a bid to ensure they stay relevant in the 21st century and being offered online. Work has also changed. There is little doubt as to the impact of digital communication, remote work, and societal changes on the nature of work itself. Many have argued the need for organizations to be more agile, flexible, entrepreneurial, and creative. COVID-19 has created significant impact on work

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and education. Even prior to the pandemic, the future of work was unfolding. Organizations continue to focus on digitalization, remote work, employee empowerment and workforce diversity. Similarly, higher education is also reinventing itself to transform through the ability to offer online degree programs, virtual support strategies, and integrating advanced digital learning management systems into instructional design. Work and education are traversing a path of immense changes adapting to global trends and consumer preferences.

This chapter and book provide the foundation for executives, academic leaders, faculty, and students to analyze the realities of higher education today, strategies that would ensure success of academic institutions, and factors that would lend to student success. In particular, the book addresses essentials of online learning, strategies to ensure success of online degrees and courses, effective course development practices, key support mechanisms for students, and ensuring student success in online degree programs. Furthermore, the book addresses the future of work, preferences of employees, and how work can be re-designed to create further employee satisfaction, engagement, and increase productivity. In particular, the book covers insights that would lend to ensuring remote employees feel valued, included, and are being provided relevant support to thrive in their roles.

The world has witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on work education and beyond. How has work changed and how has the delivery of education evolved since the pandemic? Over time, we have been gradually witnessing the changing nature of work itself. There is a general demand for more meaningful work, balance of life's priorities, and greater input from employees and designing their work.

A fundamental shift is taking place in the way we think about the future of work and its' relationship to education, training and the labor market. Until recently, expanding higher education was widely believed to result in higher earnings, reflecting an insatiable demand for knowledge workers (Brown, 2020). There is significant interest and integration of artificial intelligence, automation, and robotics shifting from prior generations of agriculture and manufacturing. While some jobs will be lost, and many others created.

Speculation about the future of work is typically centered on how new or emerging technologies could potentially change which skills are in demand, what jobs exist, which sectors will thrive or shrink, and how employee-employer relationships may shift. But changes in demographics and globalization, as well as in politics, culture, and society, will also be critical in determining where the world of work is headed (Committee for Economic Development of The Conference, 2020).

A report by McKinsey (2020) highlighted that before the pandemic, remote work had struggled to establish much of a beachhead, as companies worried about its impact on productivity and corporate culture. With the advent of COVID-19, however, tens of millions of employees were sent home, armed with laptops and other digital technologies, to start work. Now, some employers intend to increase the number of their employees working remotely at least some of the time, although at far lower levels than seen during lockdowns and quarantines.

The report further noted that across all sectors, 15 percent of executives surveyed amid the pandemic said at least one-tenth of their employees could work remotely two or more days a week going forward, almost double the 8 percent of respondents who expressed that intention before COVID-19.

The world has witnessed a rise in remote working for knowledge-based organizations (Vienne, 2020). This has notable benefits: Companies can save on real estate costs, hire and utilize talent globally, mitigate immigration issues, and experience productivity gains, while workers can enjoy geographic flexibility. At the same time, concerns include how to communicate across time zones, share knowledge that isn't yet codified, socialize virtually and prevent professional isolation, protect client data, and avoid slacking.

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