The Future of Work: What’s the working world of tomorrow?

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24.03.2012 - 25.03.2012: Talent Recruiting & Retention: Winning the war for talents

23.03.2012: Speed, Action: Results: The Workplace of the Future

1. What do you offer to the participants of the one-day-event "Workplace of the Future? What can they expect?

The FutureWork Forum is a network of HR experts from different branches. During the workshop participants will profit from various expertises and they can especially count on practical insights. They will learn the external conditions which will form and influence the working environment of tomorrow. These are macro-factors like labor law, demographic trends and technology, but also micro-factors such as the role of internal coaching/mentoring and the recruiting and retention of talents.

My seminar has two modules. In the first module „Career Choices of Generation Y&Z and their Employability“ I will analyze and characterize the generations „Y“ and „Z“. And I will discuss which career-option could be relevant for the new generation.

In the second module „New Corporate Structures: Work Practices to Unleash the Talent of Future Generations“ I will present models which are applicable in the real world to attract and retain talents and to use their full potential.

2. You are researching the working environment of tomorrow. Mankind has always had ideas about the future. What's the difference between man's imagination an the work of the FutureWork Forum with its intention to anticipate the workplace of tomorrow?

The difference lies in the method. We from the Futurework Forum acquire and work with scientific facts. Based on these facts we show trends and based on the trends we give guidance specifically for and with our customers and partners.

The added value of the FutureWork Forum lies in the complimentary knowledge of all partners and experts involved. In my case you'll have a mix of HR experience as founder and CEO of HR Matching AG, my know-how as a entrepreneurship coach and as well my knowledge as a researcher in the field of entrepreneurship.
The FutureWork Forum specifically works in the following fields:
- Research around the topic "future of work"
- Support our customers (firms) and their management with expert knowledge
- Reporting on the subject "future of work"
- Doing presentations and workshops
- Organizing coaching and mentoring programs

3. You are easily on the losing end when predicting the future. The flexible world of work and economy does not stick to any forecast.

As I said, we don’t make any forecasts. On the contrary. Based on our expertise we analyze trends and develop scenarios to meet possible trends. However, I would not say that the working world is not following any rules. There is for example a permanent change on the job market, called employer-pull and employee-push. These cycles are predictable although not every branch of industry undergoes the same cycles.

Next to these cycles, there is a long-term change on the demographic level. Consider employment a generation ago and today. Again, we interpret developments and propose guidance. We don’t construct any kind of models, not at all. We are not clairvoyants like the visionaries in a variété theatre. All we do is showing trends on a macro level and recommend certain behavior patterns. Take the Google ‘80/20’ working principle, leaving 20 percent creative time to the employees. Today, there is almost any industry branch which would not adopt that principle in certain kind of ways. Trends, as you see, can be predictable.

4. You personally research in the fields of entrepreneurship and how unemployed people can start their own business. This could lead - on the long run - to a growth of micro firms and a split of the working world into smallest entities and a regionalization in a globalized world. A trend or a wrong assumption?

We have launched a study in 2009 and have surveyed over 40’000 founders in cooperation with national departments (SECO in Switzerland, BfA in Germany and Pôle Emploi as well as Office National de l’Emploi (ONEM) in France). For governments are facing the question how to reduce unemployment.

I would not support your argument of regionalization. We have always known micro firms. Their importance for any economy is undisputed. Such firms are also started by formerly unemployed people, but mostly by former employees. Thus, it would be wrong to assume that any employment crisis could be overcome leading unemployed people from inoccupation to entrepreneurship. Don’t forget that not everybody is a born entrepreneur. To start a business is just another opportunity to escape the boredom of unemployment, another way back to life.

Talking about the size of the companies: although we see a strong trend towards entrepreneurship, we don’t consider this trend to be a counter-movement to globalization. Consider that the trigger for the globalized economy is technological and
economic progress, not structural matters like the mentioned ones. But as the economic needs on a regional level are distinct from those on an international, say ‘global’ level, I would not play off small businesses against multi-nationals. Both have their right to exist and both have advantages and disadvantages. Small businesses contribute, on the one hand, to a local awareness and to identity for a region. On the other hand, there is, again, not a rule of thumb for any region in the world. Small and medium enterprises are widespread in Switzerland. In other countries the situation is different due to geographic and economic factors.

Our survey confirmed that the chance of survival for a company is over 85% after three years which is a very high probability. In Switzerland, such businesses create an average of more than two new jobs. These are impressive figures and underline the importance for this matter.

5. Where do you see differences between the Generations X, Y and Z in terms of work?

Without generalizing: Different generations have different characteristics which characterize the everyday work. But we should stick to our culture, as the three labels do not apply to the second or the third world.

Generation X are the children of the WW2 generation. They lived economic growth in the 60ies and the depression in the 70ies. The witnessed the first computerization of the working world.

I belong to Generation Y. I remember a life without computers, but early in my life have computers dominated my everyday life. This generations profits from the technological progress but has a clear focus on personality; nevertheless, they face a blending of both identity and community.

There is a flow between generation Y and generation Z (internet generation). Generation Z is completely in the wake of virtual communities. The concept of friends diminishes while the concept of community arises.

What does this mean for the working world of tomorrow for the generation Y (working) and Z (entering the market)?

Keywords to describe the everyday work are: vision, culture, community, intrapreneurship, flexibility, the contribution of your own, social media, loss of identity, loss of loyalty, mentoring, flexible working models, crowd working, open source and instant compensation models.

There is the concept of the solo-self-employed, an alternative model to the classy full-time employee, a model not everybody can cope with. You need to embody a manager, controller, contacter at the same time. In this new working world, individual fulfillment and self-exploitation, happiness and forms of mental overload will be side by side.
6. The future of work can cause a headache to employees but also to HR managers. Recruiting of talents and talent retention are keywords. Who must become more flexible: the knowledge worker or the companies?

A complex subject, indeed. I will talk about in my workshop at the Lorange Institute.

Both need to adapt, but instantly I would say that companies need more flexibility than employees. Here is why: highly educated graduates (top talents) are less focused on a region. They search a professional challenge in a global context why companies must fight harder to win and keep the top talents. To me this is the reason why the war for talents broke out. Not due to lack of talents; the level of education is higher than ever. The war broke out due to the global context. It has become harder for a company to present itself as an attractive employer.

On the other side, graduates must adopt their expectancies. Companies are confronted with wage demands that are way beyond the value of the candidate. The misjudgment of your own abilities is a real issue for companies as especially graduates from universities lack of practical knowledge and first need internal training to gain the necessary speed.

7. Work with no education is not imaginable anymore in our world. The educational trend is 'economic education'. Where does the economization of education lead the working environment?

Quite often the market requires an economic degree. The war for talents which we mentioned before is something very typical for the technical sector (engineering, IT). One of the most important drivers for economic growth is innovation through technical progress. This means that technical specialists need to work ever more focused to bring forth innovation. This trend could lead to a split between innovation und economy and profitability. In order that these talents are not getting lost in minor details, an additional economic education is of great importance.

We teach the same courses at different academies and institutions such as the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia. Key is a good mixture between economic know-how and a technological basis. Obviously, this accounts only for technological driven enterprises. Pure service companies focus economic education rather than a technological.