"For every complex problem, there is a solution that is clear, simple, and wrong." H. L. Mencken

Spending only what you need

No, not money, but time. As the child of a migrant single mother, I grew up with the refrain, "How will I afford [*INSERT latest bill to be paid*]?", whereas my son is growing up with a father who complains, "How will I find the time for [*INSERT latest obligation*]?" He knows too well that his time-poor dad is always looking for ways to reduce labour intensity, delegate or simply not do inessential things.

So I've been fascinated by the rise of "micro timeshifting" during this pandemic. We've shifted to record levels of convenience, next-day shipping, 24-hour food delivery, flexible work productivity. Basically we're becoming a desynchronised society. But we didn't need a pandemic to do this — I believe we've seen this coming for a while.

Businesses like Coursera and Google's new "career certificates" are disrupting universities by creating an educational delivery system that allows people use their time in 8 - 12 minute chunks at times that suit them, do assessment, ask questions when it suits them. And, at no or little cost.

And podcasts and audiobooks are seriously disrupting radio, publishing and other media. They're time-shifted (I can listen when I like); location-independent (I can listen anywhere I've got my phone); and free (mostly, they cost nothing). Even better, they bring to my ears the world's leading thinkers and commentators, saving me the bother and expense of buying books and reading them.

Question: What do you do to recognise that your customers' time is more valuable to them than their money?

Employable forever

The current lockdown has created a perilous employment environment for many, especially those who are not knowledge workers. Richard Miller is a revolutionary educator who's asked the question, "What are the capabilities a person should learn if they're never to be displaced, and are always to be in demand?"

He's an engineer who has completely rethought the typical narrow specialisations most specialists inhabit. Based on decades of training entrepreneurial engineers he is convinced the answer to his question boils down to these five things:

1. Learning things that matter;
2. Learning in context;
3. Learning in teams;
4. Envisioning what has never been;
5. Doing whatever it takes to make it happen.

Miller says, "Do each of these 20 times and you will be employable forever".

Question: Do you think he's right? Anything you'd add?

Are we intelligent enough?

Before writing this, I've just visited my mother, who's 88, and requires a periodic 'support to the aged' visit from me during lockdown. It turns out her local Council's aged care assessor also visited her today, who established she only requires a single hour of domestic cleaning each week. "Thank God", my mother said, "I don't want those busy-bodies in my house".

I asked to see the checklist the assessor had used, and I thought about how low-tech this once-yearly process is. By contrast, I recalled a recent conversation with an Uber driver who told me he's a PhD candidate working on a wearable device that can predict falls in elderly people.

I've also come across several offerings like this product that analyses home care visit notes by artificial intelligence to predict when a client was likely to get ill, or require hospitalisation. And, here's another one: a chatbot in the UK that its makers claim can diagnose medical conditions as accurately as a GP.

In a world where everything is turning digital I trust we'll be able to employ digital platforms where they're truly valuable, and displace only those people whose jobs are well below the abilities of machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Questions: In your organisation, whose expertise will artificial intelligence replace?

As always, please send me your feedback by email to ww@workwell.com.au. What would you like me to write about next time? Let me know!

Have a wonderful weekend, all.

Andrew