



SO LONG, TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Illustration: Ruby Loftus
Screwing a Breech Ring,
a 1943 painting by the
British painter Laura Knight
(Wikimedia)

JON FOSTER-PEDLEY, Dean and Director of
Henley Business School Africa, ponders our
working future in the light of business sustain-
ability, education and digital disruption



The digital disruption world is upon us and it's going to take away a lot of traditional employment. It is going to force us to think about the kind of future that we want to create for our children and ourselves, providing us with unique opportunities to change our lives in fundamental ways.

It is difficult to try to hold the tide of digital disruption and globalisation because countries will slide into un-competitiveness. You can't hold the waters back just by saying I don't like the inconvenience of digital structures changing. Before long, other countries will be better connected, have better access to information and create better business growth processes. And countries that are not using that, face the risk of sliding into oblivion and irrelevance.

We have to **create a society** or **country** that is going to **make information a priority.**

Countries need to be building their skills to be competitive, which if not done, will result in a population of people who are under-educated and not geared for the global and changing job market. What also happens is that you will find other people, especially young people, who are embracing change, will be using digital media in a creatively and disruptive way in business and changing how things are being done.

In the future, more work will be available for those who know how to create, operate and maintain digital technologies while other job roles will become redundant. With the potential to create considerable unemployment globally, we need to find

alternative ways for people to put food on the table and enjoy a quality life. Without this we are going to face new forms of global crises.

Learning

Digital connectedness is also changing the educational landscape and challenging business schools and other learning institutions to relook at their value proposition. With information so widely available on the Internet and thousands of free online courses, learning institutions can no longer be places where people just sit in a classroom and listen to an expert.

Learning institutions need to transform themselves into spaces of engagement and debate, places where there are no clear answers, but rather multiple perspectives. They must be in places where people come to learn to interpret information and use knowledge to make sense of conflicting opinions. Having these skills are essential for business in the digital age.

To continue, you must educate people. Something must be done about improving people's skills around the subject of digital disruption. There are more than just basic skills such as basic labour, basic mining, and basic agriculture. We need to understand the effects of new communication methods, and how digital media can be used. One of the biggest challenges is that people have generalised information. Anyone can have general information, but companies need to understand that this can be destroyed by the disruptive revolution.

However, we should not fear this because, as soon as people are fearful they become conservative. The solution is to educate people on how to use digital assets to build a developing country. We have to find ways to organise ourselves, use funding



more effectively, waste money less, build assets, and save money by not importing things that can be substituted locally.

If leaders are to think long term, they need to buy into and commit to education. This starts early in schools by giving children access to decent information and simple computers to do information projects. This is because the value of technology in disruptive education (ie education that is up to ten times more cost effective) facilitates global interaction. You can now connect countries like Italy, USA, West Africa, or Europe into a single classroom.

Digital disruption can be used for good or bad. What you can't do is to stop this from happening.

You can access information and data that is also cheap. This means that children need to have easier access to this information. It will allow children to more easily understand marketing, accessing information on international markets, communicate with people, attracting investment, and develop new ideas. This will help young people learn and invent things. What digital technology allows you to do is to be accountable and take responsibility at an early age to develop your own ideas.

Digital disruption will result in a more sophisticated and global orientation towards politics and business management. For Africa, we have to find means of connecting with other people, whether it's in China, the US or Europe, and learn lessons from them. Digital education creates more democratisation in a country and that is really good news because it allows your children

and your children's children to have better opportunities.

There are massive education opportunities available by going to the many online resources now available resulting in more ideas flowing in. The downside is that it can be more challenging to establish because of regimes in some countries, which still want to have a monopolistic control over digital resources. Economies that have embraced digital disruption such as Rwanda, are driving a number of initiatives that have increased the amount of available learning information, building employment, and empowering people economically, if not yet politically.

There are models that we need to look at. If we look at Taiwan and South Korea, these are strong political countries that have managed their economies effectively and more or less democratically. For you to educate people quicker, you the leader needs to be educated or at a minimum to fully understand the power of education. What is needed is a good education system and critical thinking. On balance, digital disruption, like any tool, can be used for good or bad. What you can't do is to stop this from happening. ➤

CONNECT WITH JON



Jon Foster-Pedley is a Dean, strategist, educator, education designer, speaker, entrepreneur, international business executive, academic and consultant. Director of MBAs and numerous leadership and executive programmes, he is a specialist in strategy, creativity, innovation and executive education.
www.fosterpedley.com www.henleysa.ac.za

