


Do you need help being human?

IF THERE'S A single word that sums up how many workers feel about the economy of recent decades, a good one could be "angst." Our increasingly competitive, interconnected world has demanded cost savings and efficiencies, pushing many workers across organizations to act more like machines. And the acceleration of digital technologies only seems to be adding a new layer of pressure, with the "always on" erosion of work-life balance and the threat of redundancy as machines not only outperform us at standardized tasks, but increasingly at more complex, value-added work.

The good news is it's not all bad news. We believe the world is actually in the early stages of a shift from this angst economy to one defined by the uniquely human attributes of creativity, curiosity, imagination, and social intelligence. They're the attributes





no machine can (yet) replicate, and it's humans that can offer the best answer for organizations seeking new ways to create value in a rapidly changing environment, especially when customers are often less willing to accept the standardized products and services that large companies were traditionally designed to provide.

Yet we may be our own worst enemies when it comes to unlocking this uniquely human potential. At a time when companies commonly need workers who will take on challenges, push boundaries, and connect with others in order to develop better ideas and more creative approaches, our survey of more than 4,500 Americans found while 51 percent were willing to risk failure for the sake of innovation, 41 percent said potential negative consequences stopped them from taking action. Some 49 percent said they were uncomfortable with unfamiliar situations, 54 percent felt uneasy about making decisions with an uncertain outcome, 52 percent disagreed with the idea that rules are made to be broken, and 43 percent liked to know what to expect each day.

Taken together, these responses suggest that, for a significant portion of the workforce, rules—in the form of processes and policies—and concern about penalties and threats to job security can stand in the way of taking risks and improvising. That can be problematic when workers who don't innovate and learn will likely find themselves increasingly marginalized in a rapidly changing and unpredictable business environment.

It all means that if we are to make the shift from angst to creativity, many companies have a choice: keep focusing on standardization and cost savings and push workers into a defensive stance of irrelevance and ineffectiveness, or focus on using available technology to offload the routine, free up human capacity, and tap into and cultivate the passion in your workforce. We define worker passion as comprising three attributes: questing, connecting, and commitment. While only 13 percent of the US workforce currently has all three, companies can help move workers from being rule-following automatons to creative problem solvers who will seek out difficult challenges and connect with others to make a significant and increasing impact. Leaders should consider:

- **Leading by example.** Commit to making a personal change, not just an organizational one. Ask yourself: What is keeping me from stepping up with enthusiasm for the challenge rather than fearing failure?
- **Providing focus.** Specialization and silos often prevent employees from gaining the perspective needed to address, or even be aware of, challenges. Help employees recognize what's interesting or important about new challenges.
- **Creating the environment.** Rethink performance measurement to encourage employees to work with, and seek challenges with, others. Celebrate efforts that create knowledge that might lead to higher performance, and eliminate the real disincentives that prevent all but the bravest from taking risks. ●

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