



## Navigating the fast-tracked future

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In 2015, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) launched the future of work initiative by hosting conferences and supplying comprehensive reports with recommendations. The BEC has always been involved in discussions on the Future of Work and, briefly looking back to 2017, we published our Employment Compass with a focus on how the future of work will be shaped. Throughout that edition, we spoke about the Barbadian economy being driven towards 24/7 operations due to the rapid transformations within the labour markets and the changing nature of work for example the integration of flexible work arrangements into the workplace.

One article which was provided by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) referred to the future of work being one where the patterns of employment will be altered compared to what was known as regular business.

I am sure that when the article was written by the IOE, they had no idea that a pandemic would radically alter all we know. We can however all agree that the existence of "regular" business has definitely been disrupted, and where possible, employers are seeking possible alternatives with an aim to adapt as quickly and efficiently as possible to ensure that their organisations remain open. The future of work has therefore arrived much quicker than anticipated and quite unannounced. 2020 and beyond will be uncertain and volatile as we continue to grapple with what can be done and how business can adjust and continue to best suit the times.

Most times when mention is made to the future of work, the immediate thought is the integration of technology into the workplace and some employees tend to believe that their job may be on the line. The future of work is much more than moving from a contemporary style to a modernized, tech-savvy style of business and yes, though some jobs may become obsolete, there are always ways to remedy employment whether it is through entrepreneurship or skill enhancement. Let us not forget to consider:

- what careers can be created,
- what business opportunities are out there,

- what skills will employees now have to acquire,
- what type of jobs can employers create, and
- what type of policies should be implemented to accommodate the shift.

Re-tooling and re-skilling have now become buzz words as a focus on self-development is one sure way to ensure as we seek ways to continue to enrich our capabilities. Currently there has been an enhancement in the variety of educational opportunities being made available in both government and private organisations. Some examples are our government's involvement in the workforce recovery programme being hosted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Partnership Relations while organisations such as the BEC is hosting learning and skill augmentation workshops utilising an online platform. No matter your age, you should never stop learning something new. The responsibility of skill enhancement would never solely fall on the employer.

We may not have moved towards the 24/7 economy just yet, but we have surely evolved and continue to evolve in the type of businesses being opened, the organisational policy adjustments relative to work from home and long distance working, and in the technologies being used. Though it has been indicated by the OECD that the number of jobs within the OECD countries can possibly result in 1 out of 2 persons being displaced in some way with automation, it does not mean that there will be a loss of employment. It means that ambition and innovation is required, and opportunity has to be sought; for example, an organisation may be able to now offer its tech skill services to a company abroad that may require the necessary support. As the future of work becomes our current reality, the world is our oyster and services need not to be confined to your local jurisdiction.

You will have to continue to move forward to ensure you remain with the trend but, what is most important here is successfully adapting to what boosts your operations. Organisations should not seek to adjust so they match the future trends or because it is what the large companies are doing. You as the employer must discover what technology complements your operations for it to remain viable and you must also ensure that this is a shared vision between you and your team.

The Barbados Employers' Confederation will continue to partake in and drive discussions on the future of work and ways in which employers can adjust their workplace practices and policies/frameworks which have been in existence for numerous years. As employers across Barbados continue to contend with the fast-tracked future, the process will need to be managed effectively as it is where the focus needs to be. How will you manage and navigate your organisational changes in this fast-tracked future?

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