

Pathways to real jobs in a changing work landscape

4 Comments

Kasy Chambers | 17 November 2016

In Australia, industry change and unprecedented technological progress have seen an automation of jobs that were previously done by people.



In Rick Measham's recent piece in *Eureka Street* discussing the need for innovation in employment, he made a few interesting points about what this means for employment in this country. He asks: 'What are we planning for a society in which there is no paid work for most people?'

Innovation is absolutely necessary in this debate, according to Fairfax workplace editor Anna Patty, who told ABC's *Sunday Night* program last week:

'I think there is a real policy vacuum. I went to a breakfast recently where Michaelia Cash, the employment minister, was basically saying that in 15 years' time, 40 per cent of existing jobs will be automated, and Australia needs to embrace the way Air B&B and Uber do business ... but there is not a lot of detail in how we adjust to this new future of work.'

Now, I can admit to swearing on occasion at automated checkout machines at Coles and Woolworths. Perhaps I crave the human contact, and perhaps machines simply need to get better at recognising unexpected items in the bagging area. But if these are the way of the future, we need to imagine pathways for those who used to staff the checkouts.

Research needs to determine how to get people who want to work into meaningful work that provides for their basic human needs and that is at their skill level.

In the *Jobs Availability Snapshot*, a research report that informs Anglicare's annual *State of the Family Report*, a comprehensive analysis of actual job advertisement numbers show the proportion of higher skill level jobs available in the Australian labour market has grown over the

past ten years, while the proportion for people with lower level skills and experience has fallen, and the divide is growing.



For May 2016, the Department of Employment's *Vacancy Report* showed 37 per cent of all positions advertised were at the top skill level, and only 13 per cent were for skill level 5.

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The human face is what really illustrates this situation. Corey Fredrickson (pictured) has received housing through a St Vincent de Paul's refuge in Canberra and food assistance through Anglicare. Corey did not complete year ten, and has had a number of odd jobs since leaving school. Corey is passionate about gaming, and will often spend hours on the computer, filling in time after losing his job recently. He says he would love to do some training in gaming, but that his Job Network provider didn't have the money to support him in such training.

It wasn't their fault of course, Job Network providers receive government funding and are necessarily conditioned as to what training can be sponsored. But what happens when the training they can provide has no professional application in the workforce and fails to cater to the skills and interests of the individual either? Arbitrary training might be provided in the form of VET, but it becomes little more than scrap paper when the jobs don't exist.

The gaming industry is probably one that will grow. If we think innovatively, IT based upskilling would be a good path for Corey.

So, what should people do when the job market radically changes around them? How can the needs of employers and employees be met as people's capacity to work ebbs and flows over a lifetime?

As Measham suggests, perhaps not everyone should be pushed to seek work in the traditional sense. Welfare organisations like Vinnies, Communities at Work, Salvos and Anglicare see clients on a regular basis that will always need some sort of financial support. Their cases are varied of course, but a society which attempts to force these people into jobs that don't exist is unnecessarily harsh and lacks imagination. One solution, as Measham argued, might lie in the direction of a guaranteed income.

Recent moves by the federal government seem to be heading in the opposite direction, however, looking to penalise welfare recipients, force longer waiting periods, and reduce allowances like Newstart, a payment that already isn't enough to live on.

It is very difficult for people receiving welfare to hear that they need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps when structurally, there is a less than ten per cent chance that they will actually find the sort of employment they need to move beyond welfare.

In fact what we need is a complete overhaul of the welfare system, so that it embraces innovative ideas for those who will not be able to transition into work. Such an overhaul would be served well by creating training opportunities and employment options that are based in real-life industries where there is growth; and by developing holistic policy that doesn't simply bandage a wound, but treat its cause.



Kasy Chambers is Executive Director of Anglicare Australia. On 31 October, Anglicare Australia released their flagship publication which this year focuses on employment and is titled **Positions Vacant: When the jobs aren't there**.

Post-script: Shortly after the writing of this article, Corey found employment, in a games shop.
