Future Work Skills
2020 Executive Summary

This research from Institute for the Future (IFTF) highlights some of the key drivers that will reshape the landscape of work and proposes ten new work skills that will be critical for the next decade.

METHODOLOGY
In researching this topic, we drew on IFTF’s foundational forecasts in areas as diverse as education, technology, demographics, work, and health. This content was enriched and vetted at a workshop that brought together experts from a wide range of disciplines and professional backgrounds. During this workshop we engaged experts in a number of group exercises to think through key drivers of change and how these will impact workplace skill requirements.

KEY FINDINGS
We chose to highlight six drivers — big, disruptive shifts that are likely to reshape the landscape for organizations and workers. Although each driver is in itself important when thinking about the future, it is the confluence of several drivers working together that produces true disruptions. We then identified ten skills that we believe will be vital for success in the workplace:

» SENSE-MAKING: ability to determine the deeper meaning or significance of what is being expressed
» SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE: ability to connect to others in a deep and direct way, to sense and stimulate reactions and desired interactions
» NOVEL AND ADAPTIVE THINKING: proficiency at thinking and coming up with solutions and responses beyond that which is rote or rule-based
» CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCY: ability to operate in different cultural settings
» COMPUTATIONAL THINKING: ability to translate vast amounts of data into abstract concepts and to understand data-based reasoning

» NEW MEDIA LITERACY: ability to critically assess and develop content that uses new media forms, and to leverage these media for persuasive communication
» TRANSDISCIPLINARITY: literacy in and ability to understand concepts across multiple disciplines
» DESIGN MINDSET: ability to represent and develop tasks and work processes for desired outcomes
» COGNITIVE LOAD MANAGEMENT: ability to discriminate and filter information for importance, and to understand how to maximize cognitive functioning using a variety of tools and techniques
» VIRTUALCollaborATION: ability to work productively, drive engagement, and demonstrate presence as a member of a virtual team
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While all six drivers are important in shaping the landscape in which each skill emerges, the color-coding and placement here indicate which drivers have particular relevance to the development of each of the skills.

Drivers—disruptive shifts that will reshape the workforce landscape

Key skill needed in the future workforce

extreme longevity
Increasing global lifespans change the nature of careers and learning

computational world
Massive increase in sensors and processing power make the world a programmable system

new media ecology
New communication tools require new media literacies beyond text

superstructured organizations
Social technologies drive new forms of production and value creation

globally connected world
Increased global interconnectivity puts diversity and adaptability at the center of organizational operations

Sense-Making
Novel and Adaptive Thinking
Social Intelligence
Computational Thinking
New Media Literacy
Cognitive Load Management
Design Mindset
Cross Cultural Competency
Virtual Collaboration

rise of smart machines and systems
Workplace robotics nudge human workers out of rote, repetitive tasks

novel and adaptive thinking
extreme longevity
new media ecology
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