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**The future of work**

The dawn of technology is breaking rapidly; the speed at which the Covid vaccine was developed, the booming of e-commerce and explosion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is giving a new ray of hope to the age of technological enlightenment or what The Economist terms as, “the roaring twenties”.

Pakistan cannot afford to lag behind in this race. With over 60 percent of its population under the age of 30, the bounty of this technological advancement can unleash a great human potential and if not tackled rightly from this very instance, can wreak a colossal calamity.

The world is changing – or perhaps developing – at an alarming rate. Exponential growth in technology in tandem with the pandemic disruption has doubled the impact of the speed that humanity is moving towards an era where machine learning, big data and augmented reality become part of our daily lives. The impact of the pandemic is visible through an upsurge in digital payments, industrial automations and telemedicine that have increased manyfold in the last few months.

Similarly, “cobots” or collaborative robots have gotten a huge boost in the last few months. Cobot are robots designed to work together with humans, and are particularly useful in the e-commerce industry. According to e-commerce giant Amazon, their revenue during peak pandemic months swelled by over 40 percent. Many of these technological advancements are slashing the jobs that we had traditionally associated with human labor.

To ensure that this wave of AI and technology boom does not engender job loss at a catastrophic rate, it is essential to revisit the traditional economic models.

While there is no denying that a technology-driven world would be more efficient, sustainable and can possibly unlock great human potential, there is also significant research indicating job losses on a huge scale. According to the Future of Jobs report by the World Economic Forum, “job creation is slowing while job destruction accelerates.”

In most cases of these developments, the ball is in the court of the private sector that majorly determines whether these innovations succeed or fail. That being said, the government has an equally challenging task at hand. It needs to ensure that the workforce is equipped for this change to come. This calls for greater public-private partnership.

Similarly, the traditional economic model of reckless fiscal spending to create jobs will not be the solution this time. With the changing landscape, the jobs of tomorrow will require more skills than mere labor. The need of the hour calls for a paradigm shift and more resources to skilling, reskilling and upskilling the population to meet the growing workforce demands of the post-pandemic world.

The following three-fold policy that tackles both the demand and supply-side could be a decent starting point for the government. First, the government needs to skill the people, mainly the segment of the population that is hardest to reskill or upskill and mostly does not have a formal education. This is the segment that is most vulnerable to this change.

Second, a radical shift is needed in our outdated curriculum. It is about time AI and technological learning is at the heart of our learnings from the school onwards. As put forth by McKenzie partner Dirk Schmautzer, technology should be introduced at the pre-school age. And third, with advancing technology, there is a greater need for soft skills. The new jobs would require greater “… creativity, critical thinking, persuasion and negotiation” writes writes Bernadette Wightman, managing director of BT Group.

These three policies are merely the starting point of a much-needed structured and strategic roadmap if Pakistan needs to compete in the post-pandemic world. It is essential to understand that the choices and decisions we make today will not only define our future but also the future of generations to come.

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