

The Changing Workplace



Daniel Pink

An Interview with Daniel Pink

Business consultant, lecturer, and author, Daniel Pink has written about the global economy and its effects on people worldwide. Pink was interviewed by U.S. State Department staff writer Paul Malamud.



European culture, language
and identity in a new world

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Q: What is globalization, in your view?

Pink: Globalization is the broad movement among economies and societies and technology that is knitting the world closer together and affecting capital markets, technology, and the exchange of information.

Q: What is making this happen?

Pink: I think it's a number of things. One of them is certainly the advent of new technology like the Internet, which allows a child in Zambia to find information almost as fast as the head librarian at Cambridge University. It allows people to stay in touch with their native countries more easily; it allows capital to move across the world to the place where it can be used most advantageously. It confers a greater amount of transparency on governments and political institutions than ever before. It erodes trade barriers. When I think of globalization, I think of it being basically about flows: whether the flows of ideas, flows of capital, flows of goods and services, flows of people—all of which have been made easier and have been accelerated because of globalization.

Q: Are we better or worse off as a result?

Pink: We're better off. In my view, globalization is good, not perfect. And we can't let perfect be the enemy of good. Globalization in general has lifted living standards throughout the world. Now there have been obviously some dislocations from that. If you are an American worker and your manufacturing job goes to a country in the developing world where someone is going to get paid one-fifth of what you're earning, then you have been in some fashion harmed by globalization.

At the same time, that manufacturing worker and his or her family benefit from the lower cost of goods and services because of falling trade barriers. And they benefit obviously from all the technology that helps enable globalization. So my view is that globalization is mostly a plus. And the challenge of public policy, the challenge of political leadership nationally and trans-nationally, is to make sure that people get the benefits of globalization, and that for the

knit – to join people closely together

affect – to produce a change in sth

advent – the coming of

librarian – a person who works in a library

advantageous(ly) – good or useful

confer – give

transparent – easy to understand

erode – to gradually destroy sth

barrier – a situation that makes sth impossible

goods – things that are produced to be sold

accelerate – to make sth happen faster

be better off – be happier or more satisfied

dislocation – stopping a system from working in the normal way

manufacture – mass production

harm – hurt

to benefit – be in a better position because of

challenge – a new or difficult task

benefit – a helpful and useful effect that sth has

downside – the less positive

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downside of globalization, governments and political institutions step in to mitigate its negative effects.

Q: Are there statistics showing that globalization lifts all boats?

Pink: It depends on whose standard of living. Certainly U.S. per capita GDP over the last 50 years has tripled. I am certain living standards in much of the rest of the world have also improved. That said, you've still got more than a billion people on this planet living on less than a dollar a day. So it's not like everybody is living in a land of milk and honey by any long shot, but in general globalization has made things better rather than worse, and in general the present is better than the past. In general, I am almost certain, not because I am a woolly-eyed optimist but because I'm a realist, that the future will be better than the present.

Q: In your book *A Whole New Mind*, you predict that more routine white-collar jobs will flow out of developed nations and into developing ones, and you say that they will be made up for by more creative jobs in America and other developed nations. Yet, this assumes that most people are capable of being highly creative. Suppose most of us are not?

Pink: I disagree with the premise that most people don't have these kinds of abilities. My argument is that economies are automating and off-shoring routine white-collar work—basic accounting, basic financial analysis, even basic legal services—and this is the same sort of pattern that we saw with routine manufacturing work. Today anything that is routine—that is, anything that can be reduced to a script, to a spec sheet, to a set of rules—this kind of work increasingly is going to disappear from the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan, because that kind of work can get done more cheaply by computers and by people overseas.

Now, what that means is that in order to survive in the economy, you have to do something that isn't routine. That tends to be work that is artistic, creative, empathic, about the big picture. And I think that the idea that human beings in general and Americans in particular can't be creative, empathic, big-picture-oriented is flatly wrong.

For example, consider the time when America was moving from an agricultural economy to a manufacturing economy, and people said, "Well, everybody can't go to high school, everybody can't learn to read and write. A good education is only reserved for a certain elite population." What I'm talking about here is not that everyone becomes Salvador Dali, but that everybody becomes adept at these sorts of high-concept, high-touch abilities. And I think that is

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aspects of
mitigate – to make sth less negative

The aphorism "a rising tide **lifts all boats**" is associated with the idea that improvements in the general economy will benefit **all** participants

per capita – for each person
GDP - gross domestic product (the total value of all the goods and services produced by a country in one year)
triple – to become three times as much
not by any long shot – not at all
woolly-eyed – not seeing clearly

predict – to say that sth will happen in the future
white-collar jobs – office jobs
make up for sth -to do sth that corrects a bad situation; to compensate
assume – accept that sth is true

premise- a statement or an idea that forms the basis for a reasonable line of argument
to automate - to use machines and computers instead of people to do a job
to off-shore – to transfer abroad
accounting – the work of keeping financial accounts (business records)
script – a series of instructions for a computer
spec – detailed description

artistic – connected with art, imagination
empathy - the ability to understand another person's feelings, experience, etc.
the big picture – the situation as a whole

elite - group of people in a society, who are powerful and have a lot of influence, because they are rich, intelligent, etc.

adept – skilful
S. Dali – Spanish painter

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eminently doable.

No one would say, "The masses of men cannot become literate." Not everybody can become Toni Morrison. But nearly everyone can become literate. "The masses of men can't become numerate." Well, I don't agree with that. I don't think that everyone can be Albert Einstein, but they can certainly be numerate. And they can go beyond that.

Q: What happens to people in developed nations when people in developing nations of the world become equally well educated and find their own creativity?

Pink: I think that's an excellent point. Tom Friedman deals with this issue in his writing. There are two different schools of thought. One is that China and India are racing us to the bottom. The other one is that they are racing us to the top. Friedman believes—and I agree—that they are racing us to the top, again not because I'm an optimist, but because that's always been the pattern, that's always been the trajectory. Now that doesn't mean that it is 100 percent certain to be the trajectory again, but that's what I would bet on.

Q: The nature of work is changing in other ways. Computers are becoming more complex and capable. How soon would you expect computers to compete with humans for professional-grade work?

Pink: I think in some ways that they are doing certain kinds of professional work. Look at TurboTax [a software program that helps people prepare their taxes]. We have all this concern about off-shoring and outsourcing. There were 3 million U.S. tax returns done in India last year by Indian tax-preparers, but there were 21 million tax returns done by TurboTax. So in some fashion, software already can do certain elements of professional work, and increasingly it's going to do more and more.



Watching real-time video from inside a sewer line, a technician maneuvers a robot through a sewer.

What that means is that the accountants who want to survive can't make a living off of doing the same sort of thing that a piece of \$39.95 software can do. They have to do things that are harder to reduce to computer code, which is a more sophisticated type of what peoples' financial needs are and giving

higher-level financial advice.

It's the same thing to some extent with stockbrokers and investment as well. Nowadays many Americans do their investing on line. Information is widely available, Internet brokerage transactions are cheap because you can execute

eminently – very, extremely
doable – able to be done

literate – able to read and write
Toni Morrison – American writer, Nobel Prize winner
numerate – having basic knowledge of Mathematics

issue – topic, problem

to race s.o. to the bottom/to the top – to adjust to a situation by lowering/raising standards

trajectory- (technical) the curved path of sth that has been fired, hit or thrown into the air

professional-grade work
work of professional quality

tax - people pay tax (=money) to the government according to their income

tax return - an official document in which you give details of the amount of money that you have earned so that the government can calculate how much tax you have to pay

outsource – arrange for sb outside a company to do work for that company

accountant - a person whose job is to keep or check financial accounts

sophisticated – clever and complicated

advise – give sb help and information on a subject that you know a lot about

stockbroker - a person that buys and sells stocks and shares for other people

brokerage transaction – buying or selling stocks

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them on your own computer, and you no longer need a stockbroker on the phone to perform the routine transactions.

At some point that stockbroker is going to try to become a financial adviser, to understand your situation in a more detailed way and offer you kinds of advice that a computer program can never do.

Q: What about robots? How do you expect them to affect available work?

Pink: If you go to a manufacturing floor today, what you see is not the manufacturing floor of the 1920s or even of the 1950s, where you had a bunch of guys in greasy overalls turning wrenches on an assembly line. What you see are people, often with associate's degrees, who are basically running these robots. The robots have no autonomy or will of their own. They answer to software code. So someone has to write the code, someone has to monitor those robots. So this is increasingly what a lot of manufacturing work is. This calls on obviously a much higher level of skill.

Q: Do you feel human dignity is threatened by some of the by-products of globalization? Some argue that bonds of family, clan, community, hierarchy are loosening—that even the dignity of individual achievement based on the development of individual skills means less because roles shift so frequently in a globalized economy.

Pink: That's an interesting question. If you consider the Western world a harbinger of the future, the family connections here are much more diffuse than in other parts of the world. You have much greater mobility, where people don't live necessarily where their parents live or where their brothers and sisters live. There is an array of different family forms now that call into question the nuclear family. The point about identity coming from a lifetime of skills is interesting. I think there is a change there, because the half-life of every sort of ability today is shrinking and shrinking. You cannot make a living by plying one trade for 40 years because it doesn't work that way. The lifespan of a particular set of skills is literally a couple of years. So there's a premium now obviously on learning and learning how to learn and constantly upgrading.

Now I don't know whether that erodes human dignity. One could argue that it might enhance it. It allows people to constantly do better, to not fall into stagnation, to have more chance to flower. But, obviously, individual stories differ and the question is a valid one.

a financial adviser gives advice (→ to advise) on financial matters

manufacturing floor – the parts of a factory where the goods are produced

greasy – covered in a lot of oil
wrench – a metal tool with a specially shaped end for holding and turning things

assembly line – production line
associate's degree – degree that is given after completing two years of study at a junior college
monitor – watch and check

dignity – a sense of your own importance and value

threaten – be a danger to sth
achievement – success
by-product – a thing that happens as the result of sth else
bond – strong connection
shift – change

harbinger – a sign that shows that sth is going to happen soon, often sth bad
diffuse – spread over a wide area

array – collection

nuclear family – a family that consists of father, mother and children

half-life – reduction to half of its original value

shrink – become smaller
ply a trade – do work or business

premium on learning – learning is considered more important than other things

enhance – to increase or further improve the quality of sth
stagnation – not developing, growing or changing