

# HUMAN-CENTRIC THINKING IN HR

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**Abstract:** Human resources as a function has evolved from support function to strategy function. Courtesy the Fayols, Hertzbergs, Maslows of the learned world, the intrinsic value of this tacit function has been realized and realized for good off late. Now the time has come to elevate the standards and take it to next level where the value this function can bring is quantifiable, visible and above all desirable

To attain this state it is imperative that modern days HR demystify the conundrums of contemporary challenges and propose the solutions which are at the intersection of desirable, feasible and viable venn.

To achieve the abovementioned objective HR has to break the shackles of primeval thinking and adopt the Design Thinking. A flow which is the amalgamation of logical and emotional thinking and the outcomes can be disruptive. Presented paper exemplifies how design thinking was implemented in a manufacturing shopfloor to engage employees and inculcate a behaviour of problem solving which in turn helped in increasing the productivity by reducing the downtime and eliminating the waste.

The project team has followed the systematic schema of empathizing, defining, ideating, prototyping and finally testing. The project was successful to the extent that post successful testing the idea was implemented in all the plants across India.

The paper also talks about the concept of gamification of day to day work and bringing in the objectivity through self-managed teams. The entire transition was possible because the thought process moved from legacy thinking to Human centric thinking.

**Keywords:** Human Centric thinking, ORganisation design, emogical, HR breakathon, *Organization Culture*.

Human-Centric Design How Design Thinking Can Power Creative Problem-Solving, Drive Change and Deliver Value.

## **Introduction:**

Through an iterative process of observation, ideation, rapid prototyping and testing, design thinking can help organizations craft a meaningful experience that seamlessly meshes the physical and digital interactions of people, processes and things.

The lone scientist working tirelessly in the lab discovers a breakthrough and changes everything; a sudden inspiration comes in a dream; a brainstorming session among the company's best and brightest leads to the next killer app – all of these scenarios might make for a good movie, but they rarely reflect reality. Creativity and problem-solving are not individual endeavors, nor do they occur in isolation. Fortunately, these myths are slowly fading as companies embrace new ways of fostering innovation across their organizations. In the past, a company may have approached the creation of a new product or service by defining a set of requirements. Today, many now seek to first understand the actual human needs behind the product or service, to develop an overall experience. This approach – often called “design thinking” – is based on developing a thorough understanding of what the user goals are from multiple viewpoints – emotional, psychological and behavioral.

Human-centric business process management is an approach to BPM that considers human skills and activities first and uses automated functions to support them. Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem-solving. It is a process that starts with the people you are designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor-made to suit their needs. Design thinking is the buzzword for the contemporary world which seems to be highly influenced by artificial intelligence and machine learning. Under such circumstances, it is imperative to emphasize on human-centric mindset which breaches the primeval approach of HR and brings forth the attitude of designing programs/processes which creates meaningful experiences. In a nutshell design thinking is a process of "Creative problem solving".

The inception of Human-centric thinking occurred in the product development department, organizations like P&G, Nike, Coca-Cola and IBM realized that this could be replicated in other areas as well and by virtue of this realization they outperformed their peers by 211% measured in terms of Human-centric value index by Human-centric management institute.

Human-centric thinking (HCT) for the human-centric problem is the intelligent approach since these problems are complex in nature and has multiple dimensions and sub-dimensions involved.

Organizations like Nestle, Cisco, LinkedIn and Citrix have implemented HCT to resolve their human resource related issues and have experienced good results out of it.

Cisco organised an '*HR Breakathon*' with the slogan: "In 24 hours HR will never be the same". The purpose was the creation of a sharper HR department in which silo's, time-zones and cultural obstacles cease to exist. That way innovative HR solutions can get the space they need.

LinkedIn, for example, organised a 6-week program with 1000 participants from LinkedIn but also Facebook, Google and other Silicon Valley companies. The main focus was to find solutions for specific issues around low employee engagement.

### **About Human-Centric Thinking:**

With such a preface it is obvious to have the curiosity to understand what this concept is, which appears to be the magic wand, organizations were eagerly waiting.

To understand this concept we need to first understand the challenges of HR programs in a real environment. Majority of the programs owned by HR has to be weighed in three dimensions namely desirability, feasibility and viability. Moreover, the solutions which fall in the intersection of these three Venn is regarded as the right solution. The right solution has emotional as well as logical element involved in it, and they are at their optimal level. Considering only two factors the optimal level should not be confused with 50-50, it should depend upon the challenge and the factors involved in it. Hence in a decision, the emotional aspect can be 10 units, and logical can be 90 or vice-versa yet they are balanced and at an optimal level.

Often in an organizational environment, we come across a situation where three factors (Desirable, feasible and viable) run in three different directions. Let us take an example of a workplace which requires an essential break at fixed interval due to the mundane nature and necessity of concentration. So the desirability here is to provide the employees with a break which can quickly refresh them. Let us assume the solution is to provide them with gaming

consoles near workstation so that they can play during breaks and bust the monotony. This is desired. Now gaming consoles and PlayStation come with a cost, also the study to derive the number of stations, and thumb rules for usage are next. This is done through a feasibility study. Now once these are arranged, it requires the maintenance of consoles, upgrades as well as update of games keeping in mind the wide variety of choices people can have in terms of games, and making them available is next set of challenge. At this point, we think of the viability of the idea.



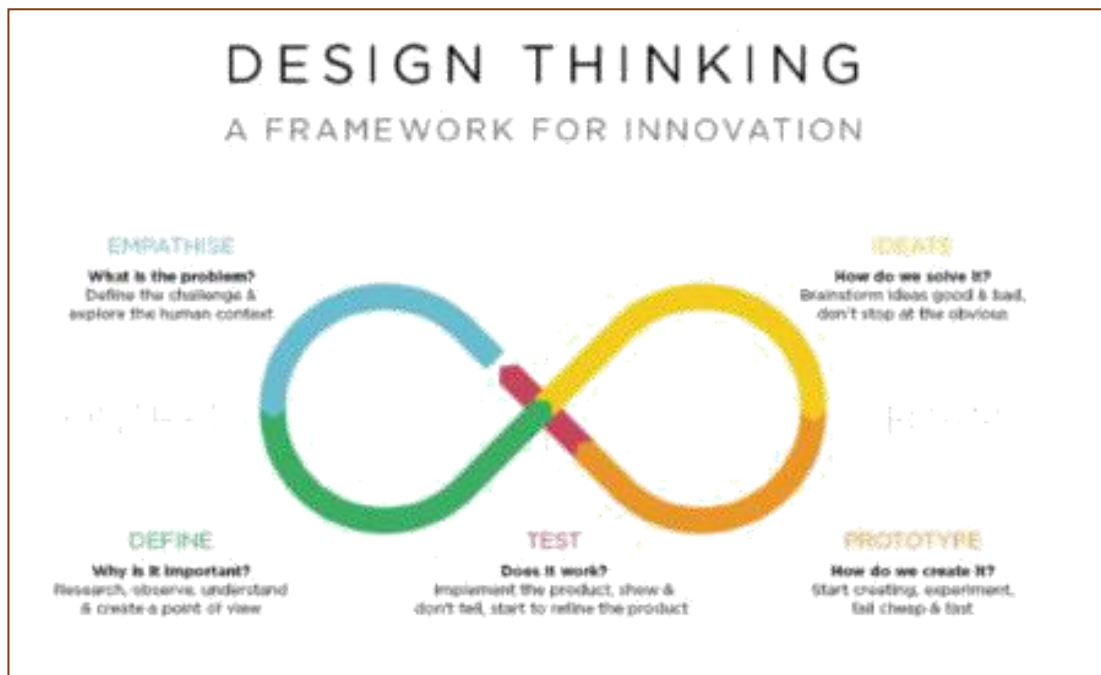
Now, what is DESFEABLE (Desirable+ Feasible) and DESVIABLE (Desirable+ Viable) is not a solution of organizational interest (considering the FEVIABLE (Feasible+Viable) is already a reject since it is not even desired).

So, empathizing with the people desirable solution been thought that is where the emotional chord is being pulled, considering the feasibility and viability the logical aspects been touched upon. Once the right balance is struck between the three dimensions, an EMOGICAL (Emotional + Logical) solution is produced.

Human-centric thinking is focussed on bringing in the Emogical solution through a systematic approach. It is basically a methodology that imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human - centred design ethos. Innovation is inspired by the expectation of people, followed by clearly defining the problem, ideate all possible solutions, creating the prototype, testing it and making the course corrections on need basis. This is a continuous process to challenge the status quo every day and every hour.

The crux of HCT implementation is innovation and empowerment, or maybe innovation through empowerment. This is disruptive from the perspective that the problem solving which was earlier the forte of higher level officers is now shifted to shopfloor people. Best of the solutions come from these people the high officials just weigh the possible solutions and pick the best considering the bigger picture. In a way, it is empowerment for innovation.

Innovation and excellence is a raise without any limit. People who work with a system day in day out can think better about its functioning and possible reasons for disruption. It is essential that their thinking ability is recognized and rewarded. This can seed the field of empowerment which in turn leads to the crops of innovation which eventually results in better yield, reduced cycle and change over time and the combined output can be higher productivity and increased efficiency.



In the presented case study I am bringing the case of a company where my team happened to implement the design thinking for employee engagement. We brought in the concept of gamification of shop floor environment which helped us to increase productivity by 300% without any significant change in the workforce, equipment and process flow. It was done only and only through empowerment and innovation.

Since researcher is no longer part of that organization, he could not get the approval for its brand name usage, but other than that all the aspects are covered in detail to paint the right picture for readers understanding.

### Organization Brief:

This is the case of a pharmaceutical manufacturing company which is ranked amongst the top five in the country has its 15 manufacturing facilities spread in 5 districts across 4 states. The company is a generic manufacturer and produces solid oral dosage, injectable, inhalers, and other forms of medicines for US, Asia, Europe and Emerging markets which are smaller yet countries with potential pharmaceutical demand.

### Pharmacy Manufacturing:

The pharmaceuticals market is highly regulated, especially the North American market. The standards expected by the United States Food and Drug Administration Department (USFDA) is exceptionally high. Unless USFDA approves a plant and the drug, in particular, it cannot be sold in the US market. There is stringent scrutiny of process and documentation for the current as well as batches of the past 5 years. Likewise, other countries have their own audit process and complying with all the norms of respective countries is mandatory to trade in that country. This makes pharmacy manufacturing a 'ZERO TOLERANCE' zone.

### Empathize:



In design thinking, the first, foremost and the most critical part is empathized. Majority of designs fail because the empathy part is missing. We all have seen the modern days lifts come with the brail signage on buttons. according to reseracher, this is one of the most poorly designed systems we come across in our day-to-day life. The button panel outside lift is often placed at eye level, for a visually impaired person it has to be at hand level because they feel it, they cannot see it. Similarly, for a midget, this eye level will be beyond the reach. Is the question are these lifts designed to suit to all? The clear answer is absolute "NO". It is designed to suit the mass. So where is the problem? The problem is a system for a visually impaired person, is designed by a person with perfect vision. So did we empathize with the user – "No"? So what is the right approach "Design for practice" or "Practice for Design"? Our design should be in line with practice, not the other way around where we create a practice because something is wrongly designed. One more example researcher noticed in New Delhi airport Terminal two the restroom has a ramp to make it disabled friendly. Researcher found it a half-baked cake. The designer has perhaps seen always a wheelchair being rolled with the help of a second person, is this the case always? Not necessarily. the person can be on a wheelchair yet he can be on his own. However, in a ramp it will be difficult to roll it up, even if it rolls up there is no urinal which can match the height of wheelchair and unfortunately, the loo is so cramped that a disabled person cannot take the wheelchair inside. What is the expectation with such a design? A disabled person will be abled for those few moments?

The majority of the thought process starts with Design for practice and ends up with practice for design.

This shows an evident lack of empathy.

This is the state for the majority of HR practices; also, they are created in the boardroom for shopfloor? Sounds like a paradox but that is the reality.

While designing our program, we decided to break the trend; HR leaders were asked to sit at shopfloor and involve in the shift huddles to understand the problems as they occur. Absenteeism is an issue we understand that, unless it is experienced first-hand it is impossible to fathom the situation sitting in a room away from the floor. It is imperative to understand the business, the nature of work, the complications and problem-solving approach. HR need not be a subject matter expert, but they must know the subject that matters.

After moving the HR cubicle to shop floor, HR leaders were asked to take observations. After a substantial period of observation, a meeting was scheduled to identify the findings from the floor and what can be the problems which warrant immediate focus.

### **Define:**

All the findings at floor have been considered as possible symptoms and through a brainstorming few core issue have been identified:

- 1) Monotony  
A great deal of monotony adversely impacts their motivation.
- 2) Visibility  
Inability to see how their contribution translates into more significant outcomes for the organisation
- 3) Empowerment

How to empower them more to create a more inclusive environment which is conducive for innovation

### Ideate:

With clear identification of core issues, different ideas were invited to tackle monotony, visibility and empowerment.

To break the monotony, the idea of gamification of the work environment was chosen.

To provide visibility and autonomy in the role, a concept of Lean was chosen called Lean daily management.

Then the project team decided to create a holistic solution which can cover all the aspects and which is easily understood by the employees of shopfloor and can be part of their day to day life.

The million dollar question was, how to create a product for shopfloor which comprises of all these aspects and is easily adaptable.

### Prototype

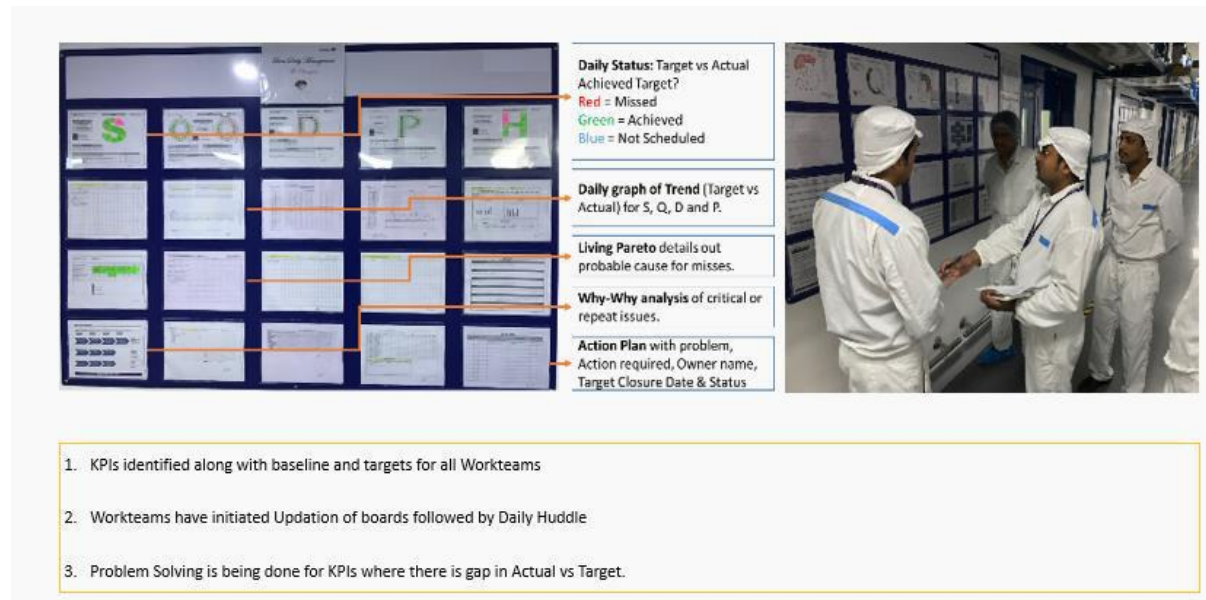
We were looking for multiple options and were weighing it in the scale of Desirability, feasibility and viability. While the majority of solutions were Desfeasible or Desviable, we were failing to find an emogical solution.

Finally, we drew our inspiration from IPL cricket. We decided to divide the entire workforce into small informal teams called Workteams. Each team had its own identity in the form of the name, and a logo, to create a sense of ownership and the belongingness. All the teams have been given some basic parameters spread across the five core areas, Safety, Quality, Delivery, Productivity and Health.



Teams are given the delivery target by 5<sup>th</sup> of every month, and they get the cut-off date of the last day of the month. They are aware of their targets and are expected to plan the delivery accordingly. Warehouse plans the supply of raw materials if they make the availability on time they get some score if they miss on service level agreements (SLAs) they take the hit, the same rule follows for the subsequent teams till the ready to dispatch consignments to

come to Warehouse. Each team can score a max of 2000 points in a month. This led to a competitive environment all around, with every batch under process at one department the next department was preparing themselves for the fast rolling. For every batch being processed on time, there was a reward point, and for every breakdown or delay, there was a penalty. Batch finished on time but has a quality issue will attract penalty, and without quality, the issue will be rewarded. All the developments are recorded in a huge board which all team members can refer at any point of time.



This environment of competition brought some energy to the floor. Every missed goal was reflecting on board as Red, and every achievement was in Green, more the green more the reward and adverse was equally valid. This helped to break the monotony of work.

People were made aware about the goals by the beginning of the month and the autonomy they get to prioritise the product they want to run, plan the efficiencies, decide on the preventive maintenance schedule, so on and so forth. It was the empowerment which was lacking earlier. Teams started thinking of better efficiencies from the machine; they moved from stopping at problems to thinking of solutions. How to use the critically constrained resources (CCRs) was earlier a challenge left for a think tank at the board room, now the shop floor knew that unless CCRs are handled efficiently, they cannot achieve the goals. They came up with the solution of staggering the products so that overall equipment efficiency is reached. Some simple solutions like this which often remained in the heads but never breached the mental blocks started popping.

Teams track their situation daily, and towards the end of the month, they claim a score against their performance. By the first of next month, HR organises a Monthly review meeting where the teams present their performance and provide proofs of their claims. A jury of vertical heads decides the best performing team of the month and the team get rewarded with a company-sponsored lunch or dinner at an exotic location.

Competition between teams was intense; every point gained and lost had a value attached to it. Teams had to fight to stay as performing teams, and bottom performing teams had their woes. Teams started solving problems at inception which lead to lesser breakdowns. The

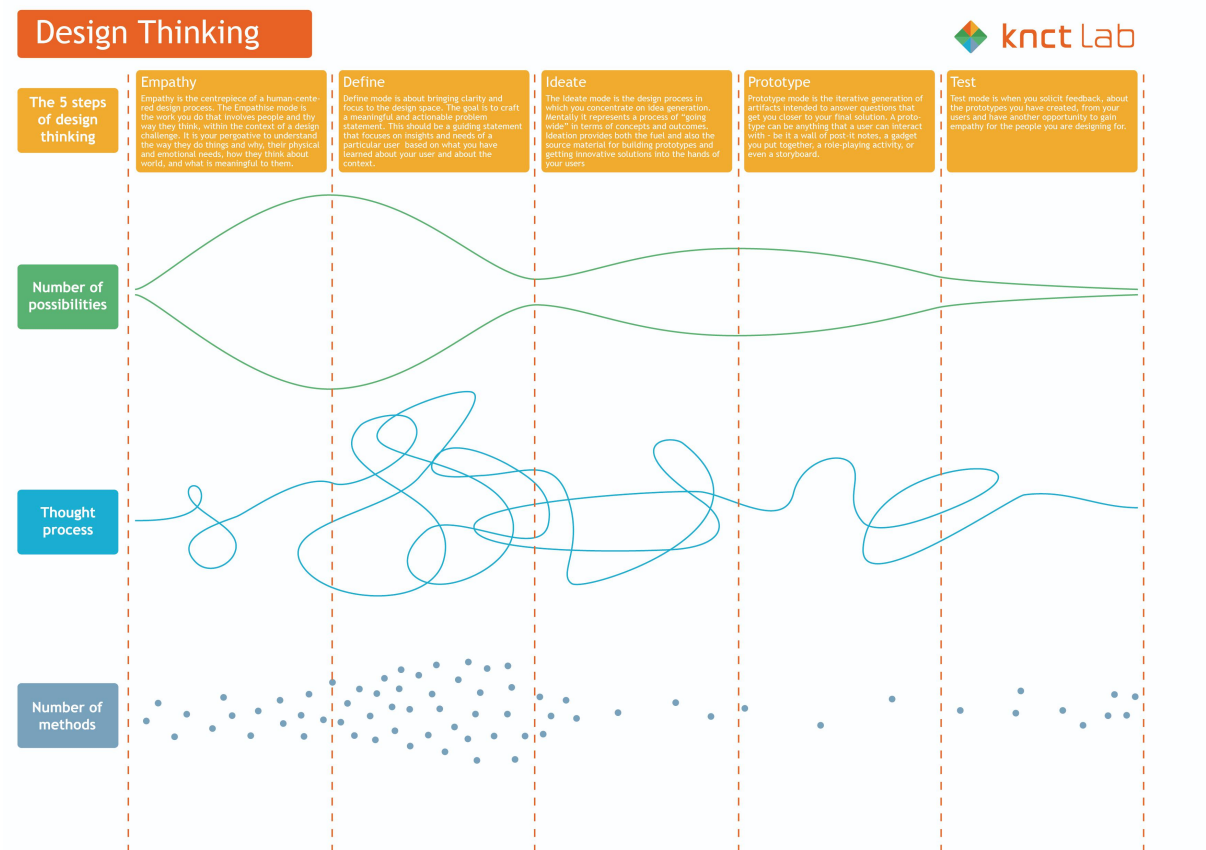
Pareto was helping in identifying the impending factors which in turn helped in reduced cycle time. The changeover time was challenged again and again to reduce it to the optimal limit. The Quality incidents caused negative points, so teams were conscious of making sure the quality incident count is reduced; it helped in higher accountability.

In Quality Control team the skewed results due to Analyst errors was a huge challenge. When Pareto indicated the significant rise in numbers, teams and their members became more cautious since the human error was reflecting in their scorecard and adversely impacting their scores. The team decided the intervention and the numbers from 30-35 during the month of Jan Feb and Mar, came down to 0 by May 2017. All of these were possible because team leaders were updating the team about hits and miss every day and the team was coming together to decide what can be the possible solution to arrest the hygiene factors.

The entire environment was a game, scores in Green and Red gave them the purpose and they were able to relate their day to day activities with the larger goals. They could understand how their contributions manifest into the realization of the objective of the organization.

By virtue of this effort, the plant and machinery without any change in technology or workforce increase managed to achieve 178million during the Q3,2017 and 192Mn pills during Q4.17. Close to 300% appreciation in production was a huge transformation which helped in understanding how empowerment can induce innovation.

**Test:** Initially it started at one plant to check if the emotional balance can be achieved. Moreover, it was noticed that it had the balance. People got the purpose of their work, and they knew the roads they are traveling would take them where. It was the complete transformation and in fact, the entire paradigm shift which floor was experiencing.





The design thinking for engaging employees was unique experimentation in its own. Though the thought process was there but giving it a complete skeleton could have been possible only through design thinking. It can be utilized for any other aspect of HR with equal efficiency.

The skeleton should not be confused with the problem-solving tool; instead, it is a tool to elaborate on the thought process and approach a problem systematically. The problem solving can be one aspect to it but depends upon the agents who are building upon the skeleton. The right shape and right outcome always, is not the right expectation, after prototype one need to test and if it fails the test, it is essential to go back to drawing book and relook at the fundamentals and make a necessary course correction.

The modern days HR has to demystify the conundrums of contemporary challenges and propose solutions. To cope with the rapid change of environment a fundamental structure which can help us to architect the solutions of tomorrow is essential. The human-centric thinking model offers that basic structure around which the solutions of inter/intra/cross-functional problems can be built. A culture of human-centric thinking has to be imbibed if the culture of innovation in HR has to be promoted, else the function of HR will appear as diagonally parked in the parallel world.

While we are getting ready for the Future of Experience Design. While there is much road to travel between today's capabilities and the emerging vision of the future, businesses should get started now on the journey to embrace and integrate design thinking throughout their organization. The experiences that result from a design thinking process are not superficial; they necessitate changes to be made in supporting business processes, technologies and organizational structures. The new customer experiences that arise will require integration and re-orchestration of how the company relates to customers on all channels.

**Some recommendations include:**

- Simultaneously apply all elements of design thinking, such as observation, iterative ideation, rapid prototyping and frequent testing.
- Understand every aspect of the user experience (from the user's perspective) before selecting which technologies will be used to enable the new product or service.
- Establish interdisciplinary teams and processes that put customer needs, desires, emotions and motivations at the center of the product and service design. Lastly, never lose sight that underlying all of these activities is the unwavering focus on, and empathy for, the person for whom the experience is being created in the first place.

In this context, our role as HR professionals is twofold. First is realizing that in this world of "Industry 4.0" everything that can be connected to the internet will be – the Internet of Things – and that everything that can be automated eventually will be. So we need to be sure we are preparing our employees for that ultimate reality and building workforces and workplaces that are ready to thrive in this new world. As Jenny said, we need to ensure that our employees do not panic about the changes to come and realize that machines will not replace humans. However, at the same time, the world of work will change; it was quoted that going forward 83% of jobs that make less than \$20/hour will be at risk for automation. So how are we helping to prepare our workforces for that change?

Our second role as HR professionals in this world of Industry 4.0 is providing humans to work with the technology. Technology does not just "appear" and exist in a vacuum; humans have to create it; humans have to interact with it; humans have to step in where the tech reaches its limit. As Jenny said "The humans create the algorithms, the algorithms create the AI. However, HR brings the humans." This theme also came across in the general session "What It Takes To Be a Most Admired Company for HR," a panel discussion featuring leaders from companies such as Johnson & Johnson, The Walt Disney Company, Accenture, and Delta Airlines. The panelists discussed the importance of having a "talent mindset" and creating environments where people can be innovative, where diverse thought and problem-solving can exist and thrive, where we develop and promote collaboration between the people and the technology to drive success. Moreover, by the way, this is all driven by leaders and great leadership.

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