

Gone Missing

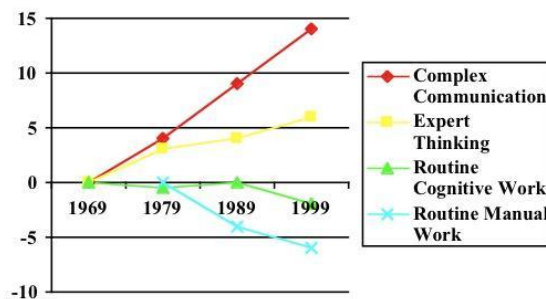
HFE May/June 2010

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There are a number of workers I just don't see much of anymore...

- I don't see parking lot attendants when entering or leaving the airport anymore. My credit card talks to a machine on the way in and again on the way out.
- I don't talk to check-in people at the airline counters anymore since I rarely check bags. My credit card talks to a terminal that prints out my boarding pass. That is if I've not already checked in online and printed my pass at home.
- I am seeing fewer bank tellers and grocery clerks. My cash card talks to the ATM and to the *cash* register at the supermarket after I have scanned my own groceries.
- My children think I am telling tall tales when I tell them that I once had "people" who pumped my gas, washed my car windows, filled my tires and sometimes gave me a free tumbler as a gift when I went to a *service* station.
- I don't hear the voice of a human telephone operator, tech support or reservation clerks until I've waded through a half dozen phone menus.

Below is a chart labeled with the sexy title "Trends in Tasks Done by the U.S. Workforce 1969-1998 (1969=0)" that appeared way, way back in 2004.¹



Parking lot attendants and their kindred that have gone missing fall into the "Routine Cognitive Work" and "Routine Manual Work" categories. The information given and processes performed were all standardized - multiple-choice answers, if you will. Any

situation arose that called for something more than an A, B, C, or D response a supervisor was found.

So a couple questions...

1. Are librarians vulnerable to these shifts in this labor market? Will librarians who are only information dispensers, book readers, babysitters, checkout clerks, and multiple choice quiz givers be automated and “go missing?” Can even readers’ advisors be automated? (Amazon seems to do a pretty good job.)

Have you asked yourself lately which of the tasks on which you spend your time are routine? Do most things do you do require professional judgment, problem-solving and, yes, creativity? What do you provide that an online resource can’t?

If *all* educators, librarians, teachers and administrators, don't attended to adding value as expert thinkers and complex communicators, rebelling against "teacher-proof" classroom models, fact-heavy mandated curricula, and objective basic skills testing as a sole measure of student performance, the de-professionalizing of our jobs may well come sooner rather than later.

It’s human nature to grouse a bit when confronted by a problem at work. Perhaps we ought to be grateful instead, if problems are what allow us to demonstrate our complex communication and expert thinking skills helping insure our jobs.

2. Are we giving our students experience practicing "Complex Communications" and "Expert Thinking" skills in their assignments? Daniel Pink in his new book *Drive*² suggests all teachers ask these questions about the homework they give:
 - Am I offering students any autonomy over how and when to do this work?
 - Does this assignment promote mastery by offering a novel, engaging task (as opposed to rote reformulation of something already covered in class)?
 - Do my students understand the purpose of the assignment? That is, can they see how doing this additional activity at home contributes to the larger enterprise in which the class is engaged?

If we really believe future workers need to be creative problem-solvers, why do we still give objective tests over the recall of trivia and only test low-level basic skills on such a regular basis? Do we construct information and technology literacy projects that honestly call for higher order thinking skills – or are we asking only for a simple regurgitation of trivia? Do we ask our students to both communicate complex ideas and to do so with complex media?

I keep thinking about a prediction made in the mid-90's by a federal DOE official. She suggested that one day schools for the economically disadvantaged would be full of computers (drill and practice, programmed learning, evaluators) while wealthy schools would have human teachers (mentors, guides, challengers). Ironic at the time; accurate today.

Those being trained by automatons to be automatons will be among the first to go missing in tomorrow's job market.

1. Levy, Frank and Richard J. Murnane. "Education and the Changing Job Market" *Educational Leadership*, October 2004.
2. Pink, Daniel H. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York: Riverhead, 2009.