

Technology and the Future of work

Kim Stevenson 20th June 2019

I write to you having just returned from 5 weeks travelling Spain, witnessing what I consider to be a society in decline with what appears to be massive inequality. All lower windows and doors are barred, for a reason I suppose. Graffiti, rubbish in the streets, continued messages from rental companies and hotel staff and about vehicle and personal safety. Abandoned buildings and MANY 'for sale / for rent' signs and empty shops. A massive difference between urban and rural.

I have a wide range of experience in many different professional roles: Currently I am a teacher at Buller High School, Westport. This is an isolated, small community with limited employment opportunities. While mature and intelligent students will generally find their own way in the world (and BTW, we do seem to be particularly poor at extending the gifted and talented students as so much energy and time is devoted to trouble-some students), the lower ability student will continue to struggle with 'formal' schooling.

Often the message to these students is "get a job" and the effort has been finding them a job. What happens when there is no work? These are the ones that will be mostly negatively affected by a lack of formal "Work".

We can continue the way we do, and the inequality gap will widen and this section of our society will increasingly feel marginalised and this will be reflected in crime statistics.

Part of what I believe this commission should consider is, firstly, what is the Goal?

Perhaps it is for NZ to be a place that all citizens feel valued?

Traditionally our 'place' or 'value' in society has been defined by our "job": what do we do? This provides income and a sense of worth. If we just carry on as we have, the inequality gap will widen and the sense of 'not valued' will increase in those who cannot get a job.

I believe we need to explore other ways that people can feel valued. This can be through other ways than formal "work". There is an age difference. I am 61, have enough material possessions and own my own home, so I'm OK thanks. I could happily retire and leave my "work" to others. All I really seek is companionship, a bit of income, and something to potter away at: We all have to do something with our day. The Mens Shed should do that along with my volunteering at St John.

For younger people just starting out, this is not a solution.

If we consider different age groups as a generalisation:

Young children need to feel loved (the Dunedin Study is fascinating) as sometimes they don't get that: we see the results of this in school and the prisons and drug addiction. We often do a poor job at protecting the youngest: the biological parents are not always the best parents. Easy to make a child, difficult to raise well.

Teenagers need mentors, strict guidelines and energy outlets: for some, as mentioned above, schools do not provide this. The Poly-techs have failed as they have sought "bums on seats" and is an

indictment of the business model in education. Practical training is still an option for many of these students: mechanics, food production (farming and horticulture), hospitality etc. Community service (NOT in punitive sense) doesn't seem to be an option at the moment, which is interesting. Integrating some training with older mentors (like myself, and many other 'mature' individuals I know, as an example) will help some 'find a place'. This could be part of the rethink of the Poly-techs and qualifications system.

Young adults; Staring out, family and home ownership aspirations. They need hope and opportunities.

Mature Adults: perhaps the option of stepping back from formal 'work'; retire early, contribute in other ways.

Suggestions:

1. Set minimum and maximum wages: Say a maximum of 20 times the minimum. The grossly excessive packages of some CEO's does not lessen inequality, it only increases the disconnect. While it may be argued that corporations need to set 'attractive' packages to attract top talent (like EquitiCorp, BNZ, MainZeal, Fletchers, Fonterra and Westland Milk, Solid Energy, Wisconsin Rail, PGG Wrightsons.....yeah right) perhaps we undersell the value of being able to live in NZ, and this is actually the main part of the package.
2. Reinvent the Polytechs as trades Institutes (as they once were) and centralise activities. If you want to train in hospitality, there is one site in the NI and one in the South. I have previously made a suggestion to the Minister of Housing, (subsequently ignored) for a house "factory" around Tokoroa which produces a transportable house for \$200k and has a series of trades training associated with it. This would be a start. Horticulture and urban farming could be interesting options.
3. New industries around recycling and metals recovery (eg E recycling including batteries) would need to be subsidised. Decriminalise marijuana and establish industries around medicinal marijuana. I personally see subsidies to new industries as Leading, Governing. Not sleeping.
4. Cleaning up: the beaches, the oceans, our streets. What can we do with rubbish in our dumps? Lot of money been invested there. A "life-cycle" tax: short lived plastic crap has a high tax rate, long lived appliances has a lower tax rate.
5. Education: teach more sustainability. One of the main planks of sustainability is to buy less stuff we don't need. Theoretically this means we need less income, but people will always spend 100% + of what they earn. We can teach this better in schools; Budgeting and the power of advertising. Teach about personal wealth accumulation and the difference between needs and greed.
6. Glide time becomes more formalised. Many Europeans practice siesta, seems very civilised on a hot afternoon. Greater flexibility around working hours, with less hours worked. The fewer work hours get spread around.
7. "Retirement": I can appreciate that the funds for retirement are not bottomless, and I am one of the Baby Boomers approaching. Greater flexibility about when a person can retire: perhaps at 55: with a lower entitlement. And less if a person works on: the Muldoon pension is too generous for some. If you choose to work on (earn money) then your pension is

docked. People can still feel valued by what they do / contribute. Means testing is an option, but politically un-palatable and encourages avoidance.

8. Taxation: If there is no decision to set a maximum wage (I recognise the conflict between idealism and political reality) then increase the top tax rates and improve the ability to enforce this. Reduce inequality.
9. Adult education / "Mens sheds" (I use quotation marks to try and reduce the sexist component): what I am exploring are the options around mature adults contributing by helping younger people learn in an environment that is different to school.
10. One of the elephants in the room is that there are just too many people.