

## The nature of work in the Cycles of the Industrial Revolution

Job seekers in today's world are being required by employers to prove that they are capable and ready for work. In reflecting on what was once required in determining the suitability and readiness of an individual to be considered for hire, when compared to what obtains in this contemporary time, the time tunnel would take us back to the days of slavery. During this horrid period endured by our forefathers, it is known that they automatically qualified without reservation to working on the sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean. The Europeans who colonized the region, took pride in enslaving those who were victims of the African Slave Trade. Those who were placed in bondage were not engaged to work because they had any special skills or qualifications, but simply on their physical appearance and state of health. As a matter of fact, they had no choice or say in the matter. All that mattered was that each individual was fit for purpose.

Moving into the era of the industrial revolution which spanned from 1760 to 1840, there seemed to have been a dramatic shift in the criteria for employment. Whereas manual labour was the feature of the slave society, the use of machinery was the hallmark of the Industrial Revolution. It was in this period, that there was the introduction of machines to replace work that was done by hands. There was also the advent of steam which was needed to power the factories to enable production to take place. This change was meant to ensure greater efficiency and higher levels of production.

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the world has continued to witness a shift in the cycle of the industrial revolution. So far there have been four cycles which have come to the fore. The first Industrial Revolution which took place in 1765, centred on the use of coal. This was followed in 1870 when the emphasis was placed on gas. In 1969, the third industrial revolution was based on electronics and nuclear energy. In the year 2000, the fourth industrial revolution took centre stage, as the world directed its attention to the internet and the use of renewable energy. The world is now experiencing a deepened of the application of science and the emergence of interconnectivity, digitalization and smart automation. These now inform the processes for driving business in the economic sectors and improving global communication. It has been established that the purpose of this is to promote the ease of doing business.

What is common place, is the fact that manpower has remained a constant in the ever-changing environments. The need for employees to have new technical skills, has become clearly obvious. In the manufacturing, production, monitoring and distribution processes, there is a need for labour. All of these for the most part, tend to require a mixture of technical and administrative skills, at the core of which is access to information and knowledge. Taking an objective look at the requirements of workforce, and the demand for labour, it is evident that training remains a vital aspect of a successful workplace. Employers who ignore this, ought to consider that it can be a grave omission.

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In the cycle of the industrial revolution, the importance of training are retaining should not be overlooked. Employers would want to ensure that their employees have the required knowledge, skills and competencies, along the experience acquired to help them execute their duties effectively, efficiently and to become more productive. If these are catered too, it is to be expected that there will be improvements in the quality of performance and productivity of employees. By providing training, employers can feel assured that this would contribute to the employee's job satisfaction, employee engagement and in the reduction of the turnover of staff members.

Employers are expected to be pleased with the positives of the industrial revolutions, considering that technological advancement and innovations are meant to reduce the cost of production. The main drawback for most employers would be the initial high investment cost in acquiring the new technology. They stand to recoup this expenditure through the reduction in recurring labour costs. From a societal point of view, it may have placed a dent in the use of child labour. What remains a sore thumb, is the fact, is the continued demand for cheap labour. This may be a contributing factor to the increase in human trafficking. In this modern day form of slavery, the struggles against inhumane treatment, worker exploitation, poor conditions of work, human rights, worker's rights, constitutional and civil rights, continue unabated.