

# How 4IR is changing the teaching and practice of HR

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The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is blending the physical and digital realms of our world, whilst rapidly changing the ways we live and work. There are many predictions about the future of work, some of them scary and others that point to possibilities where many more people might find their purpose and fulfilment in the pursuit of their livelihoods.



The radical transformations of jobs and workplaces; companies and entire industries across the world is bringing the human resources function to the forefront of current efforts to prepare people and workforces for the future. HR professionals are finding themselves in leadership positions playing driving roles in the adoptions of new technologies, the innovations of services and products, the creation of new modes of work and the development and management of new kinds of organisational talent. In turn, this is having a profound and very necessary impact on how we are educating and training the emerging HR practitioners.

According to Ashley Motene, industrial psychologist and management and leadership programme developer at [Sacap](#) (the South African College of Applied Psychology), SA educational institutions face the challenge of not just striving to fill the current skills shortages highlighted by the National Skills Development Plan 2030 and the SABPP People Factor Strategy, but to also address the further competence needs highlighted by 4IR in the global context.

Motene highlights **five transformations in HR education** that have underpinned Sacap's educational programmes in HR management:

- 1. Filling 4IR HR roles** - HR practitioners in training will need to learn how to strategically change the conversation within organisations through their actions to position HR management as a key business imperative rather than the traditional support department. Training programmes need to



*Ashley Motene, industrial psychologist and management and leadership programme developer at Sacap*

equip emerging practitioners to play multiple HR roles daily in an increasingly digitised world of work. These transformed HR roles will span 4IR adaptation requirements focussed on organisational culture, employee experience, innovative reskilling, ethical ambassadorship, data science insights, diversity and inclusion.

**2. Demonstrating 4IR HR attributes** - Personal leadership, resilience and confidence-building needs to be incorporated into the professional training of HR students in the classroom and through work-integrated learning in the field. An HR professional's proficiency can develop with time and experience. That being said, the ability to confidently apply the knowledge and skills that students graduate with is sometimes a challenge experienced by new HR professionals who may feel uncertain. Self-awareness and relationship management skills can be developed while studying so that students emerge a bit more confident and resolved in what they can already contribute from their first year of work as HR professionals.

**3. Gaining 4IR business savvy** - Focussing on competency development in the area of entrepreneurial thinking and sound business acumen during their studies will give HR students a holistic understanding of how HR management drives business strategy implementation and value-add, whether they choose to work as external consultants or grow as business partners and leaders within organisations.

**4. Growing in a 4IR context** - A contextualised learning programme is key because the role of a HR professional as a community developer, national builder or global citizen with a social and professional impact to make, is not always emphasised enough in traditional HR education programmes. Diverse engagement in thought leadership and professional industry activities should be what students are encouraged to do as they learn how HR is being applied in their countries and across socio-cultural contexts for an insightful skills exchange experience.

**5. Developing 4IR digital expertise** - In a recent [World Economic Forum white paper on HR 4.0](#), a prevailing theme is how technology and people practices are merging and shaping approaches to HR management. Traditionally, many HR professionals seem to have graduated having mostly learnt about systems, data science and the value of HR technology as explained in a textbook; and they then find it daunting to innovate with these technologies. Educating HR professionals of the future needs to entail real-time exposure to the technological advancements we are seeing in the HR management field. It may be beneficial to include research and practical exploration of how apps, systems and programmes can strengthen evidence-based decision making and information management. Graduates will emerge as better equipped practitioners who already understand how HR analytics can enhance contextual awareness, engage employee experiences, personalise the learning culture, support the development of leaders and promote business optimisation.

Motene concludes: "In the 4IR context, disruptive action and thinking needs to happen continuously within organisations in order for the promises made to stakeholders to be responsibly kept and ethically fulfilled. In the future, HR professionals will be needed to help organisations of people and bots to adapt with agility and perform with accountability; to learn with open-mindedness; to protect wellbeing intentionally and grow meaningfully. This kind of business and people-centred partnering will need to happen more flexibly, quicker but still humanely every time new ways of working are necessitated in order for organisations to thrive."

To equip students for the 4IR world, [Sacap offers two HR management educational programmes that feature dual majors in Psychology and HR management](#). This eclectic mix offers an exciting opportunity for students to gain foundational knowledge of the basic psychosocial factors that inevitably influence HR management. Moreover, the programmes are geared at developing student's self-understanding and professional competence as they grow as future 4IR leaders.

The Covid-19 world is new, but you can still start your studies at Sacap in June on its existing robust online platform and shift to your campus later. The class size stays small, we help lighten your data load, and you'll be led through the programme activities by your educator. You also get face-to-face support from the student services teams.

For anyone who is interested in the field of psychology, counselling, human resource management or business management, Sacap offers a wide range of qualifications, including Higher Certificate, Diploma, BAppSocSci (Majoring in

Psychology and Counselling), BAppSocSci (Majoring in Psychology and Human Resource Management), BappSocSci (Majoring in Psychology and Business Management) and the BPsych professional programme.

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