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Can unearthing stifled creativity realise greater productivity growth?

Among the advanced economies of the world, productivity growth has plateaued, for the last few years hovering just under 1% according to a report from Conference Board. Meanwhile, figures from the Office of National Statistics shows that the situation in the UK is even worse, with productivity growth in the third quarter of 2019 at just 0.1%. This is despite the continued investment in IT, which the Financial Times reports is still failing to lift productivity in a way that the digital revolution was expected to.

There are of course challenges in agreeing how digital transformation within companies should be measured, not least of which is the challenge of defining what digital transformation is. Simply migrating internal systems to cloud services and purchasing data analytics may bring efficiencies, but for many, to bring about true digital transformation, these investments need to be turned into new insights and innovations that generate new products or services.

Of course, migrating to cloud infrastructure and investing in products that have the potential to reveal new insights are a necessity for most businesses looking to remain competitive, but is enough being done to address the problems that existing staff experience every day? Michael Chui, Ph.D, and his team at McKinsey Global Institute estimate that six out of ten jobs are made up of 30% or more of tasks that could be automated. Not only does this suggest that there are still large productivity gains still to be realised, but because automation lends itself well to tasks that are repetitive and contain little variation, many may find that nearly a third of the work they do is monotonous or at least unlikely to keep them fully engaged.

Like productivity, employee engagement at work is another persistent problem globally, with the global analytics and advice firm Gallup suggesting that it stands at just 13% on average. Elements such as improving an employee's physical working environment will likely play a major role in improving this metric, but could removing the drudgery of many roles by commissioning the development of simple, intuitive web applications or automated processes not only help employees become more engaged, but free them to generate greater value?

Tasks that are difficult to automate but at some level come naturally to all humans are those that involve creativity; which in a 2019 survey by LinkedIn was ranked as the most wanted skill among employers, and according to the World Economic Forum, is the third most important skill to have in the fourth industrial revolution. If freed from the processes that unnecessarily consume their time,

not only will employees likely find greater job satisfaction and become more productive, but they will also have the potential to move up the value chain; harnessing their natural disposition for creativity to carry out more thoughtful work and complex problem solving that address either customers' or the company's biggest challenges.