

Education in transition: From disruption to innovation, Preparing students for a technological AI-driven future

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Abstract

We live in a transformative time where rising costs for education and living in general is difficult for many, layoffs, and AI-driven disruption challenge today's students. Social pressures from social media create negative narratives, and erode motivation, but, yet opportunity remains. Education must adapt—fostering resilience, flexibility, and digital fluency—while partnering with industry to transform fear into possibility and disruption into innovation.

Keywords

Technological Disruption, Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education, Resilience and Student Motivation, Digital Fluency

1. Introduction

We are living in a period of increased transformation over the last 10-15 years, where economic pressures, technological disruption, and shifting social narratives intersect reshaping our student's experience. Rising costs of education and cost of living, coupled with wage stagnation, present significant barriers for many college graduates. At the same time, the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced new uncertainties, raising fears of job displacement and destabilizing long-held career expectations. These challenges are further compounded by social media, which often amplifies negative narratives and demotivates student's motivation.

Yet, within this disruption lies opportunity. Educators must not only acknowledge these realities but design a culture of fostering resilience, adaptability, and digital fluency. By developing stronger partnerships with industry, higher education can help students transform fear into possibility and disruption into innovation.

2. Cost of Living for Students

We are living in one of the most transformative times in human history. For today's college and university students, the reality is sobering. Companies are laying off workers, wages are dropping in many industries, and the cost of living is rising. From food and clothing to healthcare, education, and housing, every aspect of life feels more expensive. Even the simple act of socializing—grabbing lunch, having coffee with a friend, or enjoying a night out—carries what I call “the cost of social hours.”

3. The Influence of Artificial Intelligence on College Students

On top of this, we have the rise of Artificial Intelligence—the AI “monster” as some call it. It is a creation of our own making, but one that is now changing work faster than any previous technological shift. For students who once imagined a stable career path, there is fear that AI will not only reshape job responsibilities but, in some cases, eliminate entire professions.

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4. Environmental Effects on Students Motivation

This environment affects motivation. Our students, ambitious and eager to learn, find themselves bombarded by negative narratives: social media influencers and quick-hit videos claiming that education isn't worth the time or money, and that competing with AI is impossible. And with smartphones always at arm's reach, those messages are just two clicks away, ready to reinforce doubt and anxiety.

But here is the truth: that narrative is only half-right. Yes, there are threats, and yes, disruption is real. Yet, there are still good-paying jobs, industries thriving, and degrees that provide measurable financial and personal returns. Many of today's opportunities are in fields we didn't even imagine a generation ago—fields directly shaped by technology and innovation.

5. Responsibility of Faculty in Higher Education

The challenge for us as educators and leaders is not to dismiss the fears of our students but to understand them. Their perception is their reality. When a young person looks at the world and sees uncertainty, rising costs, and a labor market in flux, we must recognize that experience as valid. We cannot simply tell them to "work harder" or "trust the process" when the process itself is evolving.

Instead, we must engage them where they are—both in the classroom and in collaboration with employers. We must create pathways that not only teach academic knowledge but also build adaptability, emotional resilience, and digital fluency. We must work with industries to ensure internships, mentorships, and employment pipelines are aligned with the skills of tomorrow. And we must emphasize a key lesson: technology does not only replace—it also creates. AI, like every tool before it, is an opportunity for those prepared to harness it.

This is our calling: to support a generation navigating unprecedented change, to help them see beyond fear and into possibility, and to partner with the working world so that education continues to open doors. Together, we can move from uncertainty to empowerment—and from disruption to innovation.

6. Presenter's Short Biography

Dr. Herbert P. Ricardo worked 10 years in healthcare administration and 25 years as a professor teaching organizational behavior, culture and management in The School of Business at Indian River State College and global trade and commerce in Faculty of Economics at Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. He teaches the practice of international entrepreneurship, organizational culture and management through a social psychology lens which bridges the gap between employee engagement and organizational productivity. This is to ensure a results, based achievement for the organizations while ensuring an increase in social stratification and community advancement, for employee and employer. He has consulted with many organizations and has a passion working with start-up, non-profit and for-profit corporations. Paragraphs should be indented except for the first paragraph after a section, subsection, or subsubsection, which should not.

Herbert has authored seven books; Raising Employees, Thinking Organizations, The Art of Supervision, Autoneurotica, Wireless, Balance: Workplace Culture in the 21st Century, and SMART BOSS.

Declaration on Generative AI

The author have not employed any Generative AI tools.