The future of work is not all about machines. CEOs must brace for the impacts of automation and artificial intelligence on their workforce, but they must also foster talent who can drive and sustain the resulting transformations.

Certainly, as intelligent machines and advanced algorithms continue to replace traditional human roles, industries will be challenged to develop teams with uniquely human skill sets that cannot be easily coded. This means data scientists who can extract the full value from an organization’s data; tech-savvy individuals who can operationalize the latest innovations; and specialists who can maintain, combine, and optimize whatever technologies their organizations come to adopt. Moreover, individuals who can collaborate, solve complex problems, and empathize with customers in ways their digital co-workers are not equipped to handle.

In short, it is not as much about bracing for the rise of the machines; but enabling the rise of the humans and creating an agile, collaborative, and digital mindset for a tech-enabled world. This explains why 44 percent of Canadian CEOs plan to upskill more than 40 percent of their workforce in digital capabilities, and why 53 percent plan to hire new skills regardless of growth prospects. The desire to adapt is also reflected in the types of talent CEOs are pursuing, with 73 percent citing confidence in emerging technology specialists and 63 percent in data scientists (up 27 percent since 2018).

**Behind the curve**

As future-ready as Canadian CEOs appear on paper, their ability (and perhaps eagerness) to find human talent who can drive their vision lags behind their global counterparts. One explanation is that Canadian organizations are cautiously optimistic by nature and may be taking a ‘wait and see’ approach to workforce transformation.

The gap could also be attributed to the fact that it is no small task finding and retaining the right individuals. Thanks to an aging workforce, demand and supply imbalances, skills mismatches, and other contributing factors, Canada is on track for a major technology talent shortage in the next five years. And with tech juggernauts like Amazon, Google, Uber, and others jockeying for talent on our home soil, the competition is fiercer than ever. Given these labour market conditions, it is no wonder that 63 percent of CEOs say ‘finding workers they need’ is a roadblock that is negatively impacting growth (Global 59 percent).

**Sourcing from within**

The demand for digitally-minded talent is clear, but are CEOs looking in the right direction? While everyone is looking beyond their office walls, there is value in looking within. It benefits Canadian CEOs to examine their current workforce to identify who may already have the skills and interest to play those future roles. And not merely those who can optimize and operationalize the latest technologies, but those who can bring human leadership traits to the table, no matter their tenure, age or background. CEOs can also gain an advantage by building pipelines to up-and-coming and underutilized talent. This requires getting involved with students from an early point in their career development plans, establishing student sponsor
believe AI and robotics will create more jobs than they eliminate

Offering opportunities
In the race for human talent, brand counts. CEOs must be able to offer the kind of career opportunities and employee experiences that are appealing to today’s talent – one where a culture of collaboration, agility, and continuous learning is driven and bolstered from the top. And where ambition and a desire to stay relevant are nurtured and leveraged to shape the organization of the future.

Workforce capabilities considered highly effective:

- **Emerging Technology Specialists**: 73% 74%
- **Data Scientists**: 63% 83%
- **Cyber Security Specialists**: 60% 69%
- **Digital Transformation Managers**: 59% 62%

44% plan to upskill more than 81% of their workforce in digital capabilities

53% are hiring new skills regardless of future growth targets