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The State of American Jobs

How the shifting economic landscape is reshaping work and society and affecting the way people think about the skills and training they need to get ahead

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Oct. 6, 2016) – A changing economic landscape is driving significant shifts in the American workplace. Employment opportunities increasingly lie in jobs requiring higher-level social or analytical skills, while physical or manual skills are fading in importance, according to a new Pew Research Center survey conducted in association with the Markle Foundation.

Not coincidentally, an analysis of government jobs data finds that employment is rising faster in jobs calling for greater preparation. The number of workers in occupations requiring average to above-average education, training and experience increased 68% from 1980 to 2015. This was more than double the 31% increase in employment in jobs requiring below-average education, training and experience.

For their part, the vast majority of U.S. workers say that new skills and training may hold the key to their future job success. New survey data find that 54% of adults in the labor force say it will be essential for them to get training and develop new skills throughout their work life in order to keep up with changes in the workplace, and another 33% say it will be important to do so. Workers are acting on this belief, with 45% saying they've taken a class or received training in the past year to learn, maintain or improve their work skills.

Americans believe the responsibility for preparing and succeeding in today's workforce starts with individuals themselves. Roughly seven-in-ten (72%) say that individuals have "a lot" of responsibility to make sure workers have the right skills and education to be successful, while 60% believe public K-12 schools should bear a lot of responsibility for this. Smaller shares say colleges and universities (52%), employers (49%), state governments (40%) and the federal government (35%) should have a lot of responsibility.

A majority of Americans (65%) say that good jobs are difficult to find where they live, but views of the situation have improved since the height of the Great Recession. However, on the whole, American workers are generally satisfied with their own jobs: 49% of American workers say they are very satisfied with their current job, while three-in-ten are somewhat satisfied. And most Americans overall feel their own jobs are secure; 60% of employed Americans say it is not at all likely that they will lose their job or be laid off in the next 12 months.

The earnings of workers overall have stagnated since 1980, lagging behind gains in labor productivity. Moreover, smaller shares of workers received health or retirement benefits from their employers in 2015 than did in 1980. More recently, alternative employment arrangements, such as contract work, on-call work and temporary help agencies, appear to be on the rise.

As they look at the future, large numbers of Americans believe the demands on workers will intensify and job security will diminish in the coming 20 to 30 years. Roughly seven-in-ten Americans (71%) say that workers will have to improve their skills more often in the future in order to keep up with job-related developments. About half (51%) think there will be less job security in 20 to 30 years, and a plurality (44%) believes employee benefits will not be as good in the future. When it comes to worker loyalty, 43% say employees will show less loyalty to their employers in the future, while an identical share believe the current levels of loyalty will prevail.

The new report, based on an analysis of Department of Labor and Current Population Survey data and a national survey conducted May 25-June 29, 2016, among 5,006 adults (including 3,096 employed adults), examines trends in the labor market and how they are playing out in the lives of American workers.

Among the findings:

- **Americans see outsourcing jobs and imports of foreign goods as the greatest harms to U.S. workers, but they believe exporting more U.S. products abroad helps U.S. workers.** As they assess the factors that may be hurting U.S. workers, 80% say outsourcing hurts American workers, and 77% say the same about more foreign-made products being sold in the U.S. Many also cite the increased use of contract and temporary workers (57%) and the decline of union membership (49%) as harmful factors. The impact of immigrants and automation draw more evenly divided verdicts. On the other end of the spectrum, majorities think exports of U.S.-made products (68%) and work-enhancing technology such as the internet and email (70%) help U.S. workers.
- **Americans are less worried about immigrants' impact on jobs than they were a decade ago.** Today, 45% of adults say that the growing number of immigrants working in the U.S. hurts workers, and 42% say having more immigrants helps workers. This is a noteworthy change from 2006, when there was a nearly two-to-one view that the growing number of immigrants hurts U.S. workers (55% vs. 28% who said immigrants help workers). Democrats, blacks and those with less than a high school diploma are all notably more likely now than in 2006 to think the growing number of immigrants helps workers.
- **The shifting demand for skills in the modern workplace may be working to the benefit of women.** Women, who represent 47% of the overall workforce, make up the majority of workers in jobs where social or analytical skills are relatively more important. Wages are rising much faster in those jobs, which has likely contributed to the shrinking of the gender pay gap from 1980 to 2015.
- **People have been staying at their jobs longer in recent years.** In 2014, about half of workers (51%) had worked for their current employer five years or more, compared with 46% of workers in 1996.
- **Educational attainment is a clear and consistent marker when it comes to feelings about job security and future prospects.** While 39% of those without a high school education say it is very or fairly likely they may be laid off in the next 12 months, only 7% of those with a bachelor's degree or more say the same. Those with lower levels of education also are more likely to feel their current skills are insufficient for career advancement and to think there are not good jobs locally.
- **Americans have somewhat mixed attitudes about the effectiveness of traditional higher education institutions.** While many college graduates describe their own

experience as having a positive impact on their personal and professional development, just 16% of all Americans think that a four-year degree prepares students “very well” for a well-paying job in today’s economy. An additional 51% say this type of degree prepares students “somewhat well” for the workplace.

You can read the report online at <https://www.markle.org/stateofamericanjobs> or <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/the-state-of-american-jobs>.

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