INNOVATION

Technology Is On The Rise, While IQ Is On The Decline

Will Conaway Forbes Councils Member
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POST WRITTEN BY
Will Conaway

Executive Technology Leader | CIO | Innovation & Strategy Officer | Board Advisor | Vertical Lead, Leadership (Cornell University)

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Photo: GETTY

Recently, while waiting for a video meeting to begin, I noticed a young child in the background in the office of one of the

participants. As children are usually more interesting than the average videoconference, I was curious about what she was doing.

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I was amused when I saw her looking at a magazine cover photo and trying to enlarge it with her thumb and forefinger. Her look was one of perplexity, as she realized the image couldn't be manipulated using the pinch-to-zoom motion, such as when using a smartphone.

After a few tries, she gave up and walked away, seemingly unconcerned and no longer interested in the photo. This child's actions made me contemplate what is happening to the development of our brains in today's increasingly tech-driven world.

A reverse in the upward trend

You may recall studying a concept known as the Flynn effect, a theory that notes that more access to education and better nutrition than prior generations led to an increase in average IQ in the 20th century. Now, new research is indicating the Flynn effect may be in a reverse trend. Evan Horowitz, director of research communication at FCLT Global, stated, "People are getting dumber. That's not a judgment; it's a global fact."

Recent studies conducted in Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom are seeing a noticeable slowing — and even a reversal — of IQ. In effect, IQs have lowered in this incredible era of technology. A 2018 Science Alert article by Peter Dockrill notes "An analysis of some 730,000 IQ test results by researchers from the Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research in Norway reveals the Flynn effect hit its peak for people born during the mid-1970s and has significantly declined ever since."

A foremost concern is the lack of focus, which is not only lowering overall intelligence but affecting our ability to stick with complex tasks and the capacity to make reliable decisions. It's also taking a toll on our emotional intelligence, as we become victims of decision fatigue from too much technological stimulation.

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There's a universally growing pressure that what is important now will not be important in 10 minutes. Few people are allotted the time required to dissect and solve challenges, let alone the time to complete tasks because things are changing too rapidly. Technology is changing our concept of time, and we are getting the brunt of the abuse. There's an expectation to solve problems at the same speed as clicking through websites. Additionally, the amount of information online can give those working on a project a false sense of expertise; they read a few lines on a blog and often take action in the wrong direction.

We are witnessing adverse effects of technology on our productivity and use of time at work, particularly in the form of multitasking. Studies on the negative impacts of multitasking frequently refer to a 20-year-old work by Joshua Rubinstein, Ph.D., David Meyer, Ph.D. and Jeffrey Evans, Ph.D. They often conclude that only 2% of the population can effectively multitask. Could it be that researchers themselves have been too distracted to conduct newer studies? I'll let you do some unscientific research with this in mind.

The next time you are in a live meeting, look around and see how many people are looking at their smartphone or other technology, and the next time you have a remote meeting, track every time someone responds to a question with, "Can you repeat that?"

Emotional intelligence (EI) has four key components: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness and relationship management. Technical stimuli are challenging each of these. Let's

use the example of technology via video games on developing brains. Technology can create real and perceived stress; it influences all four parts of EI and could lead to the inability to think or function in society. A *Psychology Today* article suggests that chronic stress is affecting the frontal lobe of children and will lead to issues of focus and the ability to manage emotions effectively, suppress impulses and even complete tasks.

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Albert Einstein famously said, "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity." I imagine that some readers may even miss a key point or two in this article due to a technological distraction.

If I'm correct in my assertion that we should be concerned that technology might have adverse effects on our brains, fear not; I'll leave you with hope. A joint study between Oxford University and Yale University predicts artificial intelligence will automate all human tasks in the next 45 years and all human jobs in the next 120 years, so we'll no longer need to worry about any of this. Or will we?

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Will Conaway

Chief Growth Officer, The HCI Group/Tech Mahindra | Teacher Cornell University. Read Will Conaway's full executive profile here.

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