

Industry 4.0. "The greatest risk is to do nothing and stay behind"

Yoko Ishikura is an independent consultant on global strategy & involved in the World Economic Forum, warns workers to prepare for the technological revolution.

The aging of societies forces countries to find new ways of dealing with demographic change. They are already under way, but for which there still seem to be few answers. Yoko Ishikura, an emeritus professor of international business strategy at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo and a consultant to the World Economic Forum, believes that the world must learn from the Japanese experience that, despite having already 27% of its population over 65, is only now waking up to the urgency of demographic issues. Thus was born the initiative Society 5.0, which aims to "position the human being at the center of innovation and technological transformation".

"As longevity and life over 100 years is becoming a reality for many of us, we need to design a social system that embodies that reality rather than the traditional three-phase view of life in which we study at a young age, we work for 40 years and retire at 60 or 65 years, which is in force. We need to design a more flexible plan for a life of over 100 years, developing and accumulating "intangible assets" in terms of lifelong learning, health, etc. along with "financial assets" that make life more rich and more meaningful," says Yoko Ishikura, in an interview with Vivo. The independent consultant, who serves as a non-executive director at Shiseido Group and Nissin Foods Holding, among others, who is a member of the Global Future Council.

For Yoko Ishikura, Western countries must learn from the Japanese experience. "Although aging has been predicted for some decades in Japan, no effective policy has been developed. The Japanese did not feel a sense of urgency about demographic issues because they did not perceive them as an immediate and short-term issue. Now the country is pressed for time. And while the Society 5.0 program has been in place for over a year, everything should have started much earlier," she says. And what is Society 5.0? It is an initiative of the Japanese government, in partnership with the business community, that intends to

develop a "super smart society", embracing the technological transformation more centered in the human being. "In the era of exponential change and diverse breakthroughs, technology is changing the way we live in unprecedented ways. Japan faces a rapidly aging population, more than any other country, the so-called "super-aging" of society, and, as the working-age population declines very rapidly, Japan is aiming for the society where everybody, regardless of age, gender and region, etc., can live the comfortable life they want," she explains. That is the core concept of Society 5.0, while Industry 4.0 essentially focuses on manufacturing.

With robotics changing the world of business, Yoko Ishikura believes that workers must be agile in a "proactive" response to change, namely by developing new skills in order to be able to remain employable. "The greatest risk is to do nothing and stay behind," she warned. While there are studies indicating that half of today's jobs will disappear due to the technological revolution, with the increasing introduction of Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Yoko Ishikura believes that "only a small percentage" will disappear completely. Most current tasks will only undergo changes.

"Technology is not an enemy, but it can be an ally if we learn to collaborate with it. Jobs that require human interaction and creativity will continue to exist and will be very important because only people can do those jobs. Artificial Intelligence does not," she says. This does not mean that we all remain static in the face of change. "If you do not see the need to develop new skills to deal with IoT and AI, you are likely to lose your job. Greater digital skills will always be necessary," she says. So that we do not become obsolete, Yoko Ishikura argues that, first and foremost, we must recognize and accept how technology is changing the way we live, work and learn, realizing that in this new world there are threats, too. "I recommend that threats be taken into account, but take advantage of potentialities. For example, betting on lifelong learning. The skills required in five years' time will be very different from those gained at school or at work. Unless workers invest in learning more often, they will become obsolete."

And what skills are these? "Complex problem solving, social skills (ability to collaborate with people of diverse backgrounds and knowledge) and creativity and imagination are most often cited. Some of them can be acquired through an education for the liberal arts, such as History and Art, etc. And today we can get this knowledge in many ways, even through online courses" says Yoko Ishikura.

Fundamental, she says, is that we prepare for different forms of work. "Instead of traditional full-time employment, they may want to be self-employed and adjust the hours that work to their own needs. But in order to try various forms of employment, you will always need a good base of skills that makes you exceptionally qualified, "says the World Economic Forum's consultant.