

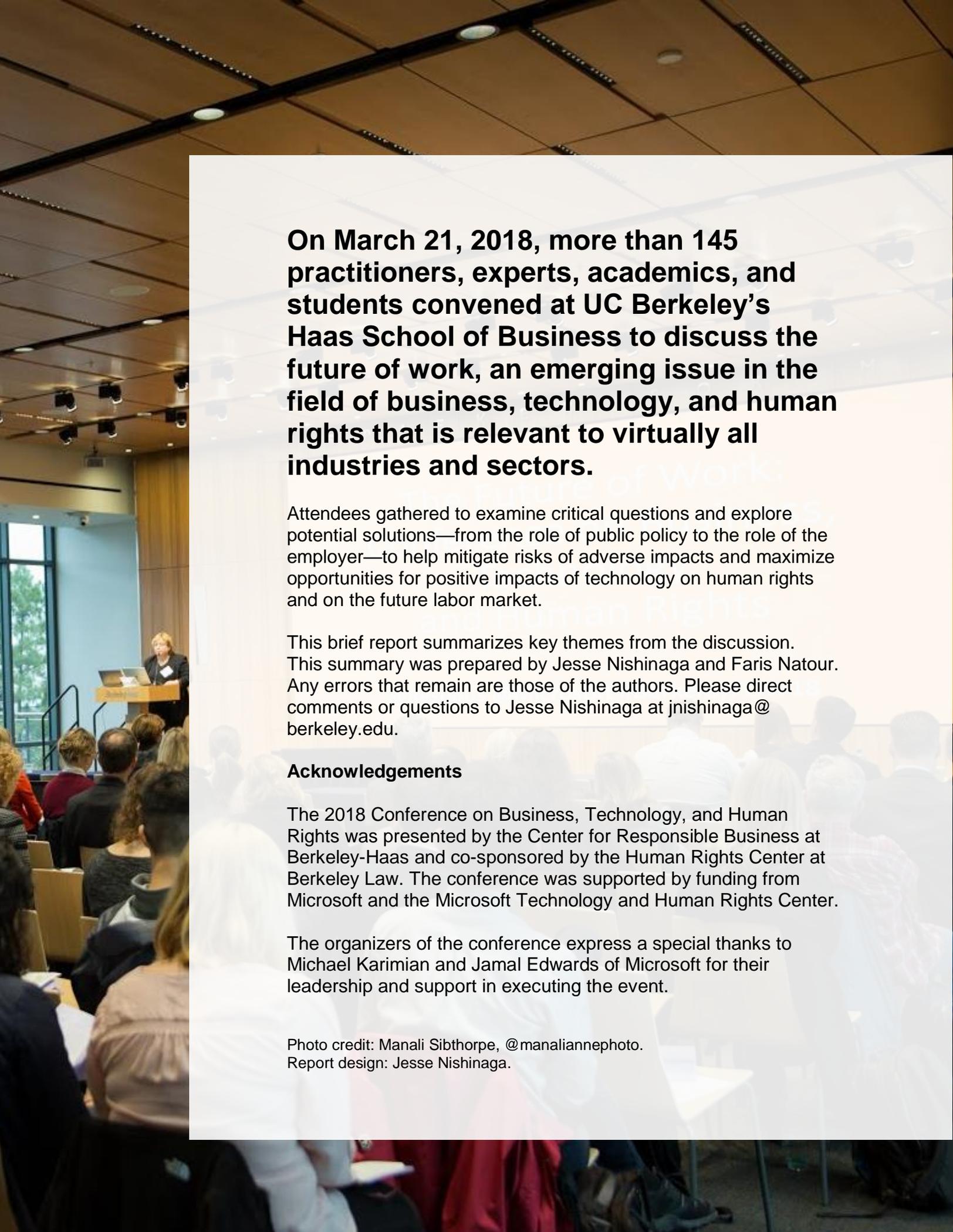
The Future of Work

2018 Conference on Business, Technology, and Human Rights

Executive Summary



March 21, 2018
Spieker Forum, Haas School of Business



On March 21, 2018, more than 145 practitioners, experts, academics, and students convened at UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business to discuss the future of work, an emerging issue in the field of business, technology, and human rights that is relevant to virtually all industries and sectors.

Attendees gathered to examine critical questions and explore potential solutions—from the role of public policy to the role of the employer—to help mitigate risks of adverse impacts and maximize opportunities for positive impacts of technology on human rights and on the future labor market.

This brief report summarizes key themes from the discussion. This summary was prepared by Jesse Nishinaga and Faris Natour. Any errors that remain are those of the authors. Please direct comments or questions to Jesse Nishinaga at jnishinaga@berkeley.edu.

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THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVE AND COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

The [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#) is already unfolding, but unlike previous industrial revolutions, the transformation that society will face could be unlike anything humankind has experienced before in terms of scale, scope, and complexity.

The McKinsey Global Institute, in its seminal [report published in December 2017](#), forecasted that by the year 2030, as many as 800 million jobs could be displaced because of automation technologies. The report also estimated that at least 30 percent of the tasks performed in 60 percent of all occupations could be automated. Beyond the impact on jobs and the resulting inequality that could arise, the very nature of work—from how we value it, to how we organize it, to how we protect the basic rights of those who participate in it—will also fundamentally change.

Participants explored how public and private sector actors in both developed and developing economies could respond to these possible scenarios, focusing on the need for policies and practices that protect human rights and uphold basic labor standards, especially as more and more people—whether by choice or circumstance—move into the growing [gig economy](#). This includes, for instance, developing solutions that strengthen workers' voice and their ability to protect their rights and negotiate fair employment contracts as their ability for collective bargaining diminishes. In some circumstances, this may also include creating systems of “universal basic income” or “portable

benefits” so that adequate social protections are available, accessible, and moves with the individual as he or she transitions from one job to the next.

Participants also pointed to the need for public and private sector actors around the world to support and prepare the next generation of workers with the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow. On one end, there will be a need for both the public and private sectors to modernize their approaches to education and training to help close the skills gap and prepare workers for their next job, especially in cases of job displacement. On the other end, employers may need to reexamine how they value human capital, from “people in specific jobs” to “people with specific skills”—skills that can be more widely transferrable and be applied to a broader range of jobs across different job categories and even different industries and sectors.

But as one speaker noted, particularly in terms of the role of business, “we as a society need to begin thinking about how to transition worker training to complement the growing prevalence of automation in the workplace in a way that is inclusive. If companies do not develop responses to automation in an inclusive way that thinks about how technology is deployed, people will use their democratic power to take opportunities away from companies.”

Furthermore, solutions will also need to be formed in collaboration across sectors and disciplines. Good outcomes will be possible if public and private sectors work in concert to develop smart, adaptable, compatible, and mutually reinforcing policies and practices that work for all people,

especially those who will be affected by these changes the most. As one speaker commented, “stakeholder conversations continue to occur in silos. Efforts going forward must ensure all stakeholders are brought to the table and participate in the same conversation.”

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY, BUT KEEP HUMANS AT THE CENTER

As the world grows to [10 billion people over the next 30 years](#), participants expressed optimism that humans will find ways to use technology to solve some of society’s greatest challenges—from climate change to poverty and hunger to health and education—faster, more effectively, and at greater scale. Many good examples of this already exist today.

For instance, robotics on the manufacturing floor in global supply chains are enabling companies to move their workers away from jobs that are “dull, dangerous, and dirty.” In an example shared by one of the speakers, workers at an electronics company are transitioning to other jobs within the same company and are now in higher skilled, career-oriented jobs that are safer and more enriching.

In another instance, a company’s technology is being used to assist medical professionals to conduct scans and assessments faster and more precisely, enabling them to spend more time with their patients to identify the best course of treatments for them.

Technology is also helping to bring education and training to more people, whether it’s a young person who is not

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able to access traditional pathways to education but can now take online courses to learn new subjects or a factory worker accessing critical health and safety training or financial education through her or his mobile device.

As in the past, technology will also help create new jobs and categories of jobs that we cannot even imagine or anticipate today.

But while these examples paint a positive picture of the role of technology, there is justifiable fear that good outcomes will not be possible everywhere and for everyone. Certain types of jobs will be eliminated and displace millions of workers.

Key ethical questions will also need to be wrestled with, including where humans should draw the line between technology making decisions for them and the need for humans to intervene and have the final say. The consensus today is to leverage technology for positive outcomes, but as one speaker said, “we must make sure that whatever we do, humans are at the center, and respect and dignity are at the center.”

A PATH FORWARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT

The public and private sectors have a shared interest to create a positive future of work. Both sectors have the means, talent, and partnership capabilities to co-create a future where work brings out the best in all people, from employers to employees.

In this spirit, companies can specifically adopt the following objectives:

1. **Support the existing workforce to adapt their skill sets** to meet the needs of future opportunities both inside and outside the company. Reexamine how skills and jobs should be defined and valued in the future.
2. **Invest in the next generation of workers** who are lifelong learners and are comfortable collaborating with technology to “do more, better, with less negative impact.”
3. **Develop technologies that augment and complement human effort** and do so “ethically, with transparency, and with humans in the loop.”

4. **Listen to workers and include them in the conversation.** Make this a fundamental practice of doing business around the world.

Meanwhile, governments can reinforce these corporate efforts by pursuing the following objectives:

1. **Adopt strong policies that ensure technology respects human rights** and are developed in ways that protect, not weaken, workers’ rights.
2. **Fund research for new public policy solutions**, such as universal basic income, to understand their potential, positive impact on the future of work.
3. **Continue to strengthen social protections** for workers around the world, especially for the millions of them who will be affected the most by technology.

There is a shared economic interest for the public and private sectors to work together on this great challenge. As one speaker remarked, “if people don’t have good jobs, they won’t have income to buy goods and services.” In short, what will be good for society will also be good for business.

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