Everyone’s a futurist

Preparing for the future involves not just being aware of likely changes but also managing them as they happen. For Morneau Shepell Ltd.’s Paula Allen, thinking like a futurist needs to be “more of a core competency” for managers. Disruptive technology and new business models will affect company structure, which in turn will have an impact on employee well-being. “You can have the best-laid plans in the world, in terms of what your business objectives are, but if your employees are floundering as a result of the fact that they’re going through the change, you won’t achieve what you hoped to,” says Allen, vice-president of research and integrative solutions at Morneau Shepell.

Adopting a futurist’s mindset can be important for a range of human resource issues. Schlehuber, for example, predicts hiring practices will change radically in the future as they’ll increasingly involve using information beyond the résumé, such as a candidate’s tweets. Employers may eventually skip hiring humans for jobs altogether. Schlehuber points to McCann Erickson Japan Inc., an advertising agency that appointed a robot as its creative director in March 2016. “HR is going to have to figure out, is a human best suited for this role? Is artificial intelligence best suited for this role?” she says. “What does succession planning look like for an AI?” she adds.

And as businesses face rapid change, “one critical business decision has to be how you communicate with your employees,” says Allen. She points to studies that link positive culture with improved employee performance and well-being during significant change.

“If you don’t pay attention to how people adapt to change and how they support employees with resources, with manager training, with attention to their culture, the organizations aren’t going to be that successful in the change.”

Sara Tatelman is an associate editor at Benefits Canada: sara.tatelman@tc.gc.ca.