Chapter 5

Preparing Gen Y and Z for the Future of Work Through Co-operative Education:
A Case Study on the University of Waterloo

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ABSTRACT

There are many predicted changes for the future of work. These changes will have significant implications for the type of work that people will do and the careers they will have. The question for many higher education institutions is what can be done to support students in preparing for what is predicted to be a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) future. In this chapter, work-integrated learning (WIL) will be explored as a model of education particularly useful in preparing students for a VUCA world. The chapter will examine one WIL program in particular, the University of Waterloo's co-op program, and consider how its design aligns and supports students in preparing for their future work.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of significant disruptions predicted for the future workforce. These include: advances in technology, the need for skill agility and lifelong learning, fostering cultures of diversity and inclusion, the expansion of the gig economy, and the tension between organizational and employee values. As post-secondary institutions consider how to best prepare learners for the ways in which those changes will affect their career paths, they need to understand the ways in which work is expected to change, and they need to consider the pedagogies that will best support Gen Y and Z learners to be successful on the uncertain career paths ahead of them. This chapter examines one particular model of work-integrated

learning at one institution, the University of Waterloo, and how its co-operative education program is designed to support students' success in the future of work.

PREDICTED TRENDS IN THE FUTURE OF WORK

There have been numerous reports written over the past few years regarding the expected ways in which work will change dramatically in the coming years (Amery, 2018, Lent, 2018, Rivera et al., 2020). While thinking and writing about predictions for the future are not new, the concept of the "future of work" is a topic that has become increasingly popular in the past decade. The Web of Science graph shown in Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of the phrase "future of work" in peer-reviewed publications since 1996.

Figure 1. Web of Science bar graph showing the frequency of the phrase "future of work" between 1996-2020 (total: 571 records)
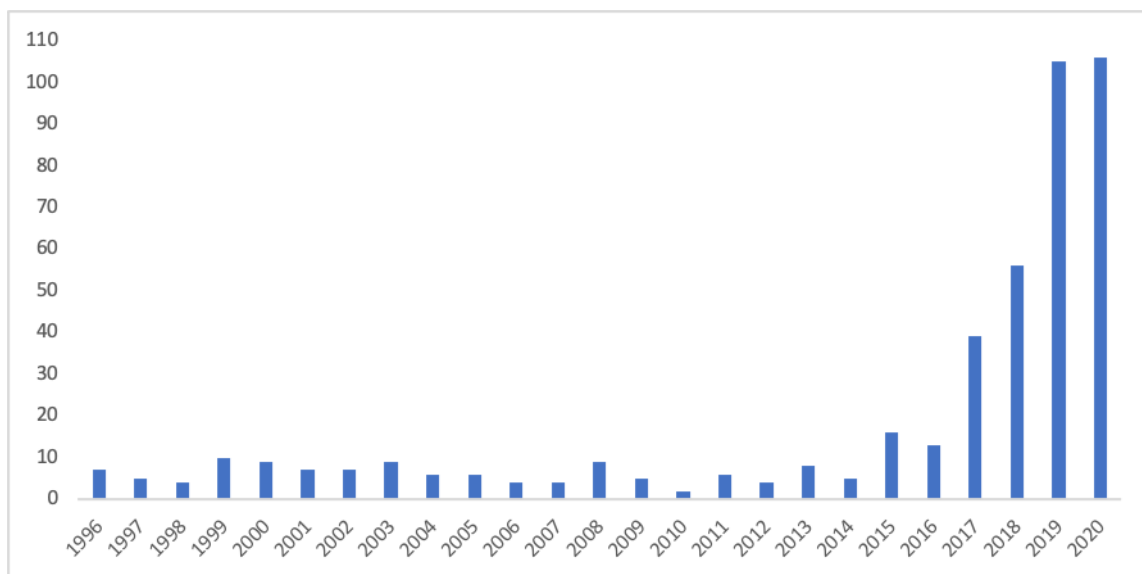
The phrase "future of work" appeared for the first time in 1996 and increased from 2011 onwards. Occurrences of the phrase in peer-reviewed publications have almost doubled in 2019-2020 as seen in Table 1 below:

The nature of what was being discussed in reference to the future of work has changed over time. In a synthesis of 32 reports on the future of work written between 2015 and 2020, the following key themes were identified: advances in technology; the need for skill agility and transferability; responsibility for adaptation; fostering cultures of equity, diversity, and inclusion; the expansion of the gig economy; and the tension between organizational and employee values (Stevens et al., 2020). The following sections will highlight key insights from the reports and literature for each of these themes.

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