

Covid-19 is the first phase of the 4th Industrial Revolution

Commentary on Covid-19 by Limpopian Percyval Bayane a lecture at the University of South Africa from the Department of Sociology.

Is the existence of Corona Virus (Covid-19) the first phase towards transitioning to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in South Africa?

Since the announcement and declaration of a national pandemic due of Covid-19 in South Africa, society has moved to performing its matters remotely.

For instance, many industries in South Africa have transitioned into remote control and providing most of their services online.

This illustrates how the country and societies are slowly being introduced to the principles of 4IR, which are based on technological advancement, robotics, internet and artificial intelligence.

This article does not generalise about Covid-19 and 4IR but rather wants to direct researchers' attention to some of the consequences of 4IR and Covid-19 in South Africa.

Further research on this topic will contribute to understanding the South African context of 4IR and the implications of Covid-19 on society.

Covid-19 pandemic came as a shock to South Africans, where the first case was reported on the 5 March by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

After a bit more than a week a national state of disaster was declared, and a number of measures implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19, included limiting and banning travelling out of and into South Africa.

On the 26 March, a national lockdown was declared to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in South Africa.

As a result of the national lockdown in South Africa, a transformation of many affairs in the country took place, including the temporary closure of companies and businesses to ensure that social distancing is maintained as the core measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The initial national lockdown period was extended after 16 April, and different phases were announced.

A noticeable aspect following the announcement by the president of South Africa and implementation of the national lockdown in South Africa is that businesses, work places, schools and many societal affairs transitioned from being done through direct face-face contact to remote.

Many businesses only operated remotely in mid-April until the country moved to phases five and four, which allowed essential business to operate but maintained social distancing.

Although, the country eased to level 3 of the national lockdown, business is continuously operating remotely through the use of online ordering and delivery.

Education in Covid-19 Pandemic

Notably, Covid-19 has a negative impact on the education system. For instance, most universities are now changing into remote teaching and plan to execute exams, and other activities online.

This has been posing challenges to higher education students, especially those in black communities who do not have access to technology for remote learning.

Furthermore, the South African government gave primary and secondary schools a green light to operate, but the rise of Covid-19 cases led to closing of schools again.

Thus, the battle with technological revolution enforced through Covid-19 pandemic demonstrate how the South African community is not ready for remote learning and teaching.

Online teaching signifies the introduction of the fourth industrial revolution through technological revolution experienced in South Africa.

Businesses in Covid-19

The operation of business in the midst



of Covid-19 has been a challenge to many companies.

Declaration of the national lockdown in South Africa came with closure of operation, and many industries opted for remote selling and buying.

For example, an official announcement was made during level 4 of the national lockdown that restaurants will be operating remotely – for online ordering and delivery.

As such, the transitioning into remote control and use of technology illustrates how technology and artificial intelligence is slowly taking over the way of living and operation of businesses in South Africa.

For instance, one day I called an insurance company for help, only to get a recorded message that 'work is and will be done remotely'.

I, therefore, needed to email for further information and help.

Covid-19 is the first phase to 4IR

I therefore argue that Covid-19 is the first phase of transitioning into the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in South Africa, as most affairs are remotely based and industries are slowly moving to basing their businesses in technology and remote control.

In his book, Schwab (2016) postulates that the fourth industrial revolution will have significant implications on the economy, business and society – way of living.

As a result, traditional ways of living, businesses and working to mention a few are challenged by the technological revolution imposed through the pandemic.

Scholars on the 4IR deliberate on the positive and negative effects of the revolution on industries and human aspects.

However, South Africa has been encountering the negative impact of the revolution through closure of business, schools, the changing nature of work and human difficulty to make end meets in societies.

According to Schwab (2016) 4IR is a new and advanced technology, artificial intelligence and robotics anticipated to take over the economy, industries and business.

Although scholars grapple with defining and describing the technological revolution, less attention is focused on unpacking how

the technological revolution will unfold.

Henceforth, I argue that the introduction of and transition into remote work, living and operation of business through the Covid-19 pandemic is the first phase of the technological and internet revolution.

Thus, the question remains of whether the South African community is ready for the technological revolution, and particularly black communities with lack of access to technology.

In conclusion, the national pandemic brought about by Covid-19 accelerated the transition and transformation of societal conduct in business, schools and social –societal affairs.

The 4IR is pursued in South Africa through the pandemic which as a result is enforcing the shift towards remote control and the dominance of technology in the way of life.

Although the country is moving into remote control, there will be heavily effects of the transitioning process on a societal level.

For instance, shifting of the country into remote control shows implications, such as possible job losses and change to the meaning of work, the nature of work including working conditions and labour relations.

These times call for rethinking and reconceptualisation of many things in the country.

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