



# The changing nature of work

## The relevant workforce



## Rethinking talent management for an agile, robotic and entrepreneurial world

'Human capital' is a key asset of any organisation, so it makes sense to focus on people to ensure relevance in times of change. Fostering agility, optimising talent, boosting engagement and reinventing reward can make the difference.

As organisations face storms of disruption, and meet it head on with technology and innovation to remain relevant, they must also turn their attention squarely to their workforce.

"We value our businesses, but never on the strength of human capital," says Lisa Barry, Partner, People and Change, KPMG. "We're not counting value in the right way. And we're not consuming it (human capital) in ways that maximise the human condition, the way people work and when they're working optimally."

Mobility of people is on the rise, robotics are taking a seat alongside humans, and staff are demanding an increasingly 'consumerised' experience from their employers, presenting a vast challenge for organisations to rethink how they manage, empower and reward talent.

"Organisations will need to be more 'free range' in the way they work – it's about working 'from the talent'. If you did a stocktake of the talent in your staff, you would do things that

you don't do today in the market," Barry says.

To seize the opportunity, Barry argues that talent management must be re-strategised. She says companies that foster an adaptable workforce, optimise their people, boost employee engagement and reinvent reward have the best chance of success.

### Cultivating agility

Resilient, adaptable people can help fuel a workforce that is ready to meet new demands, according to Bernard Salt, Partner, Advisory, KPMG. He says these qualities can be fostered through a culture that reflects the changing nature of work, leading by example, and hiring people with an open-minded attitude.

"Leaders need to set the expectation that a disruptive world doesn't 'happen to other people' – it happens to everyone," Salt says. "Set expectations and say, 'This is your job now, but in 6 months or 12 months or 2 years' time we might need to

redeploy you to better manage the opportunities in the market'"

Salt says considering the physical environment of the workplace, or encouraging offsite, flexible working, can also assist.

"An agile workplace encourages people to be flexible and fluid. The physical layout can be designed to create a culture of agility and constant change."

### A cloud of talent

As organisations nurture adaptable employees, they can also be open-minded about how they boost their resource pool, drawing on what Salt calls the "cloud of talent." With a growing marketplace of freelancers, contractors, consultants and teams for hire, along with the ability to reach people around the world with technology, it is easier to top up teams with additional skills, support or creativity.

"Think of a 'human cloud' where employers are able to 'reach into the cloud' and draw on talent as required," he says.

Barry says it's time to break the belief that ideas must be generated from staff within an organisation. Rather, solutions can also be sought externally and rewarded.

"It's about resetting an organisation to be able to perform, and there are a myriad of different ways to do that. Sometimes you may need to 'borrow brains', but in the new dynamic market, who says you can't do that?" she says.

### **Harnessing the 'snowflakes'**

Barry says every employee is different "like snowflakes", offering the analogy that "we don't organise the 'snowflakes' very well." She says employers need to ask, 'have we got the right people doing the right work?'

"We limit their contribution because we write job descriptions, born out of the industrial revolution that timed out a long time ago. Some of the rules, regulations, compliance and routines have us stuck in tight corners," she says.

Through developing agility, learning more about staff (perhaps through analytics and appropriate technology monitoring of work habits and practices) and deconstructing scripts around roles and responsibilities, there is a chance organisations can tap into what Barry calls "the superhuman"

"If we activate individuals, they will give you more. If you can free people to work in their 'flow state' for 3 hours a day, they will do more than they would in 3 days. Your brain moves into a different place where you can think and develop ideas. You will also have the energy to execute at new levels of excellence," she says.

Engaging the powers of technology to automate manual tasks can assist, freeing up human talent to focus on more interesting and impactful pursuits.

"The robots can do the things that humans probably shouldn't do, or that the robots could do better. That will make space," she says.

### **Purpose and personalisation**

As employees rise to meet these new norms, their reward must align with the change. Barry says this isn't simply about money, but also about offering a higher purpose to their work.

"You know you've done a good job when everybody is connected to a purpose and they're living the organisation's story, working it and creating it," Barry says.

As employees experience 'concierge' style service from other organisations as consumers, they are increasingly expecting it from their employer. This presents an opportunity for employers to offer services above expectation, which helps to build employee loyalty.

"You have to show that you're in it together, rather than just push to get work done. So there's more balance in the relationship," Barry says.

It could be as simple as offering pre-paid food to order online during busy periods, or providing technology wearables to monitor when staff are stressed, then stepping in to assist.

### **Putting 'doomsday' in perspective**

Despite the advantages of embracing change, the rise of robotics in the workplace, along with the disruption of sectors

and jobs, can spark a fear of job losses or obliteration of certain skill requirements. Salt says organisations must recognise this potential impact on people.

"There can be feelings of insecurity when you come from a world of tenure, to a more open market, and that can be quite unsettling for workers," Salt says.

To keep the shift in perspective, he points to figures that show jobs in Australia have remained strong despite technology.

"The unemployment rate in Australia today, at 5.7 percent, is still less than it was in the year 2000. We've added 3 million jobs and reduced the unemployment rate over a 17-year period where there has been automation, robotification and outsourcing – and significant workplace change," Salt says.

He is optimistic about the potential for organisations to evolve, and for their people to embrace new opportunities.

"The majority of humanity will think, 'I can use that time to do something else'. We will find and create those jobs of the future," Salt says.

Barry says achieving success for both organisations and their talent comes back to assessing the value of human capital, recognising their strengths, and embracing the talent marketplace. It's vital to support people to evolve and to empower them to thrive.

"Applying insights on employee performance will increase your competitive advantage," she says.

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