



Boardroom questions

Future workforce

Board Leadership Center (India)

(a five minutes read)



According to the World Economic Forum, “Automation, in tandem with the [impact of] COVID-19, is creating a ‘double-disruption’ scenario for workers.”¹ Coping with the continued automation and accelerated digitalisation of our post-pandemic reality requires organisations to adopt a high pace and frequency of change. In addition, the rapidly evolving business environment of a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world, and the need to adapt accordingly, means the lifespan of skills is shortening. At the same time, workforces are being disrupted by churn, and the “hot topics” driving company agendas – such as, ESG, data analytics, intelligent automation, or regulation – are creating a higher demand for certain skills than there is supply. The result is a scarcity of resource.

With these changes, come risks and opportunities. Organisations need to be able to separate hypes from sustainable solutions. The constant need for reskilling/upskilling and new ways of working are trends that are here to stay – and will likely accelerate. Reskilling and upskilling are not only tools to enable an organisation to retain and re-train their existing workforce, but they can

help bridge the gap between supply and demand. With organisations looking to the same profiles to fill a role – e.g., data scientists – demand outweighs supply. Instead, they could consider profiles with adjacent skills, and upskill them to fit the role.

In addition, organisations need a common purpose and the right company culture, to accompany change and to sustain new ways of working. Organisations that manage to align and empower their workforce to deal with the new reality will allow their employees to deliver on the customer promise and drive business performance.

The Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) will need to help lead the transformation and create the capability, capacity, and company culture needed to weather current upheavals and to create the foundations for continued profitability.

Boards will need to acknowledge the importance and role of culture, purpose, and employee experience in any transformation or evolution, in order to stay relevant. Next to the Voice of the Business and the Voice of the Customer should be the Voice of the Employees.

The challenges are significant, and the board should allow HR to guide their organisations in:



Aligning the organisation's purpose, culture, and values



Shaping the workforce in a way that benefits from humans and machines working together



Adopting design thinking to identify and address employee experience



Using data to generate workforce insights



Reporting back on their findings about how the culture on the ground and employee experience compare to the board's vision.

1. The Future of Jobs Reports 2020, World Economic Forum, 20 October 2020

What questions should boards consider asking?

Purpose

- Do we need to re-evaluate our purpose in light of the new reality?
- How do Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) expectations impact our brand perception and our employees experience?
- How will our operating model evolve to remain relevant and competitive?



(Future) workforce planning

- How do we successfully integrate digital and human labour?
- What will our workforce of the future look like considering the 5 B's of possible workforce shaping scenarios: Buy (your permanent employee mix, i.e. your payroll), Build (upskilling and reskilling your talent), Borrow (the use of contingent contractors and consultants, or outsourcing services), Bind (retention) and Bot (automation)?
- How does this change the meaning of "career" in our organisation?
- Can we identify the new skills and capabilities that will be required in the future?



New reality

- How does the new reality of more remote working impact our available talent pool? What are the opportunities – for example: rethinking our employer value proposition, sourcing remote candidates, attracting new target groups who start considering our company as an employer option in light of remote working?
- How do we keep our workforce connected and engaged?
- What are the barriers and how can we develop plans for new ways of working and nurturing employee commitment?



Culture

- What is the culture that we want to achieve within our organisation?
- How is this linked to our purpose? How can culture bring our purpose to life?
- What are the (culture) changes required to support our people, the new ways of working and make our workforce future-proof?



Retain and reskill

- Have we identified our key talent and defined actions to develop and retain them?
- Is our current Learning and Development function adequately resourced and appropriately organised to deliver the level of re-skilling that the organisation is likely to need?
- How do we accompany employees throughout the transformation journey from a change perspective?



What actions can the boards consider?

In aligning your future workforce with your strategy:



Establish a company culture with a common purpose and values that support, connect and empower the digital workforce.



Implement a formal and continuous 'workforce shaping' activity that plans for the implications of automation and new ways of working on the workforce, including plans to develop new skills and capabilities. This activity should be formally connected to medium-term business scenario planning and strategy development.



Build change management capabilities within HR and across leadership that can help guide the organisation through the high-paced transformations while considering the employee experience.



Move from experimenting with technologies and data towards deploying them widely not only within the HR function but across the organisation.

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