

# THE DEMAND FOR AN AGILE, INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE

BY ANDREW FLETCHER

*“The Future of Jobs report recently predicted that by 2020 more than one third of the skills that will be required are not yet considered critical and are not being taught in universities and colleges today.”*

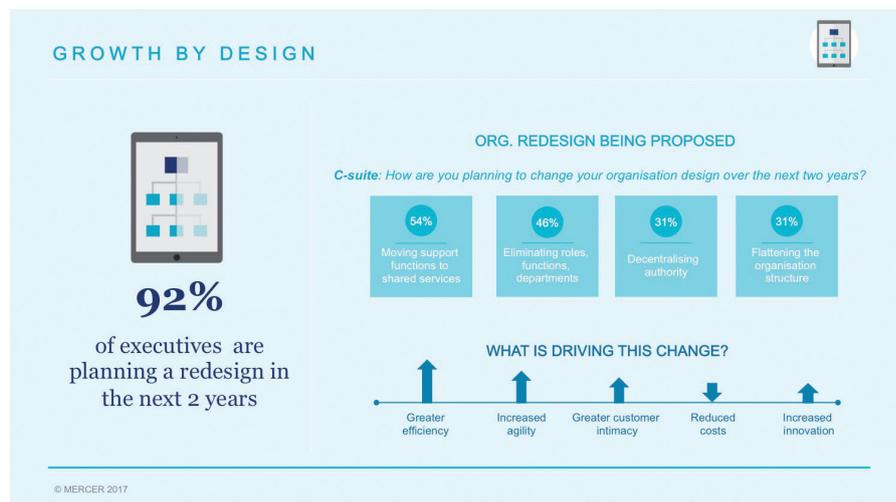
The World Economic Forum

Given that workplace disruption has become a sizeable issue from which the full impact is yet to be appreciated - what skills do we need to acquire to prepare?

Before we can assess the specific skillset our workforce will need, we need to understand how C-Suite Executives approach structural change within their organisation.

Compiled with input from 400+ senior executives, 1700+ HR professionals, and 54,000+ employees from 20 industries, Mercer's 2017 Global Talent Trends report has found that 92 per cent of Australian C-suite executives will make structural changes within their organisation over the next two years to increase responsiveness, productivity, agility and innovation.

When the same executives were asked if they would consider their organisation



as change agile the response was far from encouraging placing Australian organisations far below global trends. Therefore, if we accept our Executives' view that there is a deficiency in most of our organisations' ability to adapt to change in an agile way - what place will learning play into the future?

## To Build, Buy or Borrow Talent?

Understanding the need, accessibility and availability of staff for your organisation is essential if you are to understand whether it is more effective to build, buy or borrow talent.

Compared to last year's global trend of 82 per cent, Mercer reports that 79 per cent of Executives around the world identify the investment in talent as a priority, 48 per cent would rather resort to external talent acquisition, and 40 per cent would prefer to borrow contingent workplace skills in the form of contractors.

Top three immediate areas of greatest talent demand in order of ranking are:

1. IT Technology (including Digital)
2. Core Operations | Service Delivery
3. Marketing

Comparatively, Executives rated leadership as the greatest shortage in today's talent pool.

## Tip

As an HR/OD/Learning Practitioner, create a line of sight into Executive's greatest focus around talent demands and align your development of learning resources with them. Determine whether you have the available skills, knowledge, and expertise to build the capabilities critical to your organisation's future.

## How do you define Agility?

If your organisation considers agility as an important capability to nurture it helps defining what agile means internally. Traditionally from an IT perspective agility can be based around 2-4 week sprints to affect change as a team focuses all efforts on a particular short term task or project.

HR professionals often refer to changing behavioural outcomes through creating an agile mindset in employees as a part of progressive talent management.

Executives approach agile as an essential part of a customer experience (internal, externally or both) and can involve quickly moving into different markets with customers, partners or commercial models in a responsive fashion.

The use of the term agile has moved

to a fluid and evolving mainstream definition outside of its origins in IT and project management. As exposure to the term agile has broadened, its shifting interpretation can create confusion dependant on one's view.

Mercer considers an agile organisation from a talent perspective, as one that listens and learns. These organisations characteristically derive actionable insight from talent data to create an empowerment agenda.

## Tools for unlocking Workforce Opportunity

Innovative and fun, Mercer Match® is Mercer's new gamified approach to talent acquisition and learning combining two traditionally separate work functions. By combining a neuroscientific approach to short games based on 'behaviours and traits', players can determine their best suited career. Users can participate in a series of fun, on-demand games which will help them to scientifically determine their most suited career path.

Rather than solely attracting talent based on skills the app can help both potential employees and employers determine if they have a mutual cultural alignment which is often difficult to determine at initial consultation. The app provides an easy way for all parties to 'try before you buy' whilst also opening up a larger talent ecosystem outside of an immediate industry skill set.

Organisations can also obtain evidence based approaches when developing leadership or high potentials programs by creating a sample of the internal traits and behaviours as part of best practice they would like to cultivate, attract or avoid.

## Underlying Frameworks

The key to developing a sound strategic framework is the ability to adapt to the evolving needs of an agile workforce.

As the demand for new skills is ever-changing, HR and learning can add precious business-value by learning to incorporate both emerging and ongoing

talent skills into job design.

Today, 50 per cent of HR Leaders are receptive to making changes to job specs within their business, and 86 per cent of organisations indicate that innovation is essential to their agendas this year. Still, a low 42 per cent of employees say that their companies make it easy to innovate.

Learning functions within organisations can create value by:

- Being realistic in determining what learning is core to the organisation
- Prioritising what future skills need to be incorporated into job design development
- Assisting in creating an agile mindset (either in the innovative and/or digital agendas)

## Connecting Learning Strategy with Organisational Design

Often, learning initiatives are left aside as they sit low on company core strategic objectives. To create an effective learning strategy it should reflect the essence of the organisations strategy with particular attention around how to engage talent.

The 4C's model covered in *Learning Strategy for the C Suite* include: capability; capacity; compliance and culture.

Engaging stakeholders to face issues of change, innovation and agility requires debate, right answers and a general consensus.

Given that today's talent agenda issues combine difficulties in strategy, structure, skill and governance both within and outside the organisation, it is essential to create an environment with a clear focus on education.

Using a build, buy, borrow approach will help determine what the optimal resource mix is for initiatives and how it can help guide where investments toward learning need to be made.

## Developing Diverse Skill Sets

Key skills and data to consider from Mercer's *2017 Global Talent Trends* that are relevant to learning are:

- Leadership and Professional

Development - Australia ranked this the number one thing that would make a positive impact to their work situation "Leaders who set clear direction".

- Innovation - 50 per cent of companies say they gather innovation ideas from employees but only 26 per cent invest in innovation skills training.
- Digital and Data Analytics - Less than 10 per cent of organisations consider themselves digital while only 35 per cent of executives believe HR provides a digital experience.

## Technology Change and an Agile, Innovative Workforce

As technology options increase so does the ambiguity of the responsibilities we face in today's workforce. Confronting the immediate skills challenge that disruption causes also provides us the opportunity to re-examine how our broader HR and learning operation models support the organisation and influence strategic outcomes.

What has become apparent is that a workforce which is skilled, responsive, agile and innovative will remain highly valued in the eyes of employers in the foreseeable future.

## References

Fletcher A, 2016 'Learning Strategy For The C Suite', *Training and Development* vol 43, no 6.

Mercer 2017, *2017 Mercer Global Talent Trends* <https://www.mercer.com.au/our-thinking/career/talent-trends-2017.html>

Mercer Match <https://mercermatch.com>

World Economic Forum 2016, *Future of Jobs Report* <https://www.weforum.org/press/2016/01/five-million-jobs-by-2020-the-real-challenge-of-the-fourth-industrial-revolution>

**Andrew Fletcher** is the Pacific Learning Commercial Leader of Mercer. Contact via LinkedIn <https://au.linkedin.com/in/andrewfletchermelbourne>