



# Beyond COVID19: Transforming the Workforce for a New World

July 2020

Dealing with disruptive forces is already a strategic priority for businesses as they remain challenged on all fronts be it trade wars, geopolitical uncertainty, demographic change, rapid urbanisation, rise of technology, or climate change and resource scarcity. Just when the global economy was at an inflection point, COVID-19 crisis added several new dimensions for businesses to consider even as they strived to realign and stay afloat.

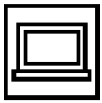
Talent has consistently been a key driver of business growth. Even before COVID-19 spread, over 84% of Singapore CEOs expressed concern over the availability of key skills in [PwC's 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Global CEO Survey](#).

Today, as businesses restart and prepare for a rebound in the post COVID-19 world, the demand for right talent and workforce culture stand further exacerbated. Organisations will need to accordingly re-think their business model, capabilities and workforce.

The key questions in the minds of CEOs today are: Is there an opportunity now to create more agile redeployment models that will help prevent being caught in the next crisis? What capabilities will help accelerate the 'bounce-back-ability' of businesses? Will the current workforce be able to meet the demand of future skills requirements?

The challenge is also around developing a talent pool that is knowledgeable, strategically adept, cognitively flexible and proficient. So, as businesses transform their workforce for post COVID-19 new world, key areas to focus on include:

- 1) New ways of working
- 2) Workforce mix
- 3) Continued Upskilling



# New Ways of Working

The evolution and advancement in technology, coupled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have led us to rethink our ways of working. Companies have had to revise their operational frameworks and policies almost overnight and most of us have already started operating in the new setup.

## Questions on business owners' minds:

- How to keep remote workers informed and motivated?
- How to maintain performance and productivity?

## Key considerations for businesses:

- 1) Ramp up digital operations to meet evolving demand.
- 2) Re-assess and redesign your organisation, teams and role structures to maximise productivity and agility.
- 3) Managing employee experience and adopting new working practices through this crisis will influence how employees cope with change over the long term.

People engagement relies on organisational resilience, the ability to engage and inspire people (even virtually) and is deeply rooted in trust; trust that your people will do the right thing.

Businesses who are not digitally prepared may face challenges working remotely with possible concerns over productivity and cybersecurity. For organisations that have been practising remote working, their infrastructure is put to test as remote working is rolled-out to the entire organisation. The ability for an organisation to prepare, anticipate and adapt to sudden changes becomes key to its survival.

While organisations need to be ready with Business Continuity Plans (BCP), they need to promote a culture of trust and resilience. Constantly adapting to change will be a major change of mindset in some industries and for some workers. This calls for transformational leadership at the helm – where leaders can provide direction, while continuing to build trust and make timely decisions. The Singapore government's funding as part of the SkillsFuture Enterprise Credit is a great boost to organisations to start their workforce transformation initiatives now.

In Malaysia, large organisations representing significant market capitalisation are being challenged with productivity and potentially accumulated liquidity issues. The workforce transition which these companies have had to adopt has been swift in the form of work from home policies. But as the global pandemic is starting to have a longer term impact, organisations are exploring increased remote working options to reduce their overall employee cost by investing in long term flex work arrangements.



## Workforce mix

Jobs will continue to evolve. Excessive layers and narrow spans of control make organisations complex and sometimes inflexible, impacting their ability to adapt to changing environments. While organisations start focusing on redesigning the roles to cater to the disruption, some of us will already find ourselves picking up roles that are very different to the ones we were performing.

### Key Considerations for businesses:

- 1) Reconsider location strategy with a view to maximising available talent and resource pools, and fully understand and assess geographical concentration risks.
- 2) Determine immediate workforce strategy considering capacity, workforce mix, redeployment, reskilling and temporary workforce cost effectiveness measures.
- 3) Model new ways of working to foster collaboration, empathy, inclusive behaviors, and working differently.
- 4) Focus on protecting people, not jobs.

With the gig economy taking shape, contingent workers and freelancers have increasingly become part of usual business formats. This workforce is able to work remotely from any location bringing new forms of flexibility to people and businesses. It is left to be seen how the markets in South East Asia envision and adapt to workforce management.

It is estimated that 70% of the workforce in Malaysia, being SME businesses, may not have the capability to transition to alternative services and leverage digital platforms to immediately adopt remote working. These businesses are required to rethink their operations, redesign their processes, or even complement their business with other services and workforce models as they now strategise on workforce management in the short term to long term. Furthermore, many companies are not well configured for working from home as their workforce are not fully equipped with laptops or tablets, as well as the remote working habits to enable continued productive working.

In Vietnam, the biggest questions are around business continuity plans during and after COVID-19 and, workforce transformation is one of the focal points. Vietnamese businesses require a more contingent and multi-skilled workforce to minimise future unexpected risks.







# Upskilling

Even though the majority of local CEOs have been concerned over the shortage of talent and agree that significant upskilling is the most important way to close a potential skills gap in their organisations, fewer than one in five organisations (15.6%) in Singapore believe they have made 'significant progress' in establishing an upskilling programme that develops a mix of soft, technical and digital skills, according to [PwC's 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Global CEO Survey](#).

COVID-19 has only added to the skills and jobs mismatch, and the need for an effective upskilling programme is even more pivotal today. Significant job losses seem inevitable across many countries as a result of measures to keep businesses afloat.

## Key Considerations for businesses:

- 1) Take a strategic approach to reskilling and build a workforce capable of delivering in critical areas at lower cost than through market acquisition.
- 2) Develop workforce skills to maximise the value of digital and other investments.
- 3) Reinvesting in your people during a volatile period, is a great way to establish trust and prepare your organization for the crisis recovery phase.

Leaders are realising the correlation between upskilling, progress, economic optimism and revenue confidence. As the world around us changes, and transformation of the global economy continues, new skills will become the spark plug to keep business engines running. Our society's intellectual capital may well depend on deepening our understanding around how to effectively design and implement upskilling initiatives. It calls for bigger initiatives from both industry and governments as they consider sharing the load of upskilling those who face unemployment.

Singapore's SkillsFuture program that encourages individuals to learn new skills and its Mid-Career Support Package that enables better employability by promoting skills refresh makes even more sense in the current context. Given some jobs will be redundant, organisations and individuals need to develop a growth mindset, a resilient and learning-focused culture. The first step for organisations is to assess where they are presently, what jobs and competencies exist and then define the future workforce while also taking into account the impact of digitisation and automation.

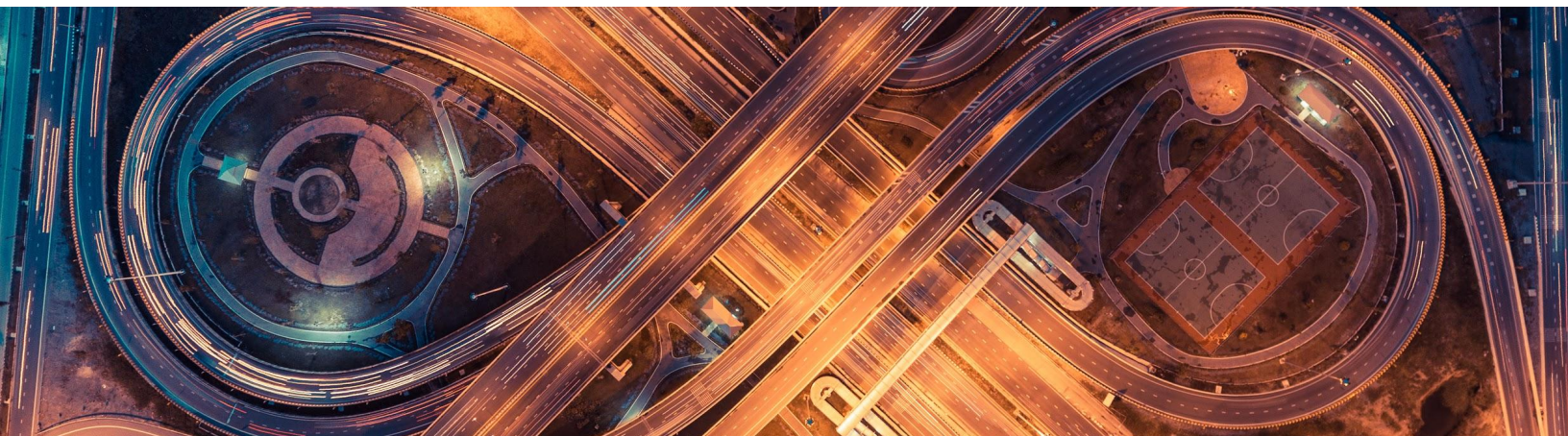


According to Thailand's 4.0 policy, the country is moving into a new era defined by innovative technology-based manufacturing and services. Thailand's future workforce is set to acquire technology capabilities in all key business sectors that the Thailand Government aims to invest in including modern agriculture, bio-fuel and bio-chemicals, modern transports, automation, robotics, intelligent electronics, aviation, and medical devices. In addition, the government plans to link networks of research and development both within Thailand and overseas.

## Conclusion

While we find ourselves in a scenario where there is uncertainty over managing business operations in the economic situation beyond COVID-19, some industries are already experiencing heavier strain than others, particularly in areas such as talent mobility and organisation design. Is there an opportunity to redefine job roles contextualised to the emerging markets? How do we manage talent mobility within an organisation, or within sectors, to enable large scale workforce transformation swiftly and effectively?

For now, organisations can leverage the right technologies and ensure people are upskilled in using digital tools. In the long-run it will help to develop a workforce with the right organisational culture to enable best practises in communication, productivity, and collaboration, with a focus on working innovatively and readily adapting to the evolving business environment.



## Contact

**Martijn Schouten**

South East Asia People & Organisation Leader

PwC Singapore

[Martijn.Schouten@pwc.com](mailto:Martijn.Schouten@pwc.com)