



The Evolution of the Workforce

Business leaders discuss how digital disruption is forcing them to take a new approach to HR and talent mapping. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** reports from Criticaleye's Asia Leadership Retreat 2016

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Evolution is typically energised by a single but significant change, the effects of which are radical but slow coming. Language, the ability to walk upright and the introduction of money each happened in pockets spread over land and generations.

Yet now we're being hit by numerous and instant technological changes that affect us worldwide, and employers are struggling to keep up.

"Due to exponential technological disruption, digital can completely transform a business within a year," warned **Nils Michaelis**, Managing Director for Digital within the APAC Products Operating Group at Accenture.

Speaking at Criticaleye's [Asia Leadership Retreat](#), held in association with Accenture and CEIBS (China Europe International Business School), **Nils** went on to explain how another important factor – the consumer – has been a catalyst for the creation and evolution of many jobs, even among the top roles.

"A couple of years ago, the then CEO of Macy's gave himself the title of Chief Customer Officer and was one of the first CEOs to do so. This got the whole company to rotate towards being customer-centric," **Nils** explained.

From a leadership perspective, the difficulty lies in creating a talent pipeline that is able to deal with these changes.

"As leaders, we need to turn our attention to how we bring the workforce together, and how we reskill them," said **Chris Harvey**, Managing Director

“Digital can completely transform a business within a year”

for Financial Services across APAC at Accenture, who led the keynote address.

However, in a Criticaleye [survey](#) of attendees at the Asia Leadership Retreat, only around half said their executive team are collaborative and 85 per cent said the behaviour of their executives can create silos.

While it's a global business issue, it's particularly important in Asia where talent is in dangerous demand, competition has led to high staff turnover, and many of the family and founder led businesses aren't doing enough to train and promote talent. So, how can we progress?

From Aptitude to Attitude

For many business leaders, including **Alan Armitage**, CEO for Standard Life (Asia), the spotlight has turned from highlighting an employee's functional aptitude to their attitude.

"I used to focus on the project plan, but realised more effort had to be put into behaviours and people," said **Alan**.

"We've put a strong emphasis on behaviours, both individually and collectively, especially on whether we have the right blend of individuals within the team and if they will work together in a productive manner."

In her work with businesses both in the UK and Asia, **Jamie Wilson**, Managing Director at Criticaleye, has found that "high performing teams show collaboration, innovation, trust and the ability to handle the ambiguity of change".

She added: "It's these traits that will see them through today's fast-changing business environment."

Alan recognises that in order to attract the best talent, Standard Life needs to offer its staff the opportunity to develop in a way that suits them.

By doing this, the organisation will also reap the benefits of having a diverse range of skills across its workforce.

"The next generation have less affiliation to the company itself but more to those that develop their skills and brand at a personal level," **Alan** noted.

"Every single member of our team has an individual development plan. Those plans need to be absolutely distinct from the individual's day job and their performance-related plan.

They are focused on where the individual would like to be in three years' time. They need to be challenging and also outline the steps an individual needs to take." >



The Fluid Workforce

Leaders must acknowledge their workforce will be more fluid than ever before; that may mean hiring more people on a part-time or consultative basis, and also acknowledging that an employee's development might result in them leaving the company.

This is something Criticaleye Board Mentor, **David Comeau**, realised back when he was President for Asia Pacific at Mondelēz International. Rather than being afraid of the fluid workforce, he saw it as a way to improve the company's reputation as an employer.

"People need to own their own career and development," said **David**. "We realised people would leave the company, so we told them we would celebrate when they leave – but also when they return."

David explained that three-years ago the company launched a programme through social media that openly recognised employees who chose to develop their careers by moving on.

"This allowed both us and them to promote their skills and success to those outside of the business. It's helped their development while also getting the word out on the great things going on at our company," he said.

Planning Ahead

This kind of attitude teaches leaders to embrace, rather than fear, mobility and succession planning. Indeed, it's an increasingly crucial way to manage tomorrow's liquid workforce.

“People need to own their own career and development”

"Succession can be a great exercise as it forces honest discussions about building the team," said **David**.

Neil Galloway, Executive and Group Finance Director at Dairy Farm Group, said that "we're increasingly trying to learn from exit interviews with people who we didn't expect would leave the company".

One of the things he discovered was that employees wanted to see there are opportunities for them to grow within the organisation. "In some cases, we had to create mobility through forced changes in order to make room for talent to move up the business.

This has meant putting all roles – including mine – into a succession plan. It was a surprise to some that I was already talking about finding an internal successor within a few months of joining the group, but it sent a strong message," **Neil** explained.

Although the requirements on your workforce – be they skills or entire roles – are both changeable and unpredictable, your employees will want reassurance.

"You need honest, transparent discussions with external candidates, so they understand the situation they are signing up for," said **Neil**.

"And you need to give colleagues candid feedback on their capabilities and potential, both the opportunities and limitations." ■

These views were shared during Criticaleye's [Asia Leadership Retreat 2016](#), held in association with Accenture and CEIBS.

Featuring Commentary From:



Alan Armitage
CEO
Standard Life (Asia)



David Comeau
Criticaleye Board Mentor
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for Asia Pacific
Mondelēz International



Neil Galloway
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