

Making the Most of a Liquid Workforce

The way in which the world of work is set to change was a key issue raised at Criticaleye's 2016 Asia Leadership Retreat. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** reports

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Standby for a very different world of work. Digital disruption, globalisation and robotics are dramatically transforming the way businesses operate. As a result, numerous jobs will disappear and those that remain will be reshaped. It's impossible to know what roles will exist in the future, so forward-thinking HRDs are recruiting employees who are adaptable to change.

According to Accenture, 47 per cent of jobs are in danger of being automated over the next 20 years. **Andrew Woolf**, Managing Director and Global Human Capital Lead for Financial Services at Accenture, believes those most at risk are 'codifiable' occupations such as underwriters, appraisers, telemarketers and lawyers.

As **Andrew** explained during a panel on the workforce of the future, at Criticleye's [Asia Leadership Retreat 2016](#), in Hong Kong: "We need employees who can adapt and are comfortable with the change that's happening all around them. They're not necessarily signing up for a specific role, so resilience, adaptability and the ability to learn are at the forefront."

It's much the case for Andrew's co-panelist, **Ben Elliott**, CEO for Asia Pacific at Experian. He said: "I need a group of people who understand that tomorrow might be very different from today, and I mean literally tomorrow."

There is ambiguity and complexity in what we do. Things change so quickly, for example we've got a lot of start-up competitors. Also, as we're part of a multinational business, we have a lot of colleagues coming into the regional division who have to understand how Asia works."

“47 per cent of jobs are in danger of being automated over the next 20 years”

Rather than relying on a large, full-time workforce with traditional skills, organisations will be obliged to develop cross-functional expertise.

This will mean hiring talent for short-term projects, retraining and relocating people. According to **Austin Bryan**, Senior Director and Head of Innovation at CLP Holdings, moving employees across divisions, roles and projects is in much better keeping with how – as consumers and individuals – we live our lives.

"If you perpetuate functional, silo-based structures you'll be asking people to swipe in and behave differently than they do in their private lives. The exciting thing for me is that the connected and shared environment creates a much more vibrant and engaged workforce," said **Austin**.

"Hierarchical organisations are no longer fit for purpose in today's environment. Some sectors are hibernating and hoping they can weather the storm, but organisations that are globally relevant and connected in the shared economy

have already tackled the fact that they must be fundamentally human, open and collaborative."

Jamie Wilson, Managing Director at Criticleye, who works with executives and non-executives to develop their leadership skills, said: "Leaders and the businesses they work for are becoming increasingly aware of the need to collaborate, because it creates increased productivity and a stronger, more unified culture. The work I do with organisations makes it clear that this is not a trend, but a basic requirement."

Keeping Track of Talent

Some businesses are taking the liquid workforce a step further by loaning out their own talent to other organisations. Yet the issue with such a fluid staff base is that talent can easily drain away and come to lie at your competitor's feet.

One way HRDs are tackling this is by setting up corporate alumni networks to track staff leavers, and by using data analytics to encourage them not to leave in the first place.

Kerry Rooks, Chief Human Resources Officer for Hong Kong at Prudential, is one of those people. She explained: "We've started to really use data to ensure engagement and retention, but the goal is to be able to predict where staff turnover may occur so we can intervene and take early action. So far it's been quite transformative, although we're still experimenting."

Experian already uses data to predict which staff may resign and when. It tracks employees on around 300 variables, >



including how long they tend to stay in roles, when they last moved house, and how often their line manager's staff quit.

"It's about 90 per cent accurate when mapped against leavers," said **Ben**. "We analysed our data and found the biggest reason people leave the organisation is a lack of opportunity; they want to move quicker than the organisation can handle. Yet 76 per cent of people who left our organisation in the last three years said they'd come back for the right job. That tells me we've got to keep farming our alumni."

Through its alumni network, Experian stays in contact with its liquid workers, charts their career progress and invites them back once they have developed new skills, contacts and experience. These 'boomerang' staff, as they've come to be called, return not only with knowledge of the business, but their rivals too.

"I need a group of people who understand that tomorrow might be very different from today"

"Sixty one former employees have rejoined the business this year. Our message to them was that the company they left is very different to the one today, so come back and have a look at what's changed," **Ben** shared.

While many HRDs have a long way to go on preparing the labour force for unforeseeable disruption, those who

get it right will really strengthen their credence within the company and propel it forward. However, according to **Andrew**, many are slow off the mark.

"I still don't see HR functions being very mature in this space but they should be talking to their colleagues to see what data they have in the organisation and how they can do something meaningful with it," he advised.

"If you can predict what it takes to be high performing in your industry, it allows you to direct your investment dollars. This is an opportunity for HR to really seize the moment and prove what they can do." ■

These insights were shared during Criticleye's [Asia Leadership Retreat 2016](#) in association with Accenture and CEIBS.

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Featuring Commentary From:



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