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Tech & Talent in Asia

The impact of new technology on the workforce was a hot topic of debate at Criticaleye's Asia Leadership Retreat 2018. **Emma Riddell** reports on the steps organisations are undertaking to stay ahead of the competition



Advances in technology and demographic change are forcing businesses to rethink their organisational structure and how they operate. It's not all about AI and robotics either – the first step for many organisations is to better enable their people by exploiting the tools they already have at their disposal.

At Criticaleye's [Asia Leadership Retreat 2018](#), held in Singapore, executives discussed what they are doing to prepare for this future workforce.

Here is what they said:

Redefine Your Workforce

The workforce of the future will need to be a broader collective, according to **Syed Ali Abbas**, Group HR Director for online retailer Global Fashion Group.

"Increasingly, we will see the concept of a total workforce, which is made up of more than just the people who are working in our organisations as employees, and includes freelancers, gig workers, term contractors, alliance partners and R&D partners," he says.

Making this work will require well thought-through workforce planning, whereby business strategy is translated into the number of people needed to deliver products and services. **Abbas** explains how you can then adjust this for "technology investments and other measures to drive productivity, and from there you can assess what you require in terms of skills and capabilities at different points in the future".

He goes on: "Then you ask: is this something that's best done by in-house employees, external contractors or gig workers? Is this something that we

“ We need to get smarter, faster and more agile. That’s where I see a transformational role for modern technology ”

should be outsourcing to a partner? Should we be co-developing with a trusted supplier or even customers?

This isn't something new, but the reality is that people still don't do it."

Create Fluid Roles and Agile Teams

How we work day-to-day is also changing. It's becoming more project based with less clearly defined roles, according to **Paul Henaghan**, Vice-President of Data Centre Solutions for Asia Pac and Japan at Dell EMC.

"We used to define roles in a box; today it's more of a circle. The technology has improved so much that today we can create fluid, evolving virtual teams that come together to work on a project," he says. "I spend a lot of time at my desktop with four or five screens open, working with a virtual team that might have someone down the road in Singapore, another person in Japan and someone in the US.

"Technology can allow us to do this at the click of a button, but you need to have the culture, as well as the tools, to make it work."

Invest in New Technology

Multinational businesses are facing a constantly changing external environment and continued cost pressure, according to **Sanjay Patel**, Group Head of Global Business Services at BAT. "We need to get smarter, faster and more agile. That's where I see a transformational role for modern technology," he says.

"What we are trying to build is a workforce that is really savvy when it comes to making the business simpler. The goal is to remove complexity by leveraging new technology, such as automation."

Real-world uses are also being found for technology that might once have been dismissed as a fad. "A year or two ago, if someone had spoken to me about augmented reality in the workplace, I would have questioned how to use it in global business services," **Sanjay** says.

"But now we are looking at using it to make our people more acquainted with the business. By wearing AR glasses, they can experience what a sales person in the field encounters and does; how we manufacture our products, which is critical when they start changing processes."

Exploit What's Already There

It's not always about investing in new tech, but rather making sure you're making the most of what's already in >



your tech arsenal. **Sanjay** explains: “If you’ve embedded a large-scale ERP system in the organisation, then the real asset at your disposal is the data, but not many companies have been able to extract the full value of that and exploit where the insights lie.

“What we’ve done, as part of our evolution towards a global business services organisation over the past year, is to leverage the existing internal ecosystem of technology. For example, we are encouraging our team to use analytics and visualisation tools – rather than traditional ones like Excel and PowerPoint – and use data to tell a story and have interactive conversations.

“Take the data, get insights and show your customers how you can create value for them, such as by freeing up working capital or improving their overhead profile.”

Engage Your Workforce

Employee engagement is going to be a huge challenge over the next few years. On one side, organisations will need to show they have built an environment that will attract the best and brightest, while on the other side managing the doubts and concerns of long-serving employees who may have to update their skills and adjust to new ways of working.

Paul says: “The world we’re entering now is all about what consumers, businesses and customers want. To deliver that effectively, you have to enable your workforce by giving them tools which allow them to respond and engage with customers in a positive and immediate manner.

TOP 5 PRIORITIES FOR LEADERS IN ASIA IN 2018:

- Innovation
- Retaining key talent and developing skills
- Greater cross-team collaboration
- Strengthening leadership capability
- Digitisation

[Source: Criticleye Asia Leadership Retreat Research 2018](#)

“The idea that people will work from nine to five, sit in front of a terminal and be motivated is far removed from reality. Individuals today – and increasingly in the future – will join your organisation for the tools that you give them to allow them to do their job.”

A similar point is made by **Michael Crompton**, General Manager, Asia, Criticleye: “When it comes to technology, the good news is that automation is increasingly bringing an end to many process-heavy, routine jobs and freeing up people to concentrate on more value-creating activities.

“However, this new workforce will need to be adaptable. And in return, employers will need to provide the opportunities and ways of working that they are demanding.”

As part of this evolution, workers are also requesting more control over managing their careers and improving their skill set, according to **Abbas**. “You provide the ability for people to dial-up the knowledge they need when they need it.

“Whether it’s a technical skill – coding for example – or a managerial competence, [or] it could be about experience: making it easier for people to do bite-sized assignments in different parts of the business to improve their commercial awareness.

“Providing an aggregation of content and a platform to access it, when it’s needed, will become increasingly common.”

He admits that this is not “earth-shattering” but explains that “what has changed is the ability for companies to deliver this on a broader scale, at a lower cost, provided you get the design right”. ■

Click [here](#) to see our film of The Challenges of Regional Leadership in Asia

Criticleye’s next Asia Leadership Retreat will be held on 4th to 5th April 2019 in Singapore. For more information, click [here](#)

Featuring Commentary From:



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