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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays every businesses, whether selling products, services or idea are converting to digital business. "Opting out" of the digital revolution is not a choice. It is here, and it's fundamentally changing every aspect of the business: strategies, business models, processes and the future workforce. The workplace is changing. Right now, core characteristics of the labour market are changing – driven largely by technology.

Digital technology has fundamentally changed every aspect of the business: strategies, processes, job functions, and business models. The workforce needs not only to adapt to meet evolving demands, but also to develop the skill sets to achieve their new goals. For example, to design for the web and mobile devices, graphic designers need to understand coding languages such as HTML5 and others. Similarly, salespeople must understand the data and analytics tools that businesses use to drive growth. As a result, many enterprises are experiencing a skills gap – indeed, a recent survey reports that 38 per cent of businesses globally are struggling to find the right talent.

More and more tasks are becoming automated, performed by computers or machines, and this means humans need to adapt. Liquid Workforce is another way of saying people will need to re-train in order to stay relevant in the midst of the digital revolution. A Liquid Workforce is one that is able to rapidly adapt and change based on the environment that they are in.

REASON TO GO FOR LIQUID WORKFORCE

"Liquid workforce" – the name alone is intriguing. This is Accenture's term for adaptable, change-friendly workers who are so agile and so ready to work beyond their current assignment that they become a competitive advantage for their companies – helping them adapt quickly to market changes as there is tremendous pressure on the workforce to quickly adapt to these evolving demands.

For example:

Automation. As automation increasingly takes over routine manual tasks, there is greater demand for the skills where humans excel ─ non-routine, interpersonal and analytical jobs.

Freelancing. The explosion in freelance work creates the opportunity for companies to leverage a contingent workforce and quickly access a broad range of skills and experience.

Training. The pace of change highlights the need for continuous training and skills advancement. It's a matter of learn or get left behind.

Demographics. The increasing dominance of the workforce by "digital natives" (someone born or brought up during the digital technology age) opens the door for companies to fully leverage this demographics technology acumen, digital expertise as well as their aptitude and enthusiasm for teamwork.

All of this starts when digital businesses put their People First. Human beings are at the center of the digital revolution. Management has to proactively help people so that they can adapt to rapidly changing demands. Companies that win focus on workplace innovation and view their people as a strategic differentiator . Organization need to improve the way *their people work and live*. It means having talent practices that attract, develop and inspire people in a uniquely human way - on their own terms. Business

goals change regularly, and many organizations must reinvent themselves multiple times.

TRAINING AS A CORE COMPETENCY

The emergence of every new technology creates abundant opportunities. But in order to capture them ahead of the competition, businesses need to rapidly assemble the right skills.

Rather than wait for the talent they need to emerge from the market, enterprises are taking an active approach by making continual training a core competency. But the right skills alone are not enough. Enterprises must also take a new approach to projects. Look at Adobe. Through a program called Kickbox, Adobe employees can volunteer to receive a red box with creative tools and a $1,000 (£699) pre-paid credit card to fund any new projects they want to start. Several of these ideas have led to full-fledged business plans. With Kickbox, Adobe has distributed almost 1,200 boxes in the last two years. Companies striving to build a similar advantage are using collaboration tools and cloud-based workflows to empower "anytime, anywhere" working. They understand that successful projects require different combinations of internal employees, freelancers, and technology for each new challenge.

FLEXIBLE YET RIGOROUS

An agile workforce will only flourish in an organisation that, in the face of change, is prepared and equipped to bend and flex. And that process demands rigorous oversight.

Consequently, more organisations are investing in end-to-end workforce management solutions – such as those provided by Oracle, Workday, and SAP – to deliver key insights into workforce capabilities and readiness. As they get more information about the workforce, business leaders can evolve their HR organization from its focus on people management, to one becoming an orchestrator for optimizing the organization's entire output. Creating an agile workforce might sound challenging, but the rewards on offer are immense.

Once organizations start to harness the power within such a workforce, they will find that they can grow smarter and faster than they ever imagined. And in the digital age, that's not just desirable – it's critical.

The liquid workforce is rapidly becoming the new normal for how businesses organize themselves. Traditional methods cannot keep up with the pace of change in the digital age and forward-thinking businesses are already beginning to learn that their workforce strategy has the potential to be a major competitive advantage.

1. To keep pace, technology helps fuel workplace innovation in three areas, i.e. innovating workforce strategies to be more fluid and flexible in areas like: skills development, project planning and organization structure.
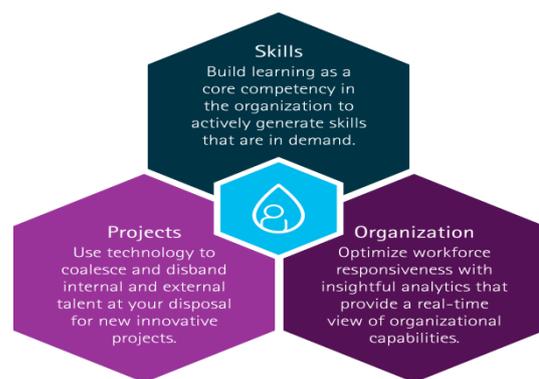
Skills: Successful organizations make continuous learning a core competency. With the skills shortage and constant reinvention, employees need learning opportunities powered by technology. These include massive online open courses (MOOCs), virtual training and boot camps that allow employees to re-skill rapidly. Given the high demand for skills in areas like robotics, artificial intelligence and data science. MNCS like Accenture predicts that eventually "corporate education will replace some higher education" as forward-thinking organizations develop their own alternatives to fill the skills gaps. Ultimately, companies, government and academia must collaborate to build the skills needed for tomorrow. And we'd be remiss if we focus only on technical skills. Creativity, social skills and EQ accelerate people to higher value work that machines can't do.

Projects: To solve the world's most challenging problems, organizations need teams with top talent. Many times, these deep skills do not exist within the organization. Leading companies must blur traditional boundaries to broaden their definition of "workforce" — finding the right combination of internal employees,

freelancers and technology for each new challenge. GE's Global Brain is a glimpse into the future as a "buzzing hive of knowledge, connectivity, technology and access that unites the human and

the machine, the physical and the digital, in previously unimaginable ways" as Beth Comstock, GE's Chief Marketing Officer, describes. And, in the sharing economy, governments and companies must collaborate to reimagine a new social contract for those in today's liquid workforce. Leading companies also use collaboration tools and cloud-based workflows that empower anytime, anywhere working. As the future of work increasingly goes virtual, Corporate Firms believe the "rise of digital reputation" may replace resumes and traditional performance processes.

Organization: In order to sustain a highly skilled workforce and fluid project model, digital businesses must have an equally flexible organizational structure. Leaders need to shift to more horizontal styles of leadership, where they co-create vs. manage. With artificial intelligence and data at workers' fingertips, more decisions will happen on the front line, where work occurs. Leaders need to be clear about expectations, transparent with feedback and ultimately trust their people to make decisions. Trust is the new currency of the digital age. Predictive analytics also enable greater flexibility by driving better decisions about hiring, roles and advancement.

There are 3 ways to make the "liquid workforce" a successful part of your business strategy.

1. EMBED CONTEXTUAL TRAINING EVERYWHERE

According to Accenture's Report, the future of work involves adaptable workforces organized around projects with embedded training. The first challenge is making sure that training is relevant to the individual learner. For example, if you hire an industry expert, you'll want to create training focusing on unique organizational processes versus industry material.

The second challenge is distribution-and redistribution. Leverage cloud-based services to make content available anywhere anytime to your dispersed expert team regardless of their time zone or device of choice. For content that you want feedback, assessment

and tracking on, use online public or private course catalogs.

2. FOSTER COMMUNICATION IN THE DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE.

It's shocking to me how many organizations still struggle with real-time team collaboration. The reality is, that leading industry expert must hire for a short-term project won't likely live (or relocate) within commuting distance of office. In addition, like Uber and Airbnb, any rapid time-to-market strategy is increasingly likely to require successfully sourcing and training contractors worldwide. The solution is to provide the right communication and collaboration tools to your contractors are effective despite their distance.

3. MEASURE TEAM ANDPROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

Lastly, recognize that feedback mechanisms and objective success metrics can be even more important in successfully managing fluid work and teams. Recent study by Mindflash found that the Agile Scrum methodology, including daily 15-minute team meetings, frequent sharing of even partial project deliverables, and finely-sliced milestone tracking are all elements of successful liquid team management.

From the organization's point of view

A liquid workforce means to organize and shape teams in such a way that they are able to rapidly adapt and change depending on the environment they find themselves in. For those in a liquid workforce, it means working in a far more dynamic, attractive and co-creating ecosystem. For example, a database administrator is no longer solely bound to the tasks of his or her own job. He or she now works closely together with other team members in executing and delivering the Final result. A true agile organization is able to deliver new functionalities across channels and technologies in a short time frame, in line with strategic business objectives.

These are all essential elements of a liquid workforce. While several companies are taking great steps, other organizations' transition phases are still at the beginning stages.

Workforce Then vs. Workforce Now

The biggest difference between the liquid workforce and 'traditional' workforce is that the former is multifaceted.

Some key elements are: a great level of autonomy, a keen sense of co-creation and a focus on 'skill cocktails' instead of deep expertise or hard technical abilities. The days where a manager tells you what to do are long gone; teams have moved to the business in a way that the business has become part of the team. The work pace has become faster, and teams often re-elect on a weekly or bi-weekly basis , looking at what has been done and established, and giving instant feedback.

Employees Need to Transform to 'The New'

The idea is to always have the right team at the right moment. The continuous, rapid feedback loop enables teams to work towards effective results much quicker, supplying the team and client with positive energy. Employees need to be able to (accept) change quickly and transform to the new – i.e. the new approach that was decided on and technology that has been made available. Combining deep technological skills with an agile approach leads to innovation and real change.

Managers still form an indispensable part of the workforce. However, their roles have changed. Considering the autonomy teams have, managers' responsibilities have been narrowed down to two essential tasks:

1. to continuously convey vision and direction;

2. facilitate an environment that brings out the best in the teams.

The End of Hierarchy ?

This begs the question: 'does this mean the end of hierarchy as we know it?' To a certain

extent, hierarchy will always be present, but the way it's structured has changed

dramatically. Bear in mind, decision-making is increasingly more embedded in technology in this day and age. When organizations use the right technology, the data needed to make the right decision can be digitized and brought directly to an employer.

The New Role of a Liquid Manager

Managers need to guide their teams in the right direction and be open to new ideas, instead of being preoccupied with planning, deadlines and budgets. To fully embrace innovation and new technology is vital. When managers

fail to do so, they hinder their team's creativity and performance. Even though managers are not specialists, nor should they be, they need to understand technology to a certain degree in order to guide their team to optimal results.

Digestible Training via Learning Boards

Training obviously plays an important role in developing people's skills and changing their mindsets. It's an effective way to guide employees into their roles in a liquid workforce. At MNC like Accenture, they use their digital learning environment, The Learning Board, where employees are offered training in a tailor-made manner. Where training traditionally meant spending a week in 'school' for a number of sessions, this method via learning boards sees employees learning online in a case-based manner. With a focus on storytelling and a preference for easily digestible "chunks", learning boards are innovative and effective methods of training. Furthermore, aside from the employees, it also includes the clients and partners of alliances. Teams no longer develop a product for a client, but develop it with the client.

Big Things Can Start Small

For any organization innovation is key, regardless of how big or small they are. Small-scale innovations should never be underestimated. People sometimes tend to forget that innovation by no means always entails 'something new', but often it's a combination of already existing technology being used differently, and thus, forming a new concept.

365-Day Approach Plan

A year from now, liquid workforce transformation should be well underway. Plan to drive the momentum across your organization in the following ways:

1. Put your new training strategy to work. Pick one high-need skill and pilot a new curriculum to train existing employees in that area. Use this initiative to determine which combination of training sources (e.g., Boot camps, MOOCs, personalized training) are the most effective strategies for your workers.

2. Build a plan to scale your liquid project practices across the organization. Learn from the progress of your pilot group. What were their successes and where did they find setbacks? Use this knowledge

to build a plan that will allow you to push this model across your organization.

3. To understand where your enterprise stands to benefit most from crowd sourcing, commission three projects that each focus on a different area that the crowd is well suited to address. Use insights from these projects to sanction the use of crowd sourcing for projects across the organization that will realize the most benefit.

4. Integrate the use of analytics into your HR organization. Pair a team from HR with your data scientists to derive new insights from your workforce that could help with reviews, promotions, hiring, or other areas that need improvement. Use these insights to strengthen talent retention and recruiting.

5. Introduce predictive analytics to one area of your people management strategy (promotions or hiring, for example). Use your team of data scientists and HR professionals to develop a comprehensive plan for how predictive analytics could enhance existing practices.

CONCLUSION

This workforce allows companies to optimize competitive performance, to react to fluctuating markets and demand as well as balance labor costs and workforce agility. It's finding the right combination of internal employees, freelancers and technology for each new project. This "fluidity" allows companies to win by focusing on workplace innovation and viewing their people as a strategic differentiator. The lines are being blurred between permanent, contingent, IC, cloud and crowd sourcing. Leading companies are using collaboration tools and cloud-based workflows that empower anytime, anywhere working.

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