Australian HR Institute®

FUTURE OF WORK:
HR HOPES AND FEARS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project Patron:	Peter Wilson AM
Project Director:	Lyn Goodear
Research team:	Professor Petrina Coventry, Dr Robin Kramar
Report Authors:	Paul Begley, Karen Passey
Design:	Kelly McKillop

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FOREWORD

AHRI surveys typically ask questions of members that enable HR practitioners to make observations about their own workplaces, as well as to express considered views about issues affecting the workforce as a whole. The findings of this survey enabled comparable observations to be made, and it also invited respondents to reflect on the positioning of the HR profession itself within the workforce of the future. The results have given us an insight into our own hopes and fears as active participants in the workforce we are moving towards.

One finding that surprised me was on the question of what respondents think of as the 'future' when they think of work. A relatively large proportion think the new world of work will not reveal itself for many years, with around 7 per cent seeing the future as fifteen or more years away. A large majority (81 per cent) see it happening somewhere between one and 10 years' time. And only one in ten respondents (12 per cent) see the future in terms of it happening now or in the immediate next few months.

I confess to placing myself with the 12 per cent. The disruptions to business models since the onset of the digital revolution have been marked not just by change, but by changes that have overturned what we have become used to, in addition to changes that have taken hold swiftly.

On the basis of recent experience, if HR passively waits and watches while the future unfolds, I see the digital technologists capturing the agenda and delivering a future workforce founded on the premise that if we can use a particular technology, we therefore must use that technology. Cooler heads need to acknowledge the potential for good that technology can bring, but also to add that other issues are at play. Professionals with human resource expertise are ideally placed to bring a judicious perspective to those issues, and need to ensure they speak up and are heard.

It's a good thing, as I see it, that the findings show that a large majority of respondents, around eight out of 10, believe emerging technologies will improve processes and contribute to productivity gains.

However, a significantly smaller majority of 57 per cent report no apprehension about future challenges and opportunities in their own work as HR practitioners. While that gives some room for cheer, it also means a sizable minority of 43 per cent are either understandably apprehensive or are sitting on the fence.

That finding is balanced by a substantial majority of 87 per cent of respondents – nearly nine out of 10 – who report being confident they will be able to acquire the skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of future work issues, whatever those issues turn out to be.

As you might observe from these findings, taken as a whole the responses reveal a degree of uncertainty, caution and ambiguity among practitioners in the HR field.

In an attempt to get a deeper sense of what respondents see as their hopes and fears, they were invited to offer a written view on what they think will be the single biggest issue for HR practitioners.

Answers here were not so optimistic and covered potential quandaries in areas such as culture, retention, reskilling, leadership, change, resilience, gender, decreasing performance, increasing litigation, and mollifying unfulfilled career expectations.

One respondent reported what a number said in different words; namely "that the big issue will be what it's always been: HR practitioners who really do not know about business and how their company operates in its entirety."

That respondent arrived at a bleak conclusion in saying that until those professional colleagues "change their views and learn about business they will never gain the respect of their customers and will continue to wish they had more influence".

Another respondent who identified as being from the government sector, reported that "HR managers are constantly caught between being true to their profession and being puppets for their executive bosses (doing as they're told, facilitating unethical processes, in threat of their own jobs)."

That respondent proposes “an emerging valid debate that HR services may be better off being contracted out, rather than sitting under the CEO as a direct report.”

These very different perspectives are typical of many of the qualitative responses, demonstrating the depth of feeling that practitioners hold about the future of their profession if HR doesn’t rise to the occasion and get it right.

These responses are on common ground in that they demonstrate a mixture of high hopes and genuine fears.

The first respondent hopes that HR practitioners can become more business-driven, because if they can do that they will build credibility and be able to exercise more influence.

The second respondent points to the need to perform in accordance with professional business standards. That obligation entails exercising the attributes of integrity, ethics and courage, especially when blind obedience is demanded, and directives are enunciated that contravene those standards.

HR clearly has a central role in contributing to a responsive and resilient workforce that needs to accommodate itself to the new ways in which we are now working, and how we are going to deal with greater change as the rapidly emerging phenomena of artificial intelligence and computers are introduced into workplaces that can operate and learn faster than human beings so that we seem, on the face of it, uncompetitive.

In that context, respondents were asked to suggest ways in which AHRI might be best able to assist in preparing HR practitioners coping with these changes.

The answers to those questions reveal that insightful case studies are greatly valued as are well researched articles and professional learning. While AHRI too will have to rise to the occasion, I take heart from many of the responses that support what we have been doing the past few years in creating a professional standard through certification that will finally establish HR in Australia as an accepted profession with an advanced intellectual foundation that is linked to agreed levels of practical know-how and professional behaviours.

By achieving that in the short term, HR can build trust – trust within its own ranks, among the wider business circles, and with the general public. We will then begin to look and sound like other accepted professions, and provide some comfort that we know what we are doing, and that we are able to actually do what we say we can do.

Lyn Goodear FAHRI GAICD
Chief Executive Officer
Australian HR Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report was the result of surveying members from the AHRI database to determine their views on the future of work, and in particular from the perspective of their hopes and fears.

The questionnaire that made up the survey commenced by asking for responses that drew on respondents' reflections on their workplace and their work in the present.

Following that it asked them to reflect in general on the idea of the future, and from that to think specifically about the work they expect be doing in the future as HR practitioners under three headings: work, the workplace, and the workforce.

They were asked whether they thought they will need to upskill in order to rise to the challenge of being trusted HR advisers to business, their core work. They were also asked how they would respond in dealing with workplace issues around reshaping jobs or replacing people with machines, when those benefits became incontestable. And finally they were asked to reflect on HR capability issues around planning for a workforce that needs to adjust to robotics, cognitive machines and artificial intelligence.

On the hope side of the ledger, the central speculation is around future workforce issues on technology, which the great majority (92 per cent) of the 1128 respondents see as an opportunity rather than a threat. A slightly smaller majority (87 per cent) express confidence that they will be able to acquire the skills needed to meet future challenges, and 79 per cent believe emerging technologies will assist in improving processes and productivity.

Around 70 per cent do not believe that technology will diminish the role of HR, with 63 per cent saying they will prepare for the future by focusing on the parts of their work that rely on human skills in the belief that some parts of their job will be replaced by machines, with around half (51 per cent) expecting machines will not replace many jobs.

Most (78 per cent) expect some form of human presence to augment machines in the event of jobs being replaced.

On the fears side, only one in three respondents (34 per cent) believe robotics will create more jobs than they replace, though 45 per cent are uncertain on that score. Besides that, nearly seven out of 10 (69 per cent) believe there will be definite lag in the redeployment of displaced workers when replacement of jobs by machines come to pass.

A large minority (43 per cent) see the implications of the gig economy having a negative impact on workplace performance, customer service, culture and ethical behaviour.

And while nine out of 10 are confident they will be able to acquire news skills and knowledge, nearly half (43 per cent) report being apprehensive or unsure about the future challenges and opportunities in their own HR work.

The findings reveal significant divisions on what the future means to respondents and when its impacts would be expected to kick in. The answers vary greatly with 12 per cent saying the future is upon us now, but more than a third (36 per cent) say it's at least seven years away, and more than half (52 per cent) saying they think of the future as somewhere between a year and four years away.

Respondents were asked how AHRI could be of assistance in preparing them for the future of work, and many answers suggest that useful case studies and professional development activities could focus more on future of work issues.

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

- Around one in ten respondents (12 per cent) believe the future starts today or in the next few months; more than a third (36 per cent) think of the future as longer than seven years away.
- The vast majority (96 per cent) perceive emerging technologies as an opportunity rather than a threat.
- More than eight out of ten respondents (84 per cent) report that less than 10 per cent of the work in their organisation is presently undertaken by robotics, cognitive machines or artificial intelligence.
- More than half (59 per cent) believe that fewer than 10 per cent of jobs will be replaced in their organisation by future advances in technology.
- More than half (58 per cent) believe they will need to pursue further education to prepare for the future work environment.
- Nearly half (43 per cent) report being apprehensive or unsure about the future challenges and opportunities in their own work.
- Nearly nine out of ten (87 per cent) are confident that they will be able to acquire the skills and knowledge (via further study or upskilling) needed to meet future work challenges.
- Almost eight out of ten (79 per cent) believe emerging technologies will improve processes and contribute to productivity.
- Seven out of ten (70 per cent) disagree or strongly disagree that the role of HR will diminish with the impact of new digital technology.
- Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) report they are focusing on better preparing themselves for the parts of their job that rely on human skills because they believe parts of their job can be replaced or greatly enhanced by new technologies.
- More than half (59 per cent) believe the HR function is well placed to provide trusted advice and strategic input to management on the future workplace
- Half (51 per cent) do not expect machines and/or artificial intelligence to replace many jobs in the future.
- Through job re-design, more than three-quarters (78 per cent) expect human presence to augment machines and /or artificial intelligence when some jobs are replaced.
- Nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) believe today's workforce planners are capable of planning for a future workforce that combines, full-time, part-time and flexitime workers, as well as on-site and off-site workers.
- One in five (20 per cent) believe their organisation would be quick to replace human workers with machines and cognitive computing if the opportunity presented itself. Another 20 per cent are unsure.
- A third (34 per cent) believe that robotics and AI will create more jobs for human workers than they replace. Nearly half (45 per cent) are unsure.
- Even if robotics and AI create new jobs for humans, nearly seven out of ten (69 per cent) believe there will be a significant lag in the redeployment of displaced workers.
- Nearly half (43 per cent) believe the gig economy will have a negative impact on performance, customer service, culture and ethical behaviour.
- Around one in five (21 per cent) believe that when advances in cognitive computing and AI are seen to be superior to the skills of human workers, the economic benefits of replacing them will go unchallenged.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey was distributed to the member database of the Australian HR Institute during July and August 2017. It attracted a total of 1128 respondents. Responses were treated anonymously.

As shown in table 1, a majority of respondents live in a metropolitan area (81 per cent).

TABLE 1: (1121 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Metropolitan area	912	81.36%
Rural area	45	4.01%
Regional area	155	13.83%
Remote area	9	0.80%

Tables 2 and 3 show the majority of respondents as aged between 30 and 59 (78 per cent) and female (72 per cent).

TABLE 2: AGE (1124 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
18-29	100	8.90%
30-39	283	25.18%
40-49	321	28.56%
50-59	270	24.02%
60-65	85	7.56%
Over 65	39	3.47%

TABLE 3: GENDER (1120 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Male	315	28.13%
Female	803	71.70%
Prefer not to say	2	0.18%

Table 4 shows that 30 per cent of respondents have achieved as their highest qualification a bachelor's degree, 29 per cent a master's degree, and 19 per cent a graduate diploma.

TABLE 4: HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION (1126 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
HSC (or equivalent)	20	1.78%
Certificate III or IV	43	3.82%
Diploma	136	12.08%
Undergraduate degree	333	29.57%
Graduate diploma	218	19.36%
Master's degree	328	29.13%
Doctoral degree	21	1.87%
Other	27	2.40%

Table 5 shows that 88 per cent of respondents are presently in employment and 5 per cent are looking for work.

TABLE 5: EMPLOYMENT STATUS (1110 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
In employment	976	87.93%
Not employed, looking for work	56	5.05%
Not employed, NOT looking for work	9	0.81%
Retired	20	1.80%
Other	49	4.41%

DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 6 shows that 45 per cent of the sample identify as an HR adviser, HR account manager, HR administration or HR middle manager. More than a fifth (21 per cent) identify as a state based, national or global HR director, 12 per cent as a HR consultant, and small proportions of around 2 per cent each as line managers, CEOs or board directors.

TABLE 6: JOB FUNCTION (1126 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
HR administrator	56	4.97%
HR adviser	136	12.08%
HR account manager	21	1.87%
HR manager (middle level)	288	25.58%
HR director (state based SME)	96	8.53%
HR director (national focus)	111	9.86%
HR director (global)	33	2.93%
HR consultant	139	12.34%
Line manager	24	2.13%
Contract/freelance	28	2.49%
CEO	30	2.66%
Board director	14	1.24%
Other	150	13.32%

Table 7 shows that the largest single proportion of respondents (37 per cent) have been working in HR or are responsible for the HR function for six to 14 years, with around a quarter (26 per cent) for 15 to 24 years, and another 17 per cent for more than 25 years. Those more experienced groups of the sample account for eight out of ten respondents, with 16 per cent reporting they have fewer than five years' experience in HR.

TABLE 7: NUMBER OF YEARS EXPERIENCE WORKING IN HR (1120 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
0-5 years	187	16.70%
6-14 years	410	36.61%
15-24 years	292	26.07%
25 years +	193	17.23%
Not in an HR role	33	2.95%
Other	5	0.45%

DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 8 shows that 43 per cent of the sample regard themselves as advanced users of data and business applications, with 47 per cent basic users, and 10 per cent frequent social media users.

TABLE 8: KNOWLEDGE OF TECHNOLOGY (1128 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Advanced knowledge of data and business applications	487	43.17%
Basic user of business applications	527	46.72%
Frequent user of social media	107	9.49%
Very limited knowledge	7	0.62%

Table 9 shows that the largest group of respondents work in organisations with more than 1000 employees (32 per cent), nearly a quarter work in organisations with between 250 and 1000 employees (23 per cent), and a quarter work in organisations with between 50 and 250 employees (25 per cent. Small proportions of the sample work in organisations with 15 to 29 employees (7 per cent), two to 14 employees (6 per cent) or are sole proprietors (6 per cent).

TABLE 9: SIZE OF ORGANISATION (1057 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Sole proprietor	67	6.34%
Small (2-14)	61	5.77%
Small/medium (15-49)	78	7.38%
Medium (50-249)	269	25.45%
Large (250-1000)	242	22.89%
Very large (1000+)	340	32.17%

YOUR ORGANISATION

Table 10 shows a wide spread of industry sectors among respondents, with 17 per cent from government (including local government), 14 per cent from professional services including associations, and 11 per cent from education.

TABLE 10: INDUSTRY SECTORS (1053 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Advertising and marketing	5	0.47%
Agriculture	18	1.71%
Airlines and aerospace (including defence)	10	0.95%
Automotive/car	7	0.66%
Business support and logistics	15	1.42%
Community services	47	4.46%
Construction, machinery and homes	35	3.32%
Education	112	10.64%
Entertainment and leisure	23	2.18%
Finance and financial services	60	5.70%
Food and beverages	16	1.52%
Government, including local government	182	17.28%
Healthcare and pharmaceuticals	81	7.69%
Insurance	19	1.80%
Manufacturing	53	5.03%
Not-for-profit	56	5.32%
Professional services including associations	143	13.58%
Retail and consumer durables	31	2.94%
Property	11	1.04%
Telecommunications, technology, internet and electronics	44	4.18%
Transportations and delivery	24	2.28%
Utilities, energy and extraction	49	4.65%
I am currently not employed	12	1.14%

YOUR ORGANISATION

Table 11 indicates that nearly seven out of ten respondents (64 per cent) estimate that less than 5 per cent of work in their organisation is undertaken by robotics, cognitive machines or artificial intelligence, with 20 per cent estimating between five and 10 per cent of work is so conducted. The remainder (16 per cent) estimate that more than 10 per cent of work is undertaken by new technologies.

TABLE 11: WORK UNDERTAKEN BY NEW TECHNOLOGIES (1054 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Under 5%	673	63.85%
5-10%	212	20.11%
11-20%	95	9.01%
21-30%	39	3.70%
31-40%	17	1.61%
41-50%	12	1.14%
Above 50%	6	0.57%

Table 12 shows overall a low impact of robotics (by 85 per cent of respondents), cognitive machines (75 per cent) and artificial intelligence (79 per cent). Around five per cent reported high impact in all three areas.

TABLE 12: IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGIES (1126 RESPONSES)

	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Robotics	864 85.12%	104 10.25%	47 4.63%	1,015	1.20
Cognitive machines	764 74.54%	219 21.37%	42 4.10%	1,025	1.30
Artificial intelligence	809 79.00%	172 16.80%	43 4.20%	1,024	1.25

WORK NOW

Table 13 shows that a majority of respondents (77 per cent) are somewhat satisfied (43 per cent) or very satisfied (34 per cent) with the work they are now doing.

TABLE 13: JOB SATISFACTION LEVEL (1053 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Very satisfied	357	33.90%
Somewhat satisfied	458	43.49%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	96	9.12%
Somewhat dissatisfied	97	9.21%
Very dissatisfied	45	4.27%

Table 14 indicates that nearly a quarter of respondents (23 per cent) plan to work in a HR for three to five years, one in five for the next nine to ten years (19 per cent), and more than a third (36 per cent) plan to work in HR for more than the next ten years, 16 per cent of those for more than 20 years.

TABLE 14: LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTING TO WORK IN HR (1057 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
1-2	74	7.00%
3-5	239	22.61%
6-8	120	11.35%
9-10	202	19.11%
11-15	129	12.20%
16-20	82	7.76%
Over 20 years	166	15.70%
I do not work in HR	45	4.26%

Table 15 shows that more than half of respondents (58 per cent) believe they will need to pursue further education to prepare for the future work environment. Another quarter (23 per cent) are not sure whether they will need to or not.

TABLE 15: EXPECTING TO PURSUE FURTHER STUDY (1060 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Strongly disagree	82	7.74%
Disagree	123	11.60%
Neutral/neither agree nor disagree	239	22.55%
Agree	444	41.89%
Strongly agree	172	16.23%

Table 16 reveals the vast majority of respondents (96 per cent) perceive emerging technologies as an opportunity rather than a threat.

TABLE 16: EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES: OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT? (1061 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
A threat	41	3.86%
An opportunity	1,020	96.14%

PERSPECTIVES OF THE FUTURE

Respondents were asked to put a time-frame around their idea of the future. Table 17 shows that around one in ten respondents (12 per cent) believe the future starts today or in the next few months, 7 per cent think of the future as longer than 15 years away, and slightly more than half (52 per cent) think of it as being between four to 10 years away.

TABLE 17: PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE (843 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
More than 15 years	59	7.00%
7-10 years	241	28.59%
4-6 years	226	26.81%
1-3 years	212	25.15%
The next few months	14	1.66%
Starts today	91	10.79%

Table 18 indicates that more than a quarter (29 per cent) of respondents believe in excess of 50 per cent of jobs will be reshaped by advances in technology, about the same proportion (25 per cent) believe between 20 and 50 per cent of jobs will be *reshaped*, and slightly fewer (23 per cent) believe that between 11 and 20 per cent of jobs will be reshaped.

TABLE 18: PROPORTION OF JOBS TO BE *RESHAPED* BY TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES (826 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
0-5%	73	8.84%
6-10%	115	13.92%
11-20%	194	23.49%
21-50%	208	25.18%
50%+	236	28.57%

By contrast, Table 19 indicates that only 3 per cent of respondents believe in excess of 50 per cent of jobs will be *replaced* by advances in technology, fewer than one in five (14 per cent) believe between 20 and 50 percent of jobs will be replaced, and around a quarter (24 per cent) believe that between 11 and 20 per cent of jobs will be replaced.

TABLE 19: PROPORTION OF JOBS TO BE *REPLACED* BY TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES (835 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
0-5%	239	28.62%
6-10%	253	30.30%
11-20%	200	23.95%
21-50%	117	14.01%
50%+	26	3.11%

Table 20 shows a substantial majority of respondents (79 per cent) believe emerging technologies will improve processes and contribute to productivity.

TABLE 20: WILL EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES IMPROVE PROCESSES AND PRODUCTIVITY? (837 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Absolutely	664	79.33%
I have my doubts	158	18.88%
I do not see any likely gains	15	1.79%

PERSPECTIVES OF THE FUTURE

Fewer than 10 per cent of respondents rate their organisation as strong with respect to each of the six areas listed in Table 21.

TABLE 21: CAPABILITIES OF RESPONDENT ORGANISATIONS WITH RESPECT TO FUTURE TECHNOLOGIES (830 RESPONSES)

	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Understanding the future impact of robotics, cognitive computing and AI talent	421 50.72%	336 40.48%	73 8.80%	830	1.58
Understanding the underlying logic behind robotic and AI use in process automation	432 52.17%	325 39.25%	71 8.57%	828	1.56
Identifying external sources of robotics, cognitive computing, and AI talent	486 58.84%	286 34.62%	54 6.54%	826	1.48
Redeploying employees elsewhere in the organisation who are replaced (or at risk of being replaced) by robotics, cognitive computing, and AI resources	477 57.68%	289 34.95%	61 7.38%	827	1.50
Re-skilling employees to complement robotics, cognitive computing, and AI	479 58.34%	268 32.64%	74 9.01%	821	1.51
Aligning competency models / frameworks to account for new robotics, cognitive computing, and AI requirements	508 61.80%	264 32.12%	50 6.08%	822	1.44

A stronger degree of confidence in capabilities than is shown in Table 21 is revealed with respect to future advances in big data for analytics and business intelligence, as revealed in Table 22.

TABLE 22: CAPABILITIES OF RESPONDENT ORGANISATIONS WITH RESPECT TO BIG DATA (820 RESPONSES)

	WEAK SKILLS/ UNDERSTANDING	MODERATE SKILLS/ UNDERSTANDING	STRONG SKILLS/ UNDERSTANDING	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Skills to access databases and produce information	194 23.75%	457 55.94%	166 20.32%	817	1.97
Skills to deliver information to mobile devices	226 27.80%	425 52.28%	162 19.93%	813	1.92
Understanding of HR data	232 28.36%	438 53.55%	148 18.09%	818	1.90

PERSPECTIVES OF THE FUTURE

Moderately strong confidence in capabilities with respect to four areas of adaptability, skill and resources in low code/no code platforms are expressed in the numbers revealed in Table 23.

TABLE 23: CAPABILITIES OF RESPONDENT ORGANISATIONS WITH RESPECT TO APPLICATION OF LOW CODE/NO CODE PLATFORMS (825 RESPONSES) (RATING: 1 DISAGREE; 5 AGREE)

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Highly adaptable - utilise Excel and database management tools effectively	42 5.10%	106 12.86%	239 29.00%	270 32.77%	167 20.27%	824	3.50
Have numerous resources skilled in social media custom development	111 13.52%	185 22.53%	260 31.67%	185 22.53%	80 9.74%	821	2.92
Have numerous resources skilled in CRM database management	113 13.76%	175 21.32%	243 29.60%	204 24.85%	85 10.48%	821	2.97
Limited skilled resources and rely on IT for most development work	93 11.37%	191 23.35%	227 27.75%	207 25.31%	100 12.22%	818	3.04

Table 24 reveals moderate to strong confidence of respondent organisations with respect to their sources of labour and skills gaps, but very low confidence in how their organisations are placed to manage the gig economy and crowdsourcing for talent.

TABLE 24: HOW ORGANISATIONS ARE PLACED TO MANAGE SOURCES OF LABOUR, SKILL GAPS, THE GIG ECONOMY AND CROWDSOURCING FOR TALENT (830 RESPONSES)

	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Manage contingent, outsourced, contracted and part time sources of labour?	158 19.04%	461 55.54%	211 25.42%	830	2.06
Understand emerging skills and critical capability gaps?	218 26.42%	452 54.79%	155 18.79%	825	1.92
Manage gig* economy and talent-sharing economy resources?	416 50.24%	321 38.77%	91 10.99%	828	1.61
Manage crowdsourcing as part of the organisation workforce and talent programs?	561 68.00%	220 26.67%	44 5.33%	825	1.37

PERSPECTIVES OF THE FUTURE

Table 25 indicates that respondents believe that managing a unified culture that upholds common customer service practices is the most important issue facing the HR profession in the future, followed closely by the challenge of managing a unified culture that upholds ethical standards of doing business.

TABLE 25: RANKING IMPORTANCE OF IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN THE FUTURE WORKFORCE (828 RESPONSES) (RATING: 1 MOST IMPORTANT; 5 LEAST IMPORTANT)

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Managing the performance of a workforce that is operating on-site and off-site	131 18.96%	108 15.63%	146 21.13%	153 22.14%	153 22.14%	691	2.87
Managing the performance of a workforce that is part-time and full-time	73 10.17%	112 15.60%	119 16.57%	199 27.72%	215 29.94%	718	2.48
Managing the training of a flexible workforce in the use of new technologies	135 18.37%	145 19.73%	228 31.02%	125 17.01%	102 13.88%	735	3.12
Managing a unified culture that upholds common customer services practices	196 26.89%	205 28.12%	118 16.19%	124 17.01%	86 11.80%	729	3.41
Managing a unified culture that upholds ethical standards of doing business	226 27.66%	181 22.15%	139 17.01%	120 14.69%	151 18.48%	817	3.26

Other than those listed above, respondents were asked what they believed will be the biggest issues facing the HR profession in managing the future workforce? Sample comments follow:

"Retaining an organisation's culture whilst moving to a largely contract work force"

"What it has always been - HR practitioners who really do not know about business and how their company operates in its entirety are the majority of practitioners and until they change their views and learn about business they will never gain the respect of their customers and will continue to wish they had more influence"

"Piecemeal technology solutions that do not talk to each other"

"HR practitioners with stronger people communication skills and industrial relations, not experts just in HR systems"

"Casualisation of workers causing skill shortages at key times"

"Lack of STEM skills across HR profession"

"Online resources will replace the need for a HR manager"

"HR managers are constantly caught between being true to their profession and being puppets for their executive bosses (doing as they're told, facilitating unethical processes, in threat of their own jobs). There's an emerging valid debate that HR services may be better off being contracted out, rather than sitting under the CEO as a direct report"

"Succession planning and retaining performing employees"

"Managing the transition of older workers to adopt technology and flexible work practices"

"Better management of a contingent workforce. The issue is not so much fulltime vs part time - it's about having a larger contingent workforce and how to keep them engaged, trained and representing the desired culture"

"Defining the role of HR itself in an ecosystem where there is no common definition of 'employment'"

HR HOPES AND FEARS

WORK IN THE FUTURE

Table 26 shows that more than half the respondent sample is not apprehensive about the future challenges and opportunities in their HR work (57 per cent), with a quarter on the fence (26 per cent) and 17 per cent expressing a degree of apprehension.

TABLE 26: I AM APPREHENSIVE ABOUT HR CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES (818 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	140	17.11%
Disagree	328	40.10%
Neither agree nor disagree	209	25.55%
Agree	123	15.04%
Strongly agree	18	2.20%

Table 27 indicates a high degree of respondent confidence (87 per cent) that they will be able to acquire the skills and knowledge (via further study or upskilling) needed to meet future work challenges.

TABLE 27: I AM CONFIDENT ABOUT ACQUIRING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE (815 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	23	2.82%
Disagree	12	1.47%
Neither agree nor disagree	72	8.83%
Agree	495	60.74%
Strongly agree	213	26.13%

Table 28 indicates that half the respondent sample (50 per cent) agrees that their employer will give sufficient weight to HR issues in foreshadowing and managing changes brought about by technology in the future. A quarter (23 per cent) are unsure and the remaining quarter (26 per cent) disagree.

TABLE 28: EMPLOYERS WILL GIVE SUFFICIENT WEIGHT TO HR ISSUES FORESHADOWING CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY TECHNOLOGY IN THE FUTURE (812 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	52	6.40%
Disagree	163	20.07%
Neither agree nor disagree	189	23.28%
Agree	316	38.92%
Strongly agree	92	11.33%

Table 29 shows that seven out of 10 respondents (71 per cent) disagree that the role of HR will diminish with the impact of new digital technologies, though 15 per cent are not sure.

TABLE 29: THE IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES WILL DIMINISH THE ROLE OF HR (816 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	144	17.65%
Disagree	432	52.94%
Neither agree nor disagree	121	14.83%
Agree	103	12.62%
Strongly agree	16	1.96%

HR HOPES AND FEARS

WORK IN THE FUTURE

A indicated in Table 30, a small proportion of respondents (15 per cent) disagree that the parts of their jobs can be replaced, or greatly enhanced, by new technologies, and so see the benefit of better preparing for a HR role that relies on human skills. Nearly a quarter (22 per cent) are unsure either way on that question, but nearly two thirds (63 per cent) agree or strongly agree.

TABLE 30: PARTS OF THE HR JOB WILL BE REPLACED BY NEW TECHNOLOGY AND SO THERE IS MERIT IN PREPARING FOR A FUTURE THAT RELIES ON HUMAN SKILLS (814 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	29	3.56%
Disagree	91	11.18%
Neither agree nor disagree	180	22.11%
Agree	408	50.12%
Strongly agree	106	13.02%

It is often said our working environment is rapidly changing, with more complex business settings in volatile markets creating uncertainty. Respondents were asked what environment they believe is ahead for them. What skills do they believe are needed to survive in a rapidly changing workplace? Sample comments follow:

"Workforce analytics and organisational design"

"Strong soft skills"

"Consulting, short term contracts"

"Courage, flexibility"

"Higher degree of competitiveness for senior roles. Relationship skills. Political environment navigation skills"

"There has always been uncertainty and volatility and this will not change. I enjoy the challenge and thrive in such an environment and also enjoy helping others to gain the skills to flourish in such environments. Skills needed are a wide range of expertise on a broad range of functions, flexibility and resilience, Good humour and a positive outlook on life and emotional intelligence"

"People will always be people and therefore need HR. Where it will change is upskilling staff and new technologies to manage people and HR"

"Shift from the administrative and tactical to the strategic and complex"

HR HOPES AND FEARS

WORKPLACES IN THE FUTURE

Table 31 shows that more than half of respondents (59 per cent) believe the HR function is well placed to provide trusted advice and strategic input to management on the future workplace. About equal parts of the sample are unsure on the issue (21 per cent) or disagree that HR is well placed (20 per cent).

TABLE 31: THE HR FUNCTION IS WELL PLACED TO GIVE TRUSTED ADVICE AND STRATEGIC INPUT ON THE FUTURE WORKPLACE (800 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	32	4.00%
Disagree	128	16.00%
Neither agree nor disagree	168	21.00%
Agree	355	44.38%
Strongly agree	117	14.63%

Table 32 shows slightly more than half the sample (51 per cent) disagree that machines and/or artificial intelligence will replace many jobs in the future. Nearly a quarter (26 per cent) agree with that proposition and the other quarter (23 per cent) are not sure.

TABLE 32: MACHINES AND/OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WILL REPLACE MANY JOBS IN THE FUTURE (803 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	77	9.59%
Disagree	330	41.10%
Neither agree nor disagree	188	23.41%
Agree	182	22.67%
Strongly agree	26	3.24%

Table 33 indicates that a large majority of respondents (79 per cent) agree or strongly agree that when some jobs are replaced, a continuing human presence will augment the technologies through job redesign.

TABLE 33: WHEN TECHNOLOGY REPLACES JOBS I EXPECT A HUMAN PRESENCE TO AUGMENT MACHINES THROUGH JOB REDESIGN (799 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	20	2.50%
Disagree	36	4.51%
Neither agree nor disagree	119	14.89%
Agree	492	61.58%
Strongly agree	132	16.52%

WORKFORCE IN THE FUTURE

Table 34 indicates that nearly two thirds of respondents (61 per cent) believe today's workforce planners have the capability to plan for a future that combines full-time, part-time, flexitime, as well as on-site and off-site employees.

TABLE 34: HR HAS THE CAPABILITY TO PLAN FOR A FUTURE WORKFORCE THAT COMBINES FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, FLEXITIME AND ON-SITE AND OFF-SITE EMPLOYEES (789 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	28	3.55%
Disagree	135	17.11%
Neither agree nor disagree	141	17.87%
Agree	398	50.44%
Strongly agree	87	11.03%

Table 35 indicates considerable uncertainty about whether today's workforce planners have the capability to plan for a future workforce that includes a markedly increasing presence of robots and artificial intelligence, with 33 per cent of respondents being unsure and 37 per disagreeing with the proposition.

TABLE 35: HR HAS THE CAPABILITY TO PLAN FOR A FUTURE WORKFORCE THAT THAT INCLUDES A MARKEDLY INCREASING PRESENCE OF ROBOTS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (788 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	37	4.70%
Disagree	257	32.61%
Neither agree nor disagree	260	32.99%
Agree	211	26.78%
Strongly agree	23	2.92%

Table 36 shows that one in five respondents (20 per cent) agree that their organisation would be quick to replace human workers with machines and cognitive computing if the opportunity presented itself. Another 20 per cent are unsure, and 60 per cent disagree with the proposition.

TABLE 36: MY ORGANISATION WOULD BE QUICK TO REPLACE HUMANS WITH MACHINES AND COGNITIVE COMPUTING IF THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF (784 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	151	19.26%
Disagree	320	40.82%
Neither agree nor disagree	159	20.28%
Agree	123	15.69%
Strongly agree	31	3.95%

Table 37 indicates that nearly half the sample (45 per cent) are unsure as to whether robotics and AI will create more jobs for humans than they replace, and one third (34 per cent) do not agree that will happen. Only 15 per cent agree that they will create more jobs than they replace.

TABLE 37: ROBOTICS AND AI WILL CREATE MORE JOBS FOR HUMANS THAN THEY REPLACE (787 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	40	5.08%
Disagree	225	28.59%
Neither agree nor disagree	356	45.24%
Agree	100	12.71%
Strongly agree	16	2.03%
If so, what jobs do you see being created?	50	6.35%

HR HOPES AND FEARS

WORKFORCE IN THE FUTURE

Table 38 indicates that around one in five respondents (21 per cent) believe that when advances in cognitive computing and AI are seen to be superior to the skills of human workers, the economic benefits of replacing them will go unchallenged. Nearly half the sample (45 per cent) disagree with that proposition while 35 per cent are unsure.

TABLE 38: REPLACING HUMANS WITH ROBOTICS AND AI WILL GO UNCHALLENGED IF THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS ARE OBVIOUS (782 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	36	4.60%
Disagree	311	39.77%
Neither agree nor disagree	270	34.53%
Agree	150	19.18%
Strongly agree	15	1.92%

Table 39 indicates that even if robotics and AI create new jobs for humans, nearly seven out of ten respondents (69 per cent) agree that there will be a significant lag in the redeployment of displaced workers. Fewer than one in ten (9 per cent) do not agree, and 22 per cent are unsure.

TABLE 39: ROBOTICS AND AI MAY CREATE MORE JOBS BUT THERE WILL BE A LAG IN THE REDEPLOYMENT OF DISPLACED WORKERS (779 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	6	0.77%
Disagree	63	8.09%
Neither agree nor disagree	169	21.69%
Agree	453	58.15%
Strongly agree	88	11.30%

Table 40 indicates that nearly half of respondents (43 per cent) agree that the gig economy will have a negative impact on performance, customer service, culture and ethical behaviour. Roughly a third disagree with that proposition (34 per cent) and 23 per cent are unsure.

TABLE 40: THE GIG ECONOMY WILL HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE, CUSTOMER SERVICE, CULTURE AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR (780 RESPONSES)

ANSWER	COUNT	PERCENT
Stongly disagree	30	3.85%
Disagree	233	29.87%
Neither agree nor disagree	178	22.82%
Agree	273	35.00%
Strongly agree	66	8.46%

HR HOPES AND FEARS

WORKFORCE IN THE FUTURE

Respondents were invited to state their view on how HR can prepare for the increasing influence of technology in the future. Sample comments follow:

“Ensuring that the ‘human’ element in all automation processes, particularly customer facing (whether internal or external customers), is retained”

“Adapt and lead”

“Understand business process and the changes that happen so that jobs can be retrained to suit”

“To stay on top of what is going in this area. Attend relevant seminars, watch relevant TED talks, monitor the industry, establish and participate in industry related discussions on the subject, notice what others are doing, share information and potential issues, methodologies and strategies”

“Be early adopters and lead the change projects alongside IT/development from the outset”

“Experiment with different work methods in different parts of the organisation and monitor what works best”

“Be prepared to analyse data and develop solution sets”

“Remain current, flexible and be quick to adapt”

“Not to react, but to learn and gain more information so that we can understand potential impact and / or opportunity, then to work collaboratively towards a positive outcome. To stay abreast of market trends and to share this with key stakeholders to ensure timely preparation and facilitation”

“Be an active participant in digital activities - influence balance of societal/commercial needs”

Given that changes brought on by technological developments are occurring with great speed and are bewildering in the impacts that are felt by businesses in Australia and across the globe, respondents were invited to offer comments on what areas AHRI might consider for action that have not been touched on in the survey. Sample comments follow:

“AHRI may look into conducting a study into what HR areas should not be automated and why”

“Provide greater information and predicted time lines for the changes in the future of work; i.e. what the future of work will look like”

“Promotion of positive case studies, encouraging people to view the future as bright”

“A greater push for the understanding of the importance of HR roles outside of the HR industry“

“Focus groups, group conversations, collaborating with universities / tech advisors and developers to gain insight on challenges, understanding of opportunities / what’s possible, undertaking pilots and planning for implementation. Monitoring and reviewing successes and opportunities for improvement”

“To create a fair conception among members, delegates and others that technology can advance HR practice, not destroy it”

“HR should work more closely with marketing and IT”

"The impact of poor HR practices in organisations”

“Support for displaced workers - many of whom will never work again”

“The guiding principles behind dealing with the contingent and gig workforce. From my readings we are well behind the curve as compared to the US and well poised to take advantage of a highly educated market who want flexibility built into how they engage with the industry. AHRI can fill the gap by providing guiding principles on how companies need to value and treat contingent workforce components in a better and more engaging way”

“Work with universities and schools – collaboration”

“The impact of outsourcing nationally and internationally. The importance of an ‘Australia first’ policy to ensure graduates and redeployed people are trained for changes rather than pulling people from overseas”

HR HOPES AND FEARS

WORKFORCE IN THE FUTURE

Respondents were asked whether there are particular aspects that relate to the future of work or implementation of new technology that affect their HR practice now. And, if so, what assistance or advice do they need. Sample comments follow:

"Workforce planning"

"Would love to understand what others are saying on future jobs and trends for the future"

"Organisational readiness"

"Yes, simple, uncomplicated online data capture of simple, everyday performance progress conversations. Many of the HRIS platforms are overcomplicated and overpriced for small regional councils or small-medium businesses to implement. I have designed a great 5 question [3 mandatory, 2 optional] framework [used monthly or at least quarterly] that just needs a simple data capture platform ... but everyone I speak with wants to turn it into a major suite of things. Line managers are busy and just want simple, mobile, clickable options. HR managers just want a program that collates that into simple reports and graphs ... so that performance can be monitored continuously and seemlessly - not a major effort once a year"

"Filtering fads in online services from the tried and tested"

"Onboarding systems"

"Knowledge, capability and capacity of current HR resources. In an organization of 130 people we have 2 part time HR officers that work the equivalent of 1FTE. The HR officers are bogged down with business as usual and have limited knowledge and change management skills to drive and implement new technology"

"Being able to source resources in remote areas"

"HRIS and HR analytics"

"I feel AHRI should come up with lot more courses which can train people with case based scenarios to work on the job. Many concepts discussed seem to be more to do with the ideal situations and not in real time. It should help us brainstorm with the ideas and creative solutions to survive any technological Impact on HR and most of the sessions get missed as a lot of professionals are unable to attend seminars in person"

"Machine learning"

HOW CAN AHRI HELP?

Table 41 shows that when asked how AHRI can best assist with preparation for the impending future changes, the channels that are most strongly supported as helpful are research and publications, professional development and training, network opportunities, and themed conferences.

TABLE 41: AHRI CHANNELS THAT COULD ASSIST IN PREPARING FOR FUTURE CHANGES (720 RESPONSES)

	NOT VERY HELPFUL	HELPFUL	VERY HELPFUL	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
AHRI National Convention	196 28.49%	385 55.96%	107 15.55%	688	1.87
Themed conference events	91 13.15%	470 67.92%	131 18.93%	692	2.06
Professional development and training	50 7.08%	410 58.07%	246 34.84%	706	2.28
Research and publications (e.g. HRM magazine, HRMonline)	37 5.17%	382 53.43%	296 41.40%	715	2.36
Network events	116 16.57%	395 56.43%	189 27.00%	700	2.10
Mentoring	166 24.20%	371 54.08%	149 21.72%	686	1.98
Awards (case studies)	207 30.17%	371 54.08%	108 15.74%	686	1.86
HR Certification	197 28.55%	327 47.39%	166 24.06%	690	1.96

Respondents were asked in what other ways AHRI could provide useful assistance. Sample comments follow:

”More knowledge sharing events in regional areas. Thinking outside the square - for example numerous events are held in major cities - could those events not be recorded live (video/podcast) or even skyped in to a location in regional areas?”

“Specific HR consulting in a variety of HR challenges”

"Regulate the profession by ensuring only qualified professionals are actually working in the sector. Preparing the current and future HR professionals to become technologically advanced and demonstrate emotional Intelligence in order to manage the diversity in the future workplace”

“A greater focus on educating the profession”

“I find your online resource section and articles incredibly useful”

“Focus on the human in HR. You guys are off on a tangent with this survey”

"More real world practical case studies and less academic research"

“Make things cheaper. Dump HRM Magazine... it's just a glossy advertisement and people big noting themselves. The only useful publication AHRI ever had was the Asia Pacific Journal. Possibly set-up an IT portion of the website were members can explore HRIS systems in a (sandbox environment) from different vendors. These are just some of the few things that can be done by AHRI... let's move away from the 'group hug, touchy feely, policing HR' to a real data, IT based, factual HR so we can actually add some value to an organisation”

“More newsletters as opposed to magazines”

“Make technology use (excel + data base + analytics) an essential element of certification”

“Slash the cost of National Conference attendance”

“Stop with the HR certification... thought we got away without it being mentioned but oh no, there it is."

"AHRI should be more accessible across the globe”

“Skills based meet-ups, partnering with & influencing the education system to ensure new HR practitioners are skilled for the future”

“I'm not sure if its commercially sound, but AHRI should look at the small to medium business owners to increase their knowledge/education about human resources. Some of the events are pitched corporately and others too expensive and prohibitive for S&M businesses. Just a thought. Thanks”

“Greater emphasis on organisational performance and business/economics as the foundation for influence, rather than topics you see that seem to be 'populist' social issue based. More emphasis on things like unless fundamental change occurs in our Australian IR framework and productivity and remuneration practices then we will keep moving down the global ladder. Pushing topics that help create investment in Australian business. Challenge the mindset of some of us HR people on things like the belief that happy workers are productive . workers--rather than creating a work environment where motivated people can thrive leads to happy workers who are productive. The importance of creating clarity and accountability etc.”

“HR Certification may be more helpful if it incorporated the futuristic requirements referred to in this survey”

“To improve HR assist and develop call centre/ phone advice”

“Lobby government, business groups, unions to get across issues and concerns and how legislation is constraining change”

“AHRI should be the go-to source for information on what each level of HR is defined as. What is the difference between a HR consultant and coordinator? What are their pay-grades? Where do they predominately work. I think an annual review or guide would be really beneficial”

“By providing advice on responses to HR technology change before it happens”

“AHRI does a good job but tends to follow trends. AHRI could showcase more and be seen as a driver of HR in a more 'aggressive' higher profile way”

“Continue to work with HR Execs to enhance the reputation of HR as leaders in the changes to the world of work”

“AHRI needs to think about what support or protections it can offer its members when they are facing adverse action against them at work, when they refuse to partake in unlawful practices. Often, they don't see another avenue but to resign. I have seen many comments around this on your various channels and I think this would be a welcome sign”

Australian HR Institute®

AUSTRALIAN HR INSTITUTE
T 61 (3) 9918 9200
E research@ahri.com.au
ahri.com.au/research