

**The Future of Work – Victorian Government Youth Summit**  
**Rachael Wilkinson, Policy Officer, Australian Industry Group**

My name is Rachael Wilkinson and I am a Policy Officer with Australian Industry Group. We are a peak employer organisation that represents businesses in a bunch of industries in every state and territory. Together with partner organisations we represent the interests of more than 60,000 businesses who employ more than 1 million staff.

The world of work is changing, but I would like to stress at the outset that we shouldn't fear this change.

We have had multiple past waves of change like the Agricultural Revolution, the birth of mass production and the rise of computing that have destroyed some kinds of jobs while creating loads of new ones, and Artificial Intelligence and Automation are shaping up to be just like that.

They are potentially, a very significant catalyst for change for particular types of jobs, but not something that will create a future work dystopia, *or utopia*, for that matter.

Though the idea that robots and computers won't take all the jobs is comforting, it doesn't mean we should relax.

Previous changes have been great in the longer term but were certainly hard for many of the people impacted on the way through.

Developments in Artificial Intelligence, Automation, 3D printing, unprecedentedly powerful and cheap computing, the Internet of Things and Big Data are underpinned by a number of major technologies that are absolutely changing the nature of the link between technology and work.

The significant period of technological change we're in is regarded as the fourth industrial revolution, a term now interchanged with Industry 4.0, which was originally the German strategy to transform *their* manufacturing sector.

Technology is driving a business environment that is becoming all about adapting – and in the future we'll need to innovate continuously to stay ahead of an ever-changing environment.

Considering all of this change, we are often asked what young people will need in the future world of work...this constantly changing environment...and the simple answer is *we can't possibly know...*

That might not seem helpful, especially coming from me today, but the good news is that we do know enough about increasingly rapid technological advancements and the way they're changing skills and work organisation to provide some insight as to what young people will need.

A CSIRO report on megatrends for Australia's future workforce in the next 20 years highlights the need for a shift of mindsets for workers, employers, the education sector and governments to accommodate for the predicted jobs of the future.

While there may be a focus on the types of technology that produce jobs where specialised skills will be valuable, an underlying message is that *foundational skills* and broad new *capabilities* will become more important than ever.

And sound foundational skills no longer just mean language, literacy and numeracy.

They mean *analytics, applications, network management, security and privacy*, as well as stuff like *creativity, problem solving, advanced reasoning, complex judgement, social interaction and emotional intelligence*.

These will become highly important in professional roles of the future.

In terms of the types of work we are likely to be doing, the OECD have reported that the share of high-skill jobs is significantly increasing while the share of low-skilled jobs is decreasing.

Companies now require a workforce which not only has expertise in particular disciplines and technologies, but also has a handle on team building capacity, emotional intelligence, strategic visioning, market analysis and cultural sensitivity.

Finally, contemporary industry requires working with highly technical and complex processes that give individual workers more autonomy and significantly more responsibility.

We used to have models of leadership focussed on rigid hierarchies of managers passing questions up and decisions down. As data collection and analysis tools improve through technology, less hierarchy is required. Individual professionals will have increased decision-making responsibility which challenges our concept of management – leadership will have to come from anyone, *regardless of title*.

It's clear the jobs experiencing growth require workers with high level thought and judgement, as was stressed in the Factory of the Future Report, which says that a company can generate enormous amounts of data, but ultimately it must rely on people to make decisions.

Funnily enough, in a future that looks like a science fiction movie, human capital will be more important than ever.

For their part, workers must recognise that it's not the largest company, it's not the most successful company, it's not even the strongest company that will benefit the most from these changes, it's the most adaptable companies.

There's a message there for the future workforce too – the most adaptable *employees* will likely be the most successful.

A need for adaptable workers with broad skills has already begun to surface in Australian Industry.

For the last few years, Ai Group's *own* employer surveys have shown that the greatest dissatisfaction businesses have with the employability skills of graduates is in self-management, problem solving and teamwork.

Education and training have been identified as among the most critical factors shaping workforce outcomes in the future. New approaches to education, training, re-skilling and skills use will be key to maximising the benefits of digital and inclusive economies.

Education needs to reflect the workforce – fluid settings rather than traditional – using digital and offline platforms, collaborative spaces, project-based activities – there must increasingly be learning opportunities outside of the classroom.

A guy called David Guest first used the concept of a T-shaped graduate back in 1991. He was not talking about Ice-T or predicting future Rick and Morty storylines. He meant someone who has vertical skills – in-depth disciplines or knowledge specific to their area of activity; and who also develops horizontal skills and abilities that are not specific to one area and help make organisations work.

These include deep listening capabilities, an entrepreneurial spirit, and being able to communicate well. Though 1991 was *a long time ago* (I would know, it's the year I was born!), David Guest's summary of the ideal graduate is still pretty much spot on.

In 10-20 years', time when everybody's job will have changed to some degree, the characteristics of agility, resilience and flexibility in professional graduates, as in all employees, will be the key to their success in organisations.

This will allow organisations to be adaptable, innovative and thrive in complex, unpredictable digital environments.

This brings me back to my earlier statement. We can't possibly know what skills are needed for the future. It's a tough ask, and no one has a crystal ball. No one has all the answers. And you should be sceptical of anyone who suggests they do.

That said, we do know enough to see that being adaptable and developing a diverse set of skills is likely to be the best way forward for anyone, regardless of age.

It used to be the norm to have one skillset and even one job for life. Let's face it – that's not our future. Change is the new normal.

If I could give you some personal advice, as a younger person who has graduated and started to embark on a career - my best skills haven't come from my degree or even my professional roles. They've come from years of minimum wage work, or work not related to my degree, most of which I was doing because I couldn't get anywhere with what I studied for quite some time

It's a tough world out there – but you've got to back yourself anyway!

But regardless, you need to wring every droplet of opportunity, growth, and skill (*no matter how obscure it may seem at the time*) from whatever it is that you are doing.

There is more than one way to cook an egg...and based on everything we currently know, that's exactly the attitude that will be rewarded in the future world of work.