The internet, robotic process automation, autonomous machines and artificial intelligence are transforming tasks and morphing the workplace. Some tasks are being automated; some roles, in the parlance of the fourth industrial revolution, are being augmented. Some jobs are disappearing while fresh ones emerge.

Automation could disrupt up to 6.5 million full-time equivalent Australian positions – but as many as 4 million new jobs could be created by 2030, according to management consultant McKinsey & Company. But these new jobs won’t be like the old jobs, so who will do them? That will probably be the existing workers prepared to invest in their own development, to increase their skills and cultural nous.

“If I don’t have the latest thinking, I will be extinct,” says Diana Faddoul.

As the world of work transforms, continual learning will be vital to future-proof careers.

STORY BEVERLEY HEAD PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS PEARCE

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A recent IBM survey estimated that 120 million workers in the world’s 12 largest economies would need to be retrained or reskilled as a result of AI and intelligent automation, and revealed that the top two skills sought by employers were behavioural: a willingness to be flexible, agile and adaptable to change; and time management and the ability to prioritise.

A recent BOSS roundtable noted that schools, vocational colleges, universities and private education organisations are all wrestling with the challenge of preparing students for the unknown.

For those who are already in work, future-proofing careers has become a priority. Most professionals will need to boost their data skills, build technical knowledge, improve creative and collaboration capabilities, consider a career pivot and, in some cases, reinvent themselves.

That is no surprise to Diana Faddoul, marketing business lead at Uniting, the community services arm of the Uniting Church. Faddoul has a bachelor of marketing and masters of marketing, and is undertaking an executive MBA.

Faddoul is in her 30s, but knows she’s up against young graduates with a fresh quiver of skills. “If I don’t have the latest thinking, I will be extinct,” she says.

It’s why she is on a continuous learning journey. Besides the university qualifications, Faddoul has taken herself to graphic design courses and advanced Excel sessions, taught herself to use the latest tech tools and wants to learn to code.

Faddoul is preparing herself for the future, but there is a price. “I usually pay for courses myself ... if someone else has paid for it, I may not be that committed,” she says. “So much sacrifice goes into this commitment – you have to be mentally prepared. I’ve also had to think about when do I want to start a family, is it something I need to put off? The social life is non-existent.”

Magnus Gittins, director of executive education at AGSM, says future-proofing careers has become urgent as the prevailing business models across multiple sectors come under threat. He expects to see the re-emergence of the academy model where people continually reskill and hone a growth mindset – the term coined by Stanford University professor Carol Dweck to describe people who move away from thinking that intellect and talent is fixed and are prepared to invest in learning and development.

People with a fixed mindset say: “I just don’t have digital skills.” With a growth mindset, they tell themselves: “I can be good at anything. Skill comes from putting energy into learning.”

### Supply versus demand

The 2019 Hays Global Skills Index, published in collaboration with Oxford Economics, reveals a talent mismatch between the skills that Australia’s jobseekers have and the skills employers want. It’s the sixth consecutive year this mismatch has been reported, but the size of the mismatch this year is the highest recorded.

Skills demand is highest in engineering, technology, financial services and professional services. Demand is falling for low-skill workers who do not regularly upskill and whose work can be automated.

Michael Priddis is the founder and CEO of Faethm, a Sydney-based company that has amassed a huge data collection and developed artificial intelligence tools that reveal the impact of workplace change on more than 2 billion jobs worldwide. Companies and governments use Faethm’s service to identify skills gaps and opportunities.

Faethm will launch a free consumer product in 2020 to help people understand the likely impact on them.

“If you’re in a job that is fundamentally human, you’re good, though you should probably be learning more technical things to augment yourself,” Priddis says. “If you’re in a job that’s more technical, you will have a problem and should be learning things that are more human.”

It’s a global challenge for individuals and organisations, says AGSM’s Gittins. He notes that AT&T last year committed to a $US1 billion upskilling program for 100,000 workers. Amazon has allocated $US700 million to a similar plan for 100,000 personnel.

These massive efforts dwarf Telstra’s $25 million training package to upskill staff, and the “cloud guilds” at NAB, Kmart and Target, where technology companies such as Amazon Web Services and Microsoft are helping build the cloud computing skills of a couple of thousand people.

“This is not just how to manage the decline but how to invent the new,” Gittins says.

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**Future shock**

**6.5M**

Australian full-time equivalent positions potentially at risk of disruption through automation.

**4M**

Jobs in Australia that could be generated by 2030.

**50%**

Proportion of accounting and finance jobs expected to be lost within 10 years.

**10%**

Proportion of income that executives should invest in professional development.

Sources: McKinsey & Co, IBM, Faethm, Kyle Hammond

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He says that while some organisations still focus on small, hand-picked cohorts of staff to be reskilled, there is a trend to invest in more widespread learning and development. KPMG, for example, has committed to its workforce being educated in design thinking as it was deemed critical to the firm’s success.

Kylie Hammond has been a corporate headhunter for nearly two decades, but says she has never seen such a degree of workplace flux. Many people, she says, will simply have to pivot to find work.

An increasing number of professionals are exploring portfolio careers, Hammond says, maintaining anchor work while also taking part in the gig economy so that they are not “behind the one employer”.

“Executives ahead of the curve are adopting a much more sophisticated approach to career planning,” she says. “They are engaging with career coaches the same way as they engage with a financial planner, accountant or lawyer – to transition, to protect their income and investing in their training.”

Best practice, she says, is for executives to put 10 per cent of their income into their professional development, with most focused on developing “hot skills” such as digital media, digital transformation, social media, negotiation skills and public speaking. This is often through shorter online courses instead of longer, costlier MBA programs.

Hammond says employers should take a leaf out of the playbook of start-ups, which tend to take a more relaxed approach to employees’ professional development and learning.

Instead of dictating who learns what, when and how, start-ups trust their people to manage their own training budget and skills development. “If the employee takes ownership and contributes, you can get amazing things to happen,” Hammond says.

In its Future Skills report, strategy consultant AlphaBeta suggests that by 2040, Australians will have to spend three hours each week on learning and development to keep pace with the demands of the automation age.

Shayne McKenzie is 50, has been retrenched twice and has reinvented himself repeatedly. He studied ceramic engineering as an undergraduate, followed by an MBA, followed by a graduate diploma in education. He has completed the Sydney Leadership program (an initiative of the Benevolent Society) and undertaken a series of courses to learn about human behaviour.

After working as a management consultant, HR leader and relief teacher, he is CEO of the Institute for the Study of Peak States in Zurich, working with therapists focused on wellbeing and performance.

McKenzie says the key to a strong growth mindset is to avoid being defined by your current or previous roles and to take stock of your transferable skills, take on a new role, and invest to learn something new. “Sometimes the response is a survival response,” he acknowledges. “My role has been made redundant at least twice – for me each time it’s been a great opportunity to sit back and say, ‘OK, what is the next part of my journey?’

“One of the best ways to avoid being redundant is to be looking at the bigger picture, where your role fits in, what changes are happening, and to identify the future skills you might want to be thinking about.”

Louise du Pre-Alba, strategic policy advocate for the nation’s largest superannuation fund, AustralianSuper, says constant reskilling is essential for people who want to do their current job well and for those seeking a career change or progress.

“In a lot of fields of endeavour there is this creeping credentialisation,” she says. “Even if you know something, you need to keep up, being accredited in those things.”

Du Pre-Alba invests in her own professional development each year, focusing on learning something different rather than increasing her credentials in the same subject area. But she acknowledges that it can be hard for people to prove in a job interview that they have certain skills, particularly creative skills.

“The standard recruitment processes do not necessarily flush out someone’s creative abilities – they are still focused around what you trained in and gained experience in,” she says. “They don’t elicit responses that demonstrate how someone can think outside the box.”

“This is really important to employers. They need to develop scenarios and get applicants to see how they respond and the way they think and approach the task. That will tell you a lot about whether they are creative or hug process in solving a problem.”

While du Pre-Alba has taken control of her own learning and development, she says there needs to be more guidance from employers.

“People need to focus on things that require creativity and exercising judgment,” she says. “So much of the old workplace required mastery of process. Mastery of process is something that robots can do.”
**KNOWLEDGE TRAILS**

Australian workers hungry for new skills are turning to free, online training platforms as well as more formal courses.

Software company Salesforce employs 40,000 people worldwide and is at the pointy end of the fourth industrial revolution. The systems it designs and sells are changing workplaces and automating tasks that people once performed manually.

Rob Wickham, vice-president and growth program manager for Salesforce Asia Pacific, says many of the fundamental skills that people needed a generation ago are being performed by machines. “The new skills that are becoming vitally important are problem solving, critical thinking, validating the sources of data,” he says. “Most important is the skill to learn new skills and unlearn skills of the past.”

Wickham says business needs to help today’s workers participate in tomorrow’s economy. And he says there is an appetite for learning. Research that Salesforce commissioned from YouGov Galaxy last year revealed that 88 per cent of Australian workers wanted to learn new skills, and 45 per cent believed it was the responsibility of government and business to help them do that.

To that end, Salesforce offers Trailhead, a free, online, gamified self-learning platform that is available to anyone, not just Salesforce employees.

Much of Trailhead’s content relates to Salesforce technology, but there are also general learning modules such as artificial intelligence basics, how to coach a team, how to use a balanced scorecard, how to cultivate equality at work, even a cyber resilience module.

Badges are awarded once modules are completed. Because the system is gamified, there are points associated with each badge or module, and people can gain Ranger or Double Ranger Status for 100 or 200 badges, which Salesforce celebrates internally. Wickham has 154 badges and tries for another 25-30 each year.

Wickham says Trailhead has provided a new source of talent for the company, while generating “resumé-worthy credentials that allow you to redefine yourself and create opportunities”.

Internally, Salesforce managers use Trailhead to support career planning, suggesting modules for employees to lift their skills so they can ascend vertically or switch horizontally for a different perspective and experience.

Wickham says it is important staff can learn during working hours, rather than be expected to shoehorn professional development into their nights and weekends.

“You have got to give them the opportunity, and elevate learning to be a priority so they feel comfortable doing it through their work hours.”

Since Trailhead’s launch in 2014, 1.7 million people worldwide have followed the self-guided learning trails and gained badges.

“It has wildly exceeded our expectations and proves people are hungry and want to take control in these uncertain times and develop that muscle – a desire for lifelong learning,” Wickham says. “At the end of the day, that is what is going to serve you well in the fourth industrial revolution.”

ANZ’s Trevor O’Leary says workplace change is not new, although the pace of it has accelerated.

ANZ Institutional has been working to ensure its people are “future-ready” since 2015, says Trevor O’Leary, the organisation’s head of loan product and execution, loans and specialised finance.

Change, he says, has long been a feature of the workplace. “People are clever and adaptive,” he says. “This is no different this time around, though possibly the pace of change is faster.

“We provide through ANZ a structure to get people future-ready, which looks at new ways of leading, having a growth mindset, challenging yourself and being persistently resilient. We have done this for a while to prepare our people when they have roles that might be removed or augmented with technology so that they are in the best position to continue to add value to the business, customers and their lives.”

ANZ Institutional partners with AGSM on two key programs. The Business Performance Program (BPP) for leaders runs over six days, has two modules and is designed to develop technology and data skills as well as new leadership approaches, particularly collaboration.

“The old way of managing was very hierarchical and sharing didn’t happen,” O’Leary says. “Your knowledge was yours alone and that was how you created value.”

A two-day BPP Accelerate course was introduced this year, held at the Stone & Chalk innovation hub in Sydney. It teaches innovation frameworks, introduces participants to fintechs, which are reshaping banking and finance, and includes customer panels to deliver participants a clear understanding of shifting expectations.

(Stone & Chalk has separately announced its own S&C Academy, offering half-day upskilling boot camps on innovation, technology and entrepreneurship.)

ANZ’s second course is a Personal Performance Program (PPP) for more junior or graduate employees, which outlines frameworks to help people manage stakeholders, build relationships and resilience, and grasp how lean start-ups operate and grow.

O’Leary says the rationale for the investment is clear: “If we train our people and motivate our people well and better than someone else, we will achieve better outcomes for the customer. If people have the tools and backing from the organisation, you get better outcomes for the organisation [and] the individual, and a competitive advantage.”

This content has been created in commercial partnership with AGSM @ UNSW Business School for BOSS magazine.

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