

Strategies for empowering the workforce



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The prediction that ‘ young Australians entering the workforce today might have as many as 5 different careers and make 17 changes in employers over their working lives’ (FYA 2017) has been widely publicised. Whilst it may seem like an overwhelming prospect for those preparing to enter the future world of work, it could be argued that it will bring with it a vast array of exciting opportunities for people throughout their working lifetimes.

A variety of trends has been, and currently is, shaping the structure of the workforce and influencing labour market trends. In turn, career planning is constantly evolving as we strive to empower our clients to be able to competently and confidently navigate the ‘ increasingly globalised, interconnected world of work.’ (Payton and Knight 2018).

The Foundation for Young Australians’ 2017 report, *The New Work Mindset* , states that ‘ the way we work will be increasingly affected by three global economic forces: automation, globalisation and collaboration.’ These combined factors are reshaping the nature of the workforce. No longer are the majority of employees progressing along a linear career journey; they are entering a ‘ more flexible employment market, marked by more temporary staff [and] more voluntary workforce mobility’ with three times more likelihood of gaining a part-time position than there was forty years ago. (McCrindle 2014). Some workers are also shifting from employment to self-employment and back – a trend which is likely to continue as people’s circumstances change throughout their lives.

Australia’s ageing population is having a significant impact on the workforce and labour market. The Australian Government’s 2017 report, *Australia*

2030: prosperity through innovation, states that the looming retirement boom will create a shortfall in the number of workers required to maintain current gross domestic product growth. At the same time, the ageing population is leading to a projection of ‘the strongest employment growth of any industry over the next five years’ (Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business 2018) in Health Care and Social Assistance. A similar scenario is predicted for the impact of automation on the labour market. Some people hold the belief that ‘robots will take our jobs’ (Borland 2017); however, evidence suggests that ‘automation will help fill Australia’s future labour gap, by improving productivity and performing tasks workers do not want, or need, to do. In addition, ... technology will create new roles in fast-growing fields like professional and technical services.’ (Australian Government Innovation and Science Australia 2017).

Due to the recognition that ‘future jobs will require problem-solving skills, innovative and creative thinking and digital skills ... in 2015 the Australian Federal Government announced a National Innovation and Science Agenda to ... “inspire all Australians – from pre-schoolers to the broader community – to engage with STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).”’ (Pfeiffer 2017). The education system has thrust STEM subjects into the spotlight, aiming to support learners to develop their ability to think critically and flexibly in order to adapt to the rapidly and constantly changing future world of work.

The career development services that we provide must adapt and advance in accordance with the inevitable and ever-changing nature of the workforce

and variations in the labour market so that our clients can succeed and thrive as they progress through their career narrative.

Each client comes to us with their own unique set of circumstances, skills and needs. It is so important that we work in collaboration with them to empower each individual as they prepare to enter the workforce or transition from one job, career or industry to another.

One of the most important things that we need to try to ensure is that our clients have, or develop, the skills to access ‘ information that simplifies the complex world of work and helps them navigate work over a lifetime.’ (FYA 2017). Assisting them in using the internet to access current, accurate and reputable content regarding education, training and employment, labour market information and other knowledge required to progress along their career development journey is one key way in which we can begin to empower our clients. We should aim to become superfluous to them, merely bit players along the way as they build their career narrative development skills.

We have an obligation to inform our clients that what is predicted as being important for successfully navigating the future world of work is having ‘ a set of transferrable enterprise skills that will give them a range of employability options.’ (FYA 2017). Their employers will be seeking the skills that are referred to as 21st century, generic, transferable or soft, which can ‘ open doors to a group or ‘ cluster’ of jobs.’ (FYA 2017). These aptitudes include: team work, creativity, hypothesis-driven problem solving, critical thinking, digital literacy, entrepreneurialism and interpersonal skills, such as

the ability to communicate and empathise with colleagues. (Australian Government Innovation and Science Australia 2017). In addition to gaining and/or refining these abilities, clients should be made aware that there will be a need to retrain and upskill more often in the future than employees do currently. However, this does not necessarily mean that moving into a new job will require radical retraining, because building a portfolio of portable skills will help our clients adapt to changing skill needs in the labour market throughout their careers. According to the Australian Industry and Skills Committee, ‘ employees are expected to take more responsibility for their skills development.’ (ASIC 2016). Having discussions about lifelong learning now being a typical component of each employee’s career journey will be essential so that clients are aware of this expectation. This will be just one of their many career management skills, which will enable them to direct the course of their career narrative progression throughout their working lifetime.

Greater access to ‘ fluid education’ (AISC 2016) is rapidly increasing and diversifying choices for working learners. This is making it easier for our clients to access pathway options to transition from one job, career or industry to another. The *Australia 2030: Prosperity through innovation* report states that ‘ VET (Vocational Education and Training) will play a significant role in helping Australians adapt to changing skill needs throughout their careers.’ The Victorian Government’s recent provision of tuition-free places in 30 priority TAFE courses and 20 pre-apprenticeship courses may enable clients to upskill and access professional development, which could have previously been cost prohibitive. Ensuring that our clients know about

current initiatives and opportunities is a key component of providing a quality career development service.

The ‘ common goal of [career services] is to assist clients to engage in effective career planning and successfully navigate career transitions to ensure the fulfilment of their unique career development needs.’ (CEAV 2018). Given that the world of work is currently characterised by constant and rapid change, we must be mindful of the implications of these adjustments and tailor our interventions very specifically for the individual, aiming to empower them to adapt to the variable workforce and labour market conditions that they will likely face. FYA’s *New Work Mindset* argues that ‘ we need to shift our focus from jobs to skills to prepare [our clients] for the world of work.’ (FYA 2017). Assisting our clientele to be aware of the capabilities and competencies that will be most transferable and sought after in the labour market can help them to ‘ navigate dynamic working lives.’ (FYA 2017).

A number of strategies are available to us, which can be utilised to better prepare clients to fulfil their career development needs. One of these is collaborating with local employers and other career development professionals and services. This provides valuable insight into job vacancies, skills shortages, job applicants’ strengths and weaknesses, education and training opportunities and new initiatives that we can bring to our clients for their consideration. Combining regular networking with continual professional development can enhance a career service enormously and assist us in striving towards providing best practice.

Furthermore, we can aim to ensure that all clients can access current and accurate labour market, education and training information via a range of media. Having hard copies of university, TAFE and pathway provider publications on hand is important, as many clients like to take information away with them in that form to read in more detail later and discuss with others. Also, using an online platform (such as Career Tools) enables us to alert clients to useful websites, like The Labour Market Portal and Job Outlook, provide links to webinars, promote details of career development activities (such as information sessions, revision lectures and Open Days) and can also be used to advertise the organisation's services. Depending on the location of the service, it may be possible to convey information through television monitors (running messages along the bottom of the screen like a news feed), a social media page (such as Facebook or Instagram) or an app. Better preparation of clients can result from heightening their awareness of the knowledge required to make informed and considered decisions relevant to traversing their individual career path. We must also be mindful of providing information in a range of formats for the diverse needs of our clientele. Consider how to make assistive technology, such as voice to text apps, available in your practice.

In order to cater for the diverse needs of each client, we should source and offer a range of opportunities for them throughout their career development journey. These may include: information sessions for parents and students regarding VET courses and VCE subjects; encouraging clients to undertake work experience in a variety of settings; assisting them to find Structured Workplace Learning; arranging speakers from universities and residential

colleges, TAFE colleges and School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship providers to meet with clients; connecting clients with employment services; organising workshops that will assist clients to prepare their resume, write a cover letter, apply for job vacancies and participate in interviews; and alerting them to voluntary work prospects.

Being committed to constant improvement requires us to evaluate outcomes so that we are aware of what we're doing effectively and what we can improve. Individual reflective practice is powerful and should be regular and ongoing. Seeking external feedback, whether it be through surveying clients at the conclusion of a career development activity, visiting a work experience or Structured Workplace Learning site and speaking to the client and their employer or reviewing content like On Track data, is vital for the ongoing enhancement of career development services.

Ultimately, as career development practitioners, we are seeking to become redundant to our client as we work towards 'facilitat[ing] [their] independence and autonomy [for their own] lifelong career management.' (CEAV 2018) Tailor services to match their unique needs and empower them to prepare for the workforce of tomorrow, today.

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