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**GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT**



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Australian businesses – particularly SMEs – are failing to future-proof the workforce with the majority acknowledging that while interest in non-traditional courses has doubled in the last two years, only a small fraction of their training budget is being spent on skills essential in a pacey and connected world.

'Skills of tomorrow' such as interpersonal communication across the generations, managing virtual teams, communicating across cultures are being overlooked as companies try to catch up with skills needed right now. Businesses are not preparing staff for increasingly mobile and cross-cultural opportunities.

Over the next five years the business imperative is for leaders to manage virtual teams and foster innovation and ideas sharing by way of cloud collaboration. Increased connectivity and opportunities in international markets are creating more geographically disparate workplaces and the ability to effectively manage and operate in a virtual culture requires new ways of working.

Greater sensitivity to interpersonal communication is required as technology opens up international pools of talent, and communicating across cultures will be key in obtaining high-performance team dynamics. 'However companies are still trying to keep up with basic skills such as computer training, customer service and time management and are allocating most of their training budgets to these traditional areas.'

Businesses should invest at least 20% of their training budget into 'future' development, with an ultimate goal of 80% to create agile teams that have their eyes on tomorrow. Through technology businesses can expand and replicate their operations interstate and overseas, but ultimately it's still people who run them. A person may start work at 6am to liaise with a US team, have a break, then log back on in the afternoon to interact with colleagues in Asia – this is the new way of working.

Even companies that don't have plans to expand overseas still need to meet the expectation of work-life balance and employees working from home. Face-to-face skills and workplace culture need translation for the digital and distance world. And while flexible working is a great option, managers and employees need to be kept motivated and online collaboration fostered.

Training is a good retention strategy, but it's also a smart strategy for companies looking at their revenue pipelines and future stars. Millennials want flexibility and they name training as a top expectation in the workplace, where they want to be exposed to concepts that will progress their careers.

While training budgets are generally capped, businesses could adopt a dual-training system which includes an internal mentoring or buddy system and an outsourced model for more technical and future skilling.

The top five training areas to prepare workers for the future are:

- interpersonal communication skills
- virtual teams
- intercultural communications
- managing diversity
- leadership

Karen Winfield, Global Operations Director, PD Training



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