

A photograph of two men in business attire. The man on the left, wearing glasses and a blue suit, is holding a tablet and pointing at it with a pen. The man on the right, also in a blue suit, is looking at the tablet. They are in a professional setting, possibly a meeting or a collaborative work environment.

FUTURE PROOFING YOUR CAREER

The Importance of Continuous Learning and Career Development



INTRODUCTION

Today's business environment is changing at a rate of knots. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg predicts that it won't be long before we will be able to transfer thoughts to our friends. Yes, really. Imagine living in a world where thoughts can be transferred. It may sound ridiculous now, but 15 years ago, many would have said that having remote access to all of your documents in a 'cloud', paying for products with your phone, being able to transfer photos from one phone to another by tapping them together and tracking your friends and family by satellite technology, would also have been considered quite ridiculous.

Technological advancement could easily be considered an HR disruptor across every industry today, given that any product, service or previously valuable skill could become obsolete as quickly as it takes a new app to hit the Apple App Store.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

One reassuring thing about the prospect of facing job obsolescence is that it's not a new problem. Many have faced it before and survived. Think about how computer programmers have had to reinvent themselves again and again throughout the last thirty years, as software engineering continued to evolve. Marketing in the 1990's used to be as simple as knowing how to buy, plan and produce advertising creative for traditional media. But now if you don't know anything about programmatic TV buying, bidding for impressions, google analytics, Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter, you no longer know how to market a brand. It hasn't killed marketing however. Those in the profession have simply had to continuously upgrade their skills to survive.



The bad news is that whilst more specialised jobs are created through technology advances, many other roles are disappearing as a consequence of the power of computers and the ways in which that changes how we do business. The good news however is that the news isn't all bad. A recent UK Deloitte's study says that 'rather than destroying jobs, technology has been a great job-creating machine'.

The results reveal good news for skilled labour but not such good news for unskilled labour, as it's generally the dull, dangerous and difficult jobs that have been made obsolete by machinery. And for those who are skilled, there is no doubt that technology will change what specialised skills are required over time, so keeping your knowledge and skills up-to-date cannot be undervalued.

The reality is that evolution has always had the potential to lead to obsolescence. The problem however is that today's evolution seems to be moving that much faster, and the technological advances are coming from so many different directions, it's fair to ask how we as employees can safeguard ourselves from becoming obsolete.

So What Are Your Options?

In today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world, it is critical to make sure you are doing everything you can to remain as relevant as possible. Career preservation is an ongoing process that requires a holistic view of your role, your organisation and the broader industry in order to understand how you need to adapt to remain relevant.

Unfortunately, there is no quick fix or single point of reference when it comes to keeping your skills and knowledge current, but here are some effective ways of being sure to stay on top of your game.

Read. Read. And Read Some More.

The Internet has changed the way individuals and organisations access information. It has never been easier to stay informed, whether it's about the wider global economy, the industry you operate in or even the views and opinions of the individuals within your organisation. It is critical to leverage the digital web to keep abreast of changes, as and when and even before they happen. Here is a quick check-list of must-do's when it comes to keeping yourself informed:

1. Sign up to credible industry newsletters and blogs, videos, podcasts, webinars, eBooks and other readily curated knowledge sources.
2. Keep up to date, daily, with general news headlines in relation to your particular industry, ensuring that your sources are credible, national media like The Australian, The Sydney Morning Herald or The Financial Review and/or global media like Forbes, the Economist or the Guardian.
3. Stay on top of global trends, and keep track of countries that are the most advanced in your industry; ensuring that you rely on credible and reputable sources such as Tedx.
4. Follow the blogs and social media accounts of your industry leaders, your competitors, and professional mentors.
5. Read books penned by global thought leaders and innovators, as they can provide broader insights into the state of the economy, political and societal changes and how they affect business.

Become a Thought Leader

Thought leaders are knowledgeable industry advocates who have managed to leverage their knowledge and expertise to convert themselves, and in turn their companies into resources for the industry as a whole. Their relevance is maintained as they must be at the forefront of industry evolution in order to be considered a thought leader.

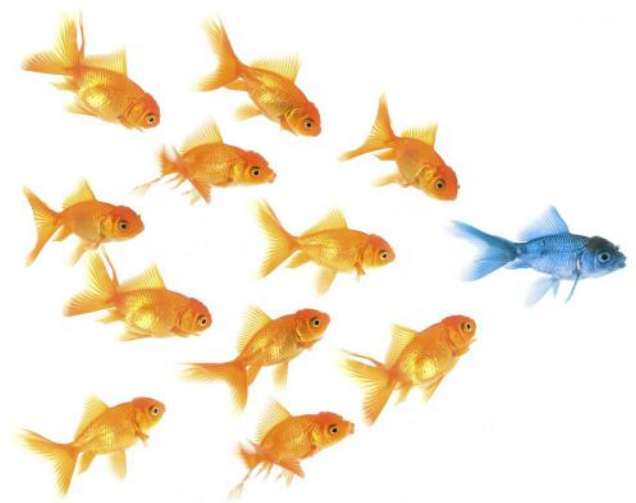
Thought Leaders are well connected within their industries and beyond, and are continuously networking to expand their spheres of influence. They must keep themselves up-to-date and be able to express opinions, insights and industry predictions that provide value to

their audiences, who then in turn share the content around their networks. Thought leaders are continuously starting and contributing to industry conversations, which means that they become sought after for their opinions by professionals and media. These conversations appear across their social, printed and digital channels in the form of:

- Blogs
- Books
- eBooks
- Articles
- Videos
- Whitepapers

Becoming a thought leader requires continuous professional development and ongoing learning, in order to ensure that the information, concepts and insights they share represent the most up-to-date industry trends.

Becoming a thought leader takes time, creativity and patience, as building credibility relies on the continuous creation of valuable and credible content over time. It is true that in today's digital world, anyone can become a publisher. Creating your own blog is easy enough to do with the use of a range of open source platforms such as Wordpress, Squarespace or Kirby. But before you reach for your laptop to start your own blog, be aware that the blogosphere is already highly cluttered and so it's never been more important to remain up-to-date and innovative in order to cut through the clutter and carve out a niche for your own thought-leading content.



Network Amongst Your Industry

Staying on top of what is going on in your local industry by attending industry seminars, conferences, workshops and other networking events cannot be underestimated. These industry-led events can not only widen your exposure to the industry in general, but can also provide you with valuable opportunities to connect with other individuals and organisations in your industry including inspirational thought leaders, like-minded individuals, and even potential future employers or business partners.

If you are subscribing to leading industry trade publications, and thought leading blogs within the industry, you will already be receiving notifications of events and opportunities to engage with the broader industry network. There are many sponsors and organisations that host these events and they all compete to host the biggest events of the year. As a result, the organisers of these events work hard to attract large audiences by featuring high-profile thought leading speakers and activities; which means you are always sure to come away with valuable insights and inspirations that will help to keep you at the forefront of your industry.

Networking events are also an effective way of identifying industry mentors who can inspire your career progression. Meeting and listening to more experienced individuals who have achieved success in your industry can be a hugely valuable source of knowledge and inspiration.



Apply for Industry Awards

A quick Google search will reveal what awards are applicable to your industry. Almost every industry celebrates different aspects of innovation, results and creativity across a calendar of awards ceremonies throughout the year. You might be surprised to learn how broad the award categories are, so it's always worth reviewing the criteria for awards, in the event that you possess the skills, experiences or can relay relevant professional examples of your work for a featured category.

Industry awards provide the opportunity to showcase and reward companies and individuals that are driving their industries forward. Being recognised as a Winner, or even a Finalist in a relevant category within your industry can do wonders for your professional reputation, and can elevate your profile amongst thought leaders.

Being nominated, shortlisted or winning an industry award can also be talked about within your social profiles such as LinkedIn or Facebook, and can feature in the content of your blogs and/or social media posts. This maximises exposure for your achievements, and increases your credibility amongst your industry peers.

Join Professional Associations

Joining the relevant professional associations relating to your industry can be highly effective in positioning you as a leader in your field and maintaining your relevance in your industry. In today's period of continuous change, aligning yourself with industry experts and keeping in contact with others in your industry can keep you at the forefront of your chosen field.

Whether it's the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, the Australian Marketing Institute or the Institute of Management Consultants, membership to these organisations can improve your professional credentials and provide you with access to a variety of career development opportunities. They not only enable you to meet industry peers and thought leaders, but they also provide a range of valuable training, resources and networking opportunities that can further your career development and knowledge base. Professional memberships also add differentiation to your resume, and reinforce your commitment to and interest in your chosen field.

Continuously Benchmark Your Industry

In today's environment of continuous technological change, it's highly advisable to know where the capabilities of your role sit compared with those of other similar roles within your industry. Benchmarking your role against others at a similar level can provide you with valuable insights about the trends and technology advances taking place in your sector.

It can be as simple as searching for your current role on job-boards, and identifying what attributes other organisations are looking for in the same role. Benchmarking provides you with the opportunity to capture changing expectations of capabilities within similar organisations. If you start to see other organisations looking for certain technical or IT skills that you don't currently use in your role, this can point to advances in technology that may soon become part of your job specifications, or may even threaten to make your current role obsolete.

Identifying shifts in skillset requirements across your industry can lead you to opportunities to adapt your skills to best suit the changing industry before it's too late. It can even lead you to similar roles within other organisations that are embracing new technologies at a faster pace within your industry, that may be able to offer you a more progressive career path.

Education & Training

Whilst on-the-job training and practical experience plays a highly valuable role in career development, certain jobs within specialised industries require ongoing professional training and development simply to remain qualified. Technological advances within many industries have increased the amount of practical systems training needed to keep employees up to date with operational requirements, but this most certainly does not mean days in a classroom.

Training within modern organisations has changed significantly over the last two decades. In the 1990's 'training and development' often entailed full day skills-based training sessions in a boardroom along with your team-members, all of whom would be rendered 'out of action' for the entire day. However, in today's mobile environment, where employees are expected to be fully accessible at a moment's notice, training and development days have been rendered a luxury that many organisations can no longer afford. Corporate training days have now given way to annual team-building and corporate strategy sessions that are very much task oriented; with outcomes that can be very clearly measured.

Corporate training programs today are quite often carried out via short-form online videos which are distributed uniformly to all relevant employees, offering web-based training modules in mobile or tablet-friendly formats that are easy for employees to participate in remotely.

Another trend that has affected training and development across all industries, is the ease with which employees can now access up-to-date training or skills updates via the internet, quite often for free. eBooks, eLearning courses and other thought-leading content can provide employees with practical and instructional advice when, how and where they need it. Smart companies will be the ones that are able to provide their employees with training and development solutions that meet their changing mobile and social needs.



Conclusion

There is no doubt that today's digital economy presents employees across Australia with a stark reality that they need to evolve to remain relevant in their chosen career. However, we can't forget the equally evident reality that this rapid evolution affects individuals both personally and professionally on a daily basis. As more and more individuals embrace smart, internet-enabled technologies that require 're-learning' in their personal lives, they will be more likely to accept that this pace of technological change will also require them to 're-learn' processes in a professional capacity.

There is no question that employees across all industries must keep their knowledge and skills current to remain relevant, and also that there are some industries that are more susceptible to obsolescence than others. But by keeping abreast of trends as they affect your industry, by taking a holistic approach to your career development, and by remaining engaged and inspired by what you do, you will be one step closer to enjoying a long-lasting and fulfilling career in your chosen field.

