

The Workforce of Tomorrow Demands a New Mindset

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Career trajectories used to be so simple. Pick a job, figure out what course you need to study or training you need to get under your belt, graduate, get a job and work your way up the industry food chain.

People used to spend years, decades even in the same jobs – do the miles, get the gold watch and then retire.

In the new, dynamic world of work, these traditional, linear pathways to work are less common. So as a young person how do you equip yourself with the right skills to be successful in such an uncertain future?

Over the last 12 months, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) has released its New Work Order report series, which shows that we're facing the biggest disruption to the world of work since the industrial revolution. Globalisation and automation have radically altered where, what and how young people are working.

These changes mean 60 per cent of Australian students (71 per cent of those in VET) are currently studying or training for occupations where the vast majority of jobs will be radically altered by automation. Many of the jobs they're studying for could vanish in 10–15 years' time. Just as these disappear however, new and different ones will be created simultaneously.

Despite all these changes, our mindset about work and the resulting advice we provide to young people remains largely the same.

We rely on stereotypes of jobs that we know have always been there, and suggest training or educational pathways that will secure a job in these occupations. Yet in this new work order where young people are predicted to have 17 jobs over five careers, it's clear that this traditional, linear career advice is no longer relevant or helpful.

To help young Australians navigate this more complex and uncertain world of work, understand where future jobs will exist and ensure they are equipped with the right skillset, FYA has turned to big data.

In our latest report, The New Work Mindset we have analysed more than 2.7 million job advertisements using a clustering algorithm which looked at the skills requested for each job and how similar they are to skills requested for other jobs. Over 600 occupations were grouped based on demand for similar skillsets, with over 4,600 diverse skills requested.

Our analysis shows that there are seven job clusters in the Australian economy where the required technical and enterprise skills are closely related and more portable than previously thought. These job clusters include The Generators, The Artisans, The Carers, The Informers, The Technologists, The Designers and The Coordinators.

What we have found through this analysis is that when a young person trains or works one job they acquire skills and capabilities that will help them get 13 other jobs. In other words, skills are more portable than we once thought.

For example, the data reveals that the technical and enterprise skills commonly asked for an Environmental Research Scientist are portable into at least 13 other jobs where skills overlap, such as a fire officer, life science technician and medical administrator. The common skills and capabilities between these jobs include data analysis, resource management, contract management and natural resource management.

Not all job switches are an overnight exercise—some will require additional formal or on-the-job training, such as the transition from a nurse to an anaesthetist. The job clusters do provide the opportunity to identify skill gaps and find ways to fill them such as by taking short courses, further study, gaining early career experience, or seeking out on-the-job training. Going one step further, our report also identified which of the job clusters offer greater long-term security on average than others.

What these findings reinforce is that the way careers education is currently provided to young people is flawed. So how do we help young Australians prepare to traverse a jobs cluster?

We need to shift the way we approach our working lives —to think in terms of skills instead of jobs. To ensure this can happen our existing systems including careers education, curriculums, courses and career information need to focus on building a portfolio of applicable skills and capabilities over a person's lifetime.

Instead of focusing on a 'dream job' it may be more useful for young people to consider the 'dream cluster' based on their skills and interests and where they are likely to have the most longevity. Developing a portfolio of applicable skills and capabilities based on the requirements of the job cluster will help ensure young people are able to easily move between roles.

For employers, this could mean shifting recruiting practices to hiring based on cluster skillsets rather than experience within a specific industry or role. This would widen the pool of candidates and may help to both reduce vacancies and drive better labour-market matching.

Further, our government, educators, parents and young people could come together to look at what else we can be doing to provide tools and support, as well as information which will help them to deliver careers advice more effectively.

Throughout our New Work Order report series FYA has consistently called for investment in a national enterprise skills and careers education strategy to help shape education in Australia.

With another 200, 000 year 12 graduates taking their next steps toward their working lives at the beginning of 2017, its clear there's no time to waste in getting this national conversation underway.

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