How might we design for the future of work in New Zealand?

Produced for the Westpac NZ Government Innovation Fund

ThinkPlace

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Executive Summary

- The future of work is now; the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated change and resulted in refreshed thinking about the future of work

- Policy makers, business leaders and innovators need to act fast – government has a role to play in defining a unifying roadmap to the future, but this shouldn't hold up trying new things right now

- Employers have something to gain with the possibilities of recruiting world-wide for remote working, thus widening the talent pool significantly

- Employees gain the flexibility of working from home or shared spaces but will need to re-define a balance between home and work life

- Meaningful work and a sense of appreciation are still key drivers for workplace happiness, especially for millennials. Leaders will be faced with learning new ways to ensure they are present, available and managing team culture as they replace the "management by wandering around" office styles

- There is an opportunity to design for a more inclusive workforce and work against a digital divide. We need to fight against a new type of underclass that performs meaningless, perfunctory, low-wage online tasks

- We all need to adopt the stance of becoming lifelong learners – there will likely be fewer and fewer jobs for life. Soft skills such as analytical problem solving, emotional intelligence and resiliency will be increasingly desirable in the future of work

- An approach to reforming education is critical and should involve not only the educational sector but parents who need to buy into, and support, changes to curricula
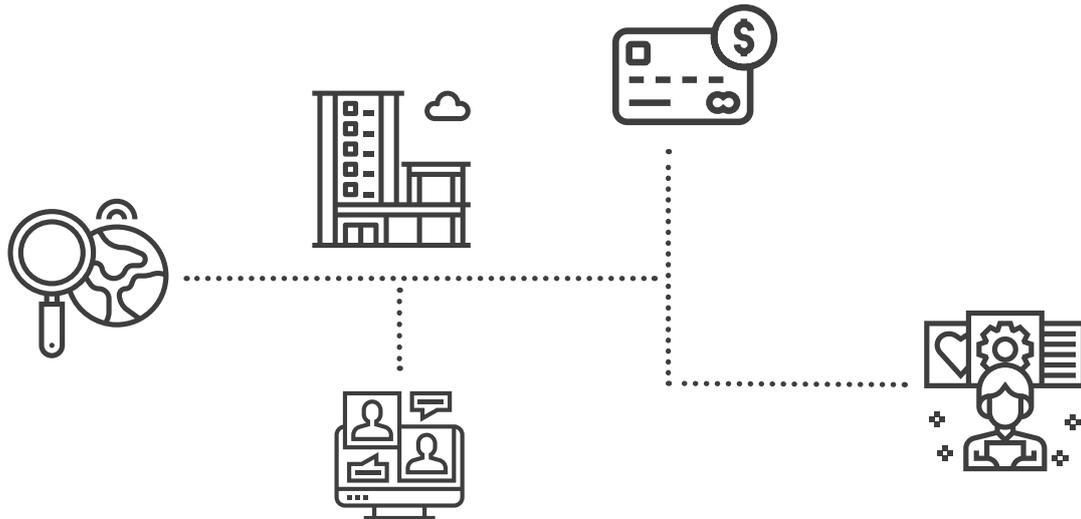
Introduction

This document contains a summary of some current conversations around the future of work, as well as a summary of conversations with six key stakeholders in New Zealand. The aim of this document is to stimulate some thinking for applicants to the Westpac NZ Government Innovation Fund, and it ends with the question to candidates – **how might we design for the future of work?**

> **The world of work is being shifted by a series of complex demographic, technological, sociological, and economic factors – both employees and employers will be required to adapt continuously as we simultaneously move towards a new future. Policies, products and services need to evolve quickly.**

It is important to note that when we talk about the future of work, this is not just a place we are heading towards, but a place we exist in now; COVID-19 has only accelerated the pace of change. The future is unfolding as we speak – it is our job to keep up.

Despite the challenges for New Zealand and the rest of the world, and the risks for employees and employers alike, we found a resounding positive voice across the literature. We now have an opportunity to reshape and reimagine our workforce and businesses. There are opportunities to design out inequalities and create a diverse and multi-skilled workforce that meets the needs of our rapidly changing world.

The changes mean we need to refocus on education as well; not only will children and families need to keep up, but all of us need to become lifelong learners.

The future of work is now

The Covid-19 pandemic environment created a natural experiment of sorts and nudged people to change – jobs we previously believed could only be done well in a face-to-face environment went rapidly online (think telemedicine). Off the back of this natural experiment, now is the opportune time to design for the future of work

Instead of backing away from new workforce opportunities and waiting to see what's happening, now is the time to double down on investing in people to ensure they have resilient skills for the future[1]
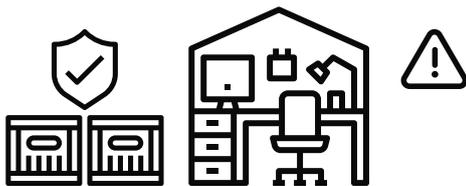
Employers have needed to adapt to what it means to have employees working from home, which has had implications for safety, productivity and workplace culture and wellbeing
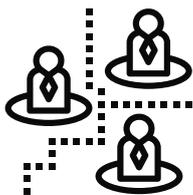
Employees need to retain their sense of belonging, boundaries, safety and job security
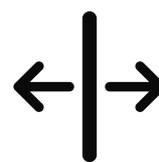
Not intervening soon enough could lead to widening inequalities and a New Zealand workforce that lacks resilience and is left behind

The government needs to lead by having a well-defined roadmap to the future, but the planning phase should be expedited and small changes should be implemented fast

Positive change

There is an opportunity to move towards an employment landscape that reflects and celebrates diversity; is multi-skilled and in-demand; makes best use of changing technology; enables flexibility; and protects and cares for employees and employers alike.[2]

- New and developing technologies make the world smaller, widening the number of potential jobs for New Zealanders, whilst improving jobs that currently exist. This smaller world could open up the borders for employers to recruit across the globe in new ways.

> "New Zealand always suffers from skill shortages. We see now that people are working remotely so geography is no longer the constraint."
>
> -Chief Executive of a NZ Professional Body

- Flexibility will increase, meaning people can work in different locations, free up time spent commuting, and better manage family and extra-curricular commitments.

- Globally, we have noticed improvements in air quality from less travelling to work.

- Working conditions that are more favourable, for example due to increased flexibility, will result in older people having the ability to work for longer. This is especially important to match our ageing populations.

- More jobs will be created through changes in technology, for example social media managers, virtual assistants, or big data analysts.

- We will see changes in "collective bargaining power" as multi-skilled employees become more in-demand, especially around matters concerning flexibility or wellbeing. For example, France recently passed a new law which gives workers the "right to disconnect" outside of work hours.

Design for inclusion

Despite the likelihood for some positive change, the research cautions that those already disadvantaged are at further risk of being left behind. The digital divide continues to be a concern and is more pressing now given the rapid and growing shift to working online. Designing for those who may need more support in this new world is critical or the world could become even more inequitable.

Lower-skilled workers may lose out

Whilst the changing technology is likely to improve and augment both workplaces and employees, the changes will be felt hardest by those in the lowest-skilled jobs. They are less likely to have access to new technologies as part of their job, meaning their ability to upskill is reduced. If technology does enter the workplace, it is more likely to displace them entirely (for example, new administrative platforms), and move them into low-skilled jobs that are not likely to be automated (e.g. call centres). This may create a damaging "wealth concentration" effect. Not only will they be the most likely to be disrupted, and have less educational opportunities, but also wealth will flow to businesses that own or leverage productive assets like robots and advancing technologies.

It is interesting to reflect on the language that emerged about the "essential" versus "non-essential" worker. Many of the "essential" workers included low-wage jobs such as cleaners, delivery drivers, rubbish removal, caregivers and food production. What might "essential" jobs be in the future? Will they still be undervalued? Will they be automated?

The ageing population

As the population ages across the world, businesses will need to adapt. We found that the rates of employment across older people are relatively high in New Zealand, with around 23 per cent of the workforce being over 55. Without a doubt, older people have a great amount of skills and knowledge to contribute, but it is vital that they are given the opportunities to upskill and retrain. Knowledge exchange between generations must also be facilitated as the move towards remote working and digital tools increases.[3]

The gender gap

Across the literature, we encountered discussions around gender. Any changes in the future of work are likely to affect genders differently – as McKinsey state, "In the automation age, women face new challenges overlaid on long-established ones."[4] Automation, for example, may affect women disproportionately, as they are more likely to hold positions in administration and support services. Women are also underrepresented in flourishing areas, such as those requiring STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) skills.[5]

The changes, however, will undoubtedly also affect men. It is unclear whether the gender gap will be widened or decreased as we move forward, but it's essential we are vigilant of changes that do occur.

Widening ethnic inequalities

The labour force is becoming more globalised with increased international migration flows reflecting the wider and more diverse talent pools available to businesses worldwide. In New Zealand, the proportion of Māori and Pasifika employees is growing, but these groups are still underrepresented in highly skilled and higher paying jobs, so more needs to be done to ensure inequalities do not widen in future.[6]

Mental wellbeing

The future of work could both benefit and exacerbate the mental health crisis in New Zealand. The difficulties that come with job loss, along with the financial and mental stress of retraining or working in the gig economy are likely to cause problems. On the other hand, the upsides to flexible working, and the rise of virtual meetings, may positively impact people's ability to manage their family and extracurricular activities.

In this challenging context, it is crucial to refocus our attention towards people and well-being. In the digital era, it is important that people feel that they will be supported if they lose out and helped in their search for new and better opportunities. The pace and speed of this change requires swift and decisive policy action inspired by a new type of growth, one that is more inclusive and more sustainable.

- OECD 2019

Meaning and work

As human beings, we are driven by purpose. A meaningful job goes beyond just making money – psychologist Barry Schwartz argues that meaningful work should be a right, not a luxury, across all jobs and pay levels.[7] Statistics from several large surveys are indicating that the majority of people would trade earnings for meaningful work,[8] and there are similar studies reflecting that millennials prioritise finding meaningful jobs.[9]

The rise of the 24/7 economy,[10] and the ability for employees to work at every moment of the day, gives rise to work situations like Amazon Mechanical Turk[11]. This platform enables businesses to connect with remote "Turks" at any time of the day or night, who then compete for extremely low-paying tasks that must be fulfilled immediately. The lack of meaning and value in these low-paid, stressful jobs could negatively impact on the mental health of workers and could result in a new type of underclass in the workforce.

It will be vital to consider the importance of meaningful activity as we head further into the virtual world of working, and what the impact will be on humans connecting remotely rather than in-person.

> **There can be less exalted ways to contribute to the furtherance of the collective good and its seems that making a perfectly formed stripey chocolate circle which helps to fill an impatient stomach in the long morning hours between nine o'clock and noon may deserve its own secure, if microscopic, place in the pantheon of innovations designed to alleviate the burdens of existence.**[12]

- A quote about the meaning of work from the view of a biscuit factory worker, by philosopher Alain de Botton.

Loneliness and recognition

Articles by Forbes[13][14] highlight that remote workers can get lonely and workers, especially millennials, still need lots of reinforcement. These facts suggest a need to design for that by utilising the emerging software designed especially for engagement and check-ins. They urge leaders to upskill now by learning about online collaboration and to use supportive digital tools when working remotely. Tools such as Office Vibe, Culture Amp and Peakon are designed for ensuring virtual office culture remains strong.

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Boundaries

Despite the positive changes coming in the way we work, it is important that the power is not skewed towards employers and away from employees. As we saw in the case of Amazon Mechanical Turk, there is a risk that low-skilled or out-of-work people are forced into finding employment that is exploitative.

For every programme on the market designed for enhancing office connectivity, there is software to track employee activities. Tools such as Time Doctor, Vericlock and Teramind range in how strong the "surveillance" features are, and clearly if used in the wrong way, employees might feel over scrutinised leading to lack of trust.

Academic Jenny Odell discusses the rise of the "results-only work environment", where the traditional 9-5 rigidity is replaced with flexible hours. She says that although on the surface it appears to benefit employees, there is a danger that the boundaries between professional and personal life blur into one and employees, without the structure of working hours, are expected to be available at any time of the day or night.[15]

For this future of work, some factors that need consideration at a policy level include: employment instability or lower earnings, social protection measures designed for more stable forms of employment, protecting workers of the growing gig economy, the rise of zero-hour contracts.[16 17 18]

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Education and training

Although those in high-skilled jobs, or with the ability to retrain and reskill, are likely to prosper in the changing world of work, there is a risk that many low-skilled or manual workers are left behind. As the OECD state in their Employment Outlook 2019 report, *"Connecting those at risk of being left behind with better job prospects should be the policy compass to a more inclusive, fairer and sustainable economy and society."*

Recent research by the OECD, CAANZ, and McKinsey indicates that up to 46 per cent of jobs in New Zealand could be at risk from automation by 2030 – those most at risk are construction, administration, retail, and healthcare. Employers must begin to assess how their existing roles will be impacted, and new roles can be created, and develop a strategy for upskilling and reskilling. Some organisations such as Ports of Auckland, Spark, BNZ, Fonterra, SkyCity and Z Energy are leading the way in this space.[19]

Younger workers must also be considered. We found that many organisations in New Zealand are already building strong partnerships with schools, tertiary institutions and communities to "lay the foundations for the future".[20] This includes building the necessary skills and mindsets required, such as collaboration and leadership. Youth talent strategies should also be developed by all businesses.[21]

The impacts on business should not be underestimated. Those that can afford to innovate and adopt new technologies and policies will gain a competitive advantage, potentially leading to some businesses struggling to keep up.[22]

This graphic from the Sustainable Business Council highlights the main shift in the skills needed from employees in future. Interestingly, the growing trend is toward needing enhanced human elements in soft skills such as emotional intelligence and less focus on technological skills that one might assume.

↑ Growing

1. Analytical thinking and innovation
2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. Creativity, originality and initiative
4. Technology design and programming
5. Critical thinking and analysis
6. Complex problem-solving
7. Leadership and social influence
8. Emotional intelligence
9. Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
10. Systems analysis and evaluation

↓ Declining

1. Manual dexterity, endurance and precision
2. Memory, verbal, auditory and spatial abilities
3. Management of financial, material resources
4. Technology installation and maintenance
5. Reading, writing, math and active listening
6. Management of personnel
7. Quality control and safety awareness
8. Coordination and time management
9. Visual, auditory and speechh abilities
10. Technology use, monitoring and control

Some other key features of the future of employees and employers are outlined in the following table.

The future employee
A lifelong learner

The future employer
Flexible and growth-supporting

The future employee — A lifelong learner	The future employer — Flexible and growth-supporting
Where people previously had jobs for life, many employees of the future do not see this as desirable or even possible.[23] Most people have several job changes, if not career changes, over the course of their life, especially given the speed with which technology and skills demands are changing.	Those employers who increase the skills of their employees through training and development outside or inside of the organisation are likely to better retain talent. Businesses will need to change their mindset and commit to providing lifelong learning opportunities to employees, finding new ways to create engaging work for those displaced.[24]
Employees will increasingly need both technological and analytical skills, but also social and emotional intelligence, and the ability to innovate, be creative and problem solve – a so-called 'STEMpathic' person. Potentially more than 30 percent of high-paying new jobs will likely be social and "essentially human" in nature.[25]	Businesses will be looking for those who are resilient and willing to be flexible to changing demands and pick up new skills as necessary. Skills in emotional intelligence are particularly needed at leadership levels.
The future employee will be a lifelong learner – someone willing and able to retrain, upskill and be flexible to the demands of the labour market.	Maintains a company culture that communicates change, respects and empowers employees, and successfully keeps pace with the disruptions of the digital age.[26]
Millennials will, in fact, demand fulfilling and purposeful jobs that provide them with these opportunities – a factor rated as a top driver of a good jobs.[27]	Need to be ethical and considerate, especially as many are reliant on the communities around them for employees and customers. The way businesses handle the transition to the future of work will impact on their reputation and relationships, and the ethical business is likely to be more successful.
Work-life balance and integration skills will become vitally important for workers as the rise of the 24/7 and gig economy become more common.	Must be diverse and demonstrate commitment to multiculturalism, especially in a New Zealand context.

A call to action

This document by Ernst and Young has been singled out specifically because of the high relevance for New Zealand and its action-focused angle.

The following are a few critical points:

- **There is a lot of talk about the future work, but not enough action** – the future of work is actually today, not some space in the future. We need to be taking real action.

- **There is a lack of centralised, real-time data on the shifting workforce** – there needs to be a single source of truth provided by government to enable decision-making by government agencies, policy makers, businesses, schools and training organisations. The lack of a centralised view means we lack an economy-wide understanding of the roles that will 'thrive', as well as those that will change and those that will become redundant.

- **Everyone thinks that the risk lies elsewhere** – Complacency is rife amongst employees, employers, and government about the shifts in work that are happening as we speak – their research showed that only 38% of workers in their research had thought to any great extent about the impact of technology on their jobs. There's the idea that it will be someone else's job that will be disrupted, which makes progress inadequate and the idea of continuous learning and adaption slow to catch on.

The Singaporean Government has been highlighted as a model with their programme called SkillsFuture that:

- Enables people to view their job and the skills needed in the future

- Allows education providers to develop future skills curriculums to help people meet these skills needs

- Is approved by industry associations, regulators and government

- Enables organisations to plan for the future by seeing which skills will be needed by their industry

- Means workers receive learning credits and are shown the higher salaries they can earn if they retrain

Ernst and Young states these three recommendations:

- The Australian and New Zealand departments of education, jobs, business and productivity develop reporting, insights and guidance on how jobs will change and what skills are needed to be future-ready. This will form a one-stop shop for all workers, employers and educators who are seeking crucial, real-time information that is currently lacking.

- Organisations to work quickly to build the transition foundations they need to adapt to changing skills and roles. This requires focus on a learning culture, career pathways, skills planning, communication about the future and employee engagement with technology.

- The education ecosystems (institutions, organisations, providers) need to work together to offer agile, adaptable offerings so that continuous, on-demand and self-directed learning becomes the new normal.

Ernst & Young, 2019

Local viewpoint

We wanted to hear directly from a few New Zealand professionals about their opinions on the future of work. We spoke with six key stakeholders in conversational style interviews. The participants were offered an early draft of this literature scan to review, and then they were asked a basic set of questions about their thoughts on the future of work and where they believed the focus should be to ensure New Zealand is prepared for the future of work. Below is a summary of what each told us.*

These local voices resonated with the current literature. In particular, there was a sense of urgency that we should be acting now, even with small steps, to create the future. Soft skills development was highlighted as an important feature of the new workforce and there was recognition that technological advances are positive, and we need to ensure that the online world is supportive and maintains the human spirit of collaboration.

* Quotes are summarised and not verbatim

Local viewpoint
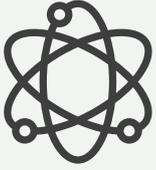
A consultant from an innovation company told us…

"Change is now, so we must act fast."

Iterating now is what is needed, rather than planning for the future. This is a prime time for positive change, not a slog that requires heavy planning and overthinking. We need to think fast and act fast, try things and then adapt.

An effective and positive workplace culture can be formed online, but it takes satisfying and creative tools, and intentionality, to enhance this.

Employees and their businesses need to be adaptable to new and uncertain ways of working. We have seen through COVID-19 that we can work remotely; yes, you need to come together at times to create energy and collaborate, but the rest can be done from anywhere.

A chief executive of a professional body told us…

"Everyone seems to focus on the digital disruption, but the human dimension should be amplified more."

Despite technological advances that allow us to work from anywhere, humans need each other for drive, creativity and connection. There is a need for new workplace models that utilise the best technological changes whilst enabling people to work at their best.

However, remote working and ability to work across borders may somewhat alleviate New Zealand's long-term skills shortage. The policy implications of this are complex and raise questions about taxation and leave entitlements, amongst others, that need to be thought through.

A school principal told us…

"Things are changing massively, but schools are not keeping up and we need frameworks to measure soft skills."

We need parents on board with the changing nature of work in order to ensure children are equipped with that they need in the future. What's needed goes beyond the 3Rs – reading, writing and arithmetic – and towards skills that are in demand like perseverance, resilience and learning to fail.

We see unhelpful behaviours by parents that don't promote these advanced skills, and schools can do more to help but we need Ministry of Education support. Schools need to adapt and stop measuring the 'same old things' – when the 3Rs are mainly being measured, it makes it difficult to equip children with the other skills they will need.

An HR professional told us…

"Start making small changes now, hiring people with different backgrounds and skills."

Small changes right now are key, and we need to act soon. Hiring diverse people with different backgrounds is essential to hearing new voices and perspectives and injecting change into the organisation. It's important to hire those with soft skills, but these skills can be difficult to measure. Traditional job titles are not the future of work; the future is a series of unbundled skills that can be used across a number of roles.

A banking economist told us…

'Upskilling is crucial, especially for older people who are going to work longer and are more vulnerable.'

We believe automation will affect physical jobs, but it also has a major effect on office jobs and those that we didn't realise were vulnerable to machines. There needs to be new skill acquisitions and the creation of new jobs for these individuals.

Older people who will stay in work longer must be equipped with the skills they need to remain valuable members of the workforce.

A digital ventures professional from a bank told us…

"Technology will create jobs you don't even know yet and we need to integrate these tools into effective ways of working."

Banks are not necessarily equipped to deal with the shifting workforce – gig economy workers cannot submit their annual salary for a mortgage when they work week-by-week. However, large institutions, like banks, offer the stability that other start-up organisations may not. The question lies in how banks can partner with smaller, flexible product developers and services to offer more to customers.

With the shift to remote working, leadership must also adapt and learn how to lead effectively from afar and create a coherent, high-functioning team. We need a more integrated way of working, however, despite all the great remote tools out there, more coherence is needed so that remote working is as effective as face-to-face.
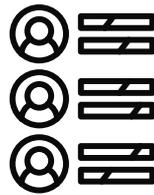
The consequences of not acting now

The current thinking that we reviewed, alongside the voices of some NZ professionals, all points to acting soon – the future is now, and the debate needs to get louder, quickly.
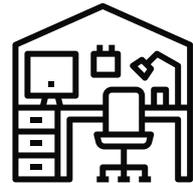
There are some risks if we don't act soon. Such as:
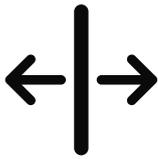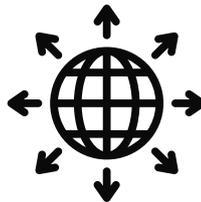
The digital divide could widen

Schools could turn out young people who are not equipped with what is desired in the job market

Employers who don't match the demand for flexible work environments could miss out on recruiting good employees

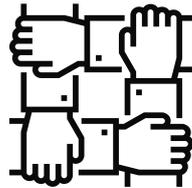Equalities could worsen and groups who have less access to skill building could get left behind

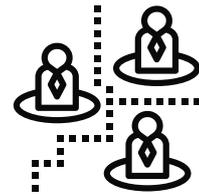Employers could be scouting overseas instead of NZ to fill skill gaps
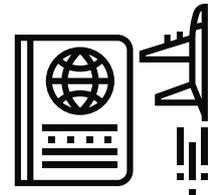
Immigration issues may quickly become more complicated as people work around the globe

Low-wage jobs could become more automated, putting vulnerable citizens out of work

Cohesive teams and office culture could decline without a concerted effort to maintain connection
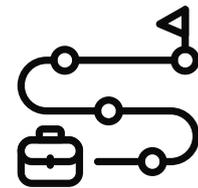
Employees could be disconnected and unhappy increasing mental health issues and impacting on productivity

It may be more difficult to manage ACC claims for "workplace" injuries if people are working at home

Employees could be increasingly faced with zero-hour contracts as employers completely change how they procure work

Government acts too late and doesn't create a strong roadmap for agencies to follow

How might we design for the future of work?

This document has pointed out some of the key considerations for the future of work. One thing is clear – the future of work is now, and the Covd-19 pandemic has provided us with the impetus for rapid change. The following questions have been put together to stimulate thinking – there will be many more questions to explore.

Questions to stimulate design projects

A global workforce

If physical spaces are no longer the limiting factor for work, then neither is geography. If skill shortages exist in New Zealand, then can the right employee come from anywhere in the world?

If so, how might we create a global workforce without borders?

What are the policies that can encourage a thriving, safe, international workforce that deals with tricky issues such as taxation, employment laws, pension, medical care, authenticity, etc.?

Education

The future of work starts with schools. If kids are being taught only with the basic skills, they will not be equipped with the flexibility required for the future of work. The educational system needs buy-in on many levels, from parents to politicians.

How might we give parents comfort that the skills of the future look different to what they're familiar with?

How might we create a joined-up vision for the skills that children need now that will help in the future?

Lifelong learners and soft skills

In future, we will need to be lifelong learners to keep up with technological changes and changing demands of the appropriate soft skills, like analytical thinking, creativity, problem solving and emotional intelligence.

How do we get people or organisations to invest in lifelong learning? Who invests in the lifelong learning process? Is that a government responsibility? A personal responsibility? A corporate responsibility?

How might we ensure that employers value and measure soft skills?

How might we emphasise soft skills training in schools?

What systems can be put into place to be more agile and responsive to what's needed as jobs evolve?

Inclusion and wellbeing

Our society could be more intentional about including groups that might otherwise miss out and/or have lonely, disconnected jobs in future.

How might we ensure the digital divide doesn't accelerate?

What measures need to be put in place to ensure our society offers meaningful work with chances for connection?

For remote work, how might we ensure collaboration and productivity without a surveillance culture?

What does safety and wellbeing look like for remote workers? How might technology enhance or hinder safety and wellbeing?

How might we ensure Māori and Pasifika have equal access to the higher-skilled jobs of the future, thus designing out inequity?

Unbundling of jobs

In the future, we're not likely to have one job title that does it all – skills will likely be bundled up in different packages to meet the jobs on the market. A topical example is an airline pilot who may unbundle their technical skills and repackage them to drive farming equipment – a specific skill may be the demand rather than the entire profession.

How might we influence HR professionals not to discount people based on their job titles?

How might we hire on skills rather than known professions or qualifications?

How might we influence policy makers to widen their views on qualifications and professions?

Policy Specific

What does a global, borderless workforce look like? How might we create flexible immigration and labour laws to employ people around the world for particular skill sets?

How do we ensure that people in the future of work are protected from the Amazon Turk style of labour?

How might we ensure that more of NZ society is included in the future of work?

How can education keep up with the basic 3Rs but also the soft skillsets predicted in future?

What tools can we create to help HR professionals move from "tick box" to skills matching systems?

Who 'owns' the future of work for the government? Who needs to push the agenda to create a future roadmap?

Banking Specific

How will the bank invest in the lifelong learning process? For their own employees? For banking professionals in general?

What role does the bank play in creating an inclusive workforce?

Are there banking products required to match the potential for a global workforce?

Is there a role to play in making currency transfer cheaper and easier to match the potential for overseas workers being employed in NZ?

How might the bank ensure they offer products to match the fluctuating incomes of the gig economy?

Who "owns" the future of work for the bank? Who needs to push the agenda to create a future roadmap?

End notes

1. https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2020/covid-19-and-the-future-of-work.html

2. OECD (2019), https://www.oecd.org/employment/Employment-Outlook-2019-Highlight-EN.pdf

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