



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Sydney
Executive
Plus+

The 2025
**Skills
Horizon**

WHAT LEADERS
NEED TO
KNOW NEXT

Authors

Dr Sandra Peter, Director of Sydney Executive Plus
and Associate Professor

Dr Kai Riemer, Director of Sydney Executive Plus
and Professor of Information Technology and Organisation

Dr Pat Norman, Research & Development Lead,
Sydney Executive Plus

Recommended citation

Peter, S., Riemer, K., Norman, P. (2024). The 2025 Skills Horizon.
Sydney Executive Plus, The University of Sydney,
<https://doi.org/10.25910/57M8-SQ33>

On social media

Please include the report URL: plus.sydney.edu.au/horizon

For references, download the report:

plus.sydney.edu.au/horizon



Contact: executive.plus@sydney.edu.au

Images sourced from Adobe Stock
and The University of Sydney.

We recognise and pay respect to the Elders and communities
–past and present– of the lands that the University of Sydney's
campuses stand on. For thousands of years they have shared and
exchanged knowledge across innumerable generations for the benefit of all.

Contents

- 07 Executive overview
- 11 Our messy future
- 17 Leading the next decade
- 22 How we built it
- 26 Make it work for you
- 29 The 2025 Skills Horizon
- 31 Amplifiers, Big Movers, Unexpected Emergers
- 41 The four Blobs
- 67 The Curious Leader
- 70 One last thing



**Our insights
are yours**

*At the University
of Sydney,
we believe in
leadership for good.*

One quality of great leaders is generosity. Whether it's time, wisdom or even a bowl of fries, sharing with your peers and your team is a surefire way to help them develop and succeed.

We came up with **Steal This Slide**, a quick and easy way for you to lift the insights from the 2025 Skills Horizon, in that same spirit of generosity.

**Scan, steal, share,
succeed. Simple.**

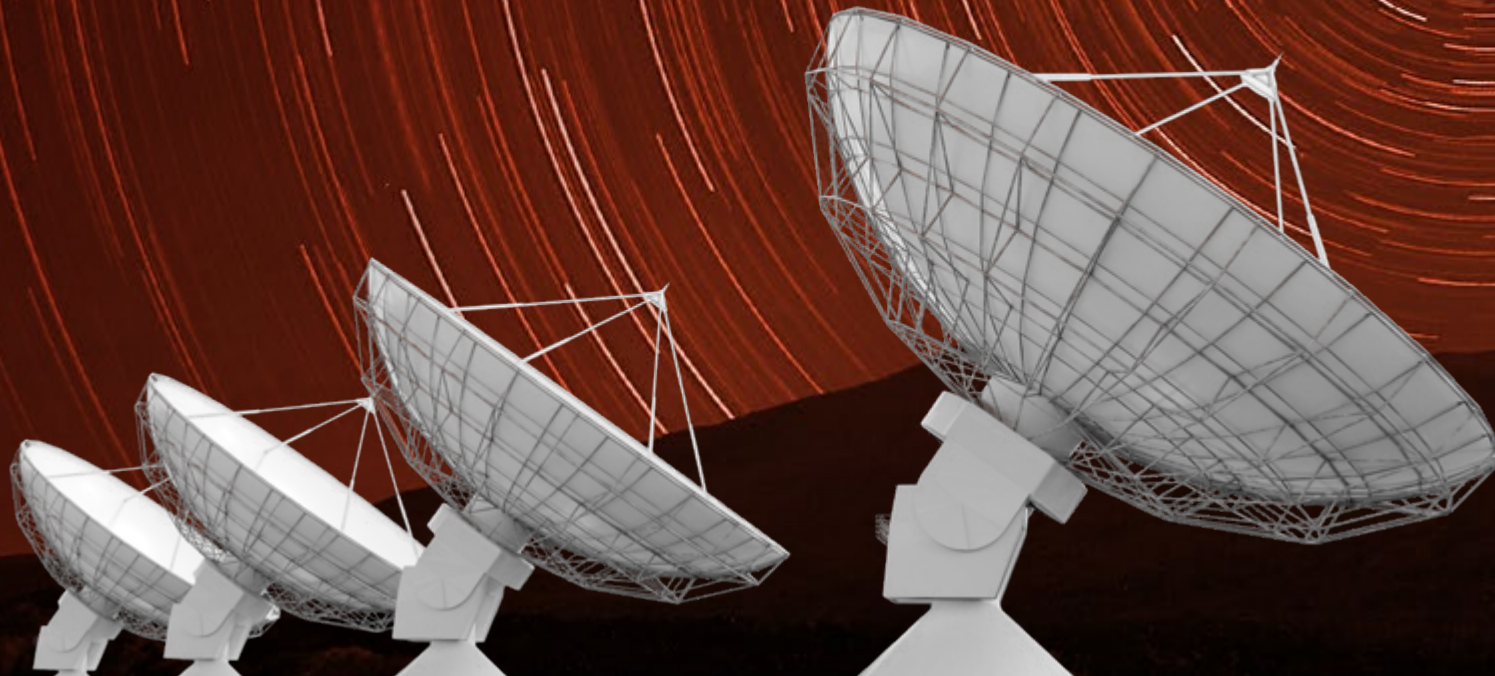
Whenever you see the **STEAL THIS** prompt, just scan the QR code and you'll get a downloadable version of the slide. You're welcome!



“Let's hope that there are better ideas that come up and capture the imagination of people.”

Daniel Kahneman

Nobel Prize-winning economist



Executive overview

New skills for a messy future

We're entering a decade of disorientation.

As a leader, you'll be constantly challenged to pinpoint what will matter next. Once you figure that out, then comes the challenge of deciding how to lead through it.

There's no doubt that disorienting times need critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and the ability to communicate effectively. But there are new skills you'll need to navigate our messy future. In **The 2025 Skills Horizon** report, we explore those skills, the benefits they unlock and how you can stay ready for anything.

Our agenda for the report is ambitious:

- + We start by unpacking how the world is changing. Namely, we focus on the five shifts—**the values shift, the technology shift, the accountability shift, the trust shift and the energy shift**—that will make it more difficult than ever to lead. These shifts will cause fractures, complexity, uncertainty. But they'll also spawn more ideas, more creativity, more innovation. While the future is messy, it's also filled with opportunity.
- + Then we dive into how we built the 2025 Skills Horizon. We looked, we read, we reviewed, we talked, we listened. This is a different kind of report. One of the main differences is

that we conversed with more than 70 global and Australian leaders and executives across various fields. And when we say "various", we mean it: inside, you'll see insights and wisdom from heads of government and head chefs alike.

- + After breaking down the numerous practical applications of the report—from using it to create a shared vocabulary across your organisation to citing it at dinner parties as a way to impress guests—we zoom in on the skills themselves. We start by stepping you through the three types of skills that stood out from our research (**Amplifiers, Big Movers, Unexpected Emergers**). That's followed by **Blobs**, which represent four areas of skills convergence that will demand your attention over the next decade (**Speaking the Language of tech, Solving problems of scale, Working across difference, Thinking through complexity**). Don't let the cute name fool you—this section will be key in planning your leadership trajectory.
- + To close, we explore the traits and habits of **The Curious Leader**, an archetype for leadership success in 2025 and beyond.

The 2025 Skills Horizon is a dynamic guide that'll help you and your team stay prepared for what's ahead.

Happy upskilling.

“First there is the challenge and the necessity of a shared reality to take meaningful action to solve problems.”

Saul Perlmutter

Nobel Prize-winning astrophysicist

“It is increasingly important to remain outwardly focused while stripping out all the noise. Leaders must keep asking themselves what really does matter.”

Ian Narev

CEO & MD, SEEK

“Strategic vision will be critical not just for founders but for executives across the board. Just being good at operational execution will no longer be sufficient. Executives and leaders will need to have much deeper understanding of technology and how to apply it to their business model.”

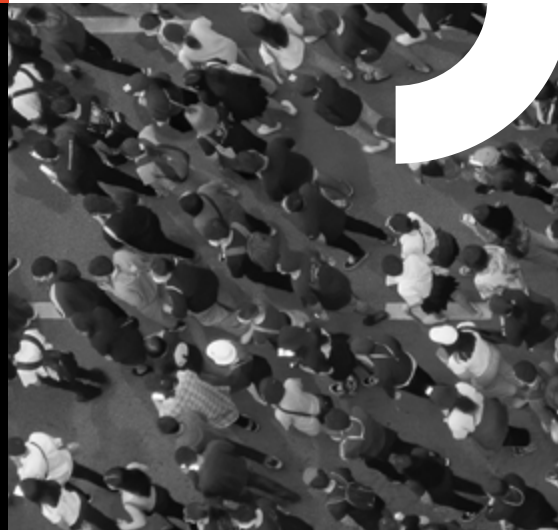
Nickle LaMoreaux

Chief Human Resources Officer, IBM

“Our leaders are going to have to be much more human than they were previously, much more caring and more innovative.”

David Gonski AC

Chancellor, UNSW



“You have to be boundary breaking and rule breaking and put trust in your imagination to take you into the unknown.”

Kip Williams

Artistic Director, Sydney Theatre Company

“I think there is a greater degree of ambiguity and nuance in the world. Even just looking at the use of Gen AI and its use in any organisation, the opportunities and challenges that Gen AI creates. On the one hand there are all the benefits that Gen AI can create – and then there are the issues like privacy and ethical issues. You need to stare into these challenges and work through them to determine what is the right position for your organisation. Being able to live with ambiguity is extremely important.”

David Thodey AO, FTSE

Chancellor, The University of Sydney

“AI can be a form of existential challenge, not only to what you're doing, but how you view yourself.”

Robert Thomson

Chief Executive, News Corp





“I think that all democracies will end up having some form of AI regulation in the next maximum two–three years.”

Dragoş Tudorache

Member of the European Parliament and
Chair of the Special Committee on AI

“Leaders face heightened regulatory and stakeholder demands, requiring stronger focus and better skills to manage, engage and communicate with a broader range of stakeholders.”

Mark Rigotti

CEO & MD,
Australian Institute of Company Directors



“There is great variation between countries and regions when it comes to hybrid work. Leaders will have to figure out what this will do to company culture, the sense of belonging to a company, to learning and upskilling, the ability to learn from others, and even productivity over time.”

Morten Wierod

CEO, ABB

“I think we're going through a period, driven by a whole series of factors, like the failure of the liberal market ideology to deliver equitable outcomes as it promised to do. It's made things better, but the rising inequality is a sign of its failure on that front, the large potential displacement of the middle class by new technologies and things like that.”

Dr Simon Longstaff AO

Executive Director, The Ethics Centre

“There is a growing sense of policy complacency, where we know what the real issues are, and we are acutely familiar with the challenges that the country is facing into. And yet we're not taking the big policy steps that are needed in order to address those challenges.”

Bran Black

Chief Executive, Business Council of Australia

“The pace of change has escalated so much with the acceleration of digital change and changes brought on by AI.”

Fiona Allan

CEO, Opera Australia

A woman in a striped jacket and glasses stands in a city street at night, looking upwards. She is holding a bag. The scene is illuminated with a warm, orange-red light. A large white semi-circle graphic is overlaid on the left side of the image, partially obscuring the background. Other people are blurred in the background, suggesting a busy urban environment.

**The next 10 years
will be the most
disorienting of your
career. They could
also become the
most impactful.**

Our messy future

5 things to worry about...

The next 10 years will be the most disorienting of your career. They could also become the most impactful.

The world is already marked by disruption and growing uncertainty. Next come deep fractures and complexities. The fractures and complexities manifest in five important shifts: **the values shift, the technology shift, the accountability shift, the trust shift, the energy shift**. They can't be avoided. You might be able to minimise their impacts, but they will all require adaptation.

In times of uncertainty and complexity we tend to trace what is neatly and clearly demarcated: visible megatrends or narrow technology trends that extrapolate technological possibilities. This can narrow our field of view, obscuring the fact that the most destabilising impacts and the biggest opportunities come at the intersection of the technological, the social and the political.

The next decade is all about messy shifts. Here are the five things to worry about:

“The truth is no longer the truth. It’s much more difficult to agree on facts. Beliefs replace facts and truths, and opinions become the new truth. One of the most difficult challenges for leaders, especially in a global organisation, will be how to manage this when creating a narrative that can bring people together.”

Morten Wierod

CEO, ABB

01 **The values shift** Fractured values and fragmenting expectations

Our organisations face unprecedented diversity. Multiple generations, each with different values and work expectations, coexist in our workforce. This internal shift mirrors broader societal changes, demanding that you engage with a wider range of stakeholders both inside and outside your firm.

Demographic trends, economic pressures and improved healthcare have created a multigenerational workforce, with each cohort shaped by distinct sociopolitical experiences. Together, we're pursuing gender, cultural and ideological diversity.

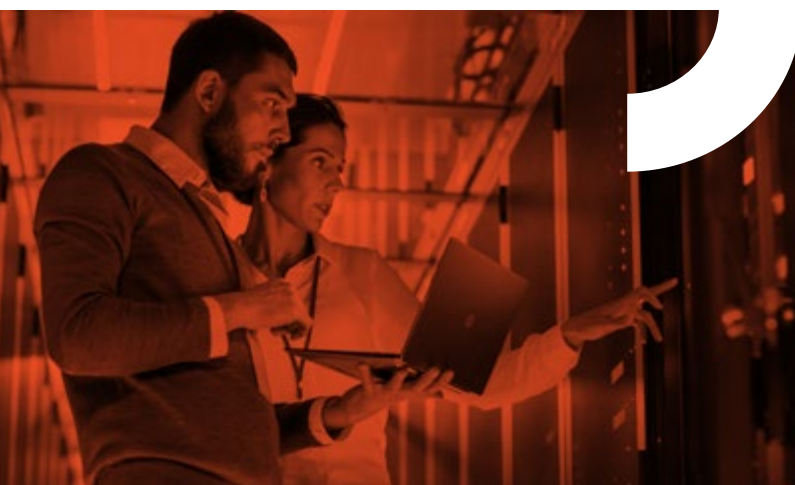
But we're entering a moment of fragmentation: shifting political norms and changing values bring new fault lines, even in previously unified groups. The attitudes of young men and women are polarising; young men are more conservative than young women. What work means to them, what careers are, what they look for in a leader, how they relate to each other, and what they expect from their organisation and government is changing.

The implications for you are both subtle and profound. How do you maintain cohesion amidst such plurality? Will productivity suffer or soar? How do you manage diverging expectations of where, when and how to work? How do you harness differences while working towards inclusion to create a true sense of belonging?

“Technology can mutate in ways that are corrosive to culture, and become catalysts for bad behaviour. CEOs have to continuously scan technologies for social and cultural challenges that can emerge.”

Robert Thomson

Chief Executive, News Corp



“Technological progress has never been faster. The great acceleration we are witnessing, the extremely rapid pace of digitalisation, creates a wealth of opportunities, but also creates a world of challenges. There are significant uncertainties about how emerging technologies will continue to affect our economies and societies.”

Rafał Kierzenkowski

Head of the Strategic Foresight Unit,
Office of the Secretary-General, OECD

02 The technology shift Strategic necessities with no clear direction

Technology has never been as indeterminate and open-ended as it is now. It's flexible, with seemingly endless opportunities to reshape business, healthcare and society. But technology is also compulsory. Avoidance is not an option. You have to figure it out. What will it mean for your business model? How about your personal productivity? How will it change your customers' habits? How will it be regulated?

Data, AI and cyber conversations are happening at every level of your organisation, and ensuing transformations will run from the front line to the board level. At the same time, technology is changing society more broadly. As these conversations move out of IT and into the C-suite, they directly impact strategy, operating models and growth.

We're entering a rapidly evolving period. While the building blocks have emerged (vast amounts of data, AI and democratised generative AI, new hardware and energy dependencies, new internets, the way they fit and evolve together has not. You have to interpret technology. Everyone is now in R&D.

If we take assistive thinking, which is our ability to augment human intelligence, tasks and organisational processes, this could unlock more productivity and creativity, as well as new abilities. So while AI might not be coming for your job, it's coming for your job description.

Synthetic reality—everything from AI-generated text, voice and video to sales agents, virtual influencers or digital team assistants—will permeate all aspects of our lives. The machine will look like, sound like and behave like us. Synthetic possibilities will challenge our business models as much as they'll challenge our education systems and our democracies.

From our companies and our universities to ourselves, this technology shift will change us.

“Food is, by far, the most important thing in the world. It's what makes us healthy. It's also what makes us unhealthy. How we grow food makes the planet healthy or unhealthy. It's as simple as that. And the key to all of this is making people understand more what food is, where it comes from, who are the people behind it. Provenance tracking is a way to really increase value.”

Rene Redzepi

Chef & Co-Owner, Noma

“With the increase in new regulatory obligations in markets like the European Union, organisations have to shift from ‘story telling’ to ‘story proving’. To ‘prove’ their products and services, they have to collaborate with others, both upstream and downstream from them, in order to collect evidence and trusted data to maintain compliance and access to those markets.”

Laszlo Peter

CEO, KPMG Origins

03 **The accountability shift** Accountability across boundaries and the provenance economy

We need to rethink accountability. Sustainability, decarbonisation, regulation and the new geopolitics require a shift of perspective from the organisation to the systems level. And as the world reaches the limits of its social and environmental ecologies, provenance, tracking and tracing become crucial.

The questions of *How was it made?*, *By whom?*, *Under what conditions and regulatory regime?* and *What will become of it?* are becoming a central concern. All businesses must respond to sustainability and regulatory demands: tracking the provenance of materials in their supply chains; the scope and volume of their carbon emissions; and the impact of their products on the natural, social and economic worlds. This includes an awareness of the full scope of the supply chain; creating products that are free of modern slavery; and the centring of ESG concerns in order to calculate and reliably report on their footprint for sustained market access.

Governments and regulators increasingly seek full proof of the provenance of materials and products. And consumers are more and more conscious of their impact on the environment and society. That means they seek more information not only about the origins, materials and manufacturing processes behind the products they purchase, but also the values and ethics behind the services and technologies they use.

There are new opportunities in this shift: for strong partnerships with government, suppliers and competitors across the value chain; to enter new markets; and to decrease costs (for instance, through re-use and energy efficiency).

“Being alive to policy, understanding its impact on your business, being intimately familiar with the people and the decision-makers, and having an understanding of how best to engage is key.”

Bran Black

Chief Executive, Business Council of Australia

“There is an erosion of confidence and trust in business and public institutions. We, the leaders of these very powerful organisations that have shaped and continue to shape society, need to stop and think. Do we actually deserve people's trust? Are each of our actions building or depleting our right to operate and innovate? Are we acting ethically?”

Nick Leeder

Vice President, Customer Solutions, Google APAC

“With digitisation comes commoditisation of certain products and markets. Therefore, reputation, trust and communication play a critical role for people in building relationships with customers.”

Antony Shaw

CEO, HSBC Australia

“We’re entering a more volatile period where we need our public institutions and other social institutions to work as automatic stabilisers. They have a stabilising role in public decision making in society, ensuring that they don’t amplify any big movements and instability. This is especially important as a counter to amplification through social media, fragmentation, misinformation and disinformation.”

Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM

Australian Public Service Commissioner

04 **The trust shift** The erosion of trust in institutions, ideas and geopolitical stabilities

The foundations of trust are shifting. New instabilities have brought into focus its normally invisible foundations: taken for granted principles, institutions, relationships and norms.

In the year when more democracies voted than at any time in human history, trust in traditional institutions and enduring ideas like liberal democracy are in sharp decline. And there are more eyes than ever on the role of businesses, their legitimacy and their social licence to operate important services and systems in and for society. Taking on these responsibilities requires trust, which has to be earned continuously, and at scale.

We’ve also entered a period of geopolitical decline. The global balance of power used to be on a trajectory we broadly understood. It’s now changing faster than the institutional architecture we have to govern our financial, cultural and power systems can adapt. What’s emerging is a new patchwork of coalitions. This changes global power dynamics and obscures our ability to understand geopolitical developments and tensions.

This shift will shape global trade, supply chains and access to resources—and could prove tremendously destabilising. What then can you still trust?

The values that underpin our national and global institutions and systems are also challenged by new technologies, global technology giants and new alliances. The digital space has become the latest arena for geopolitics. States are joined by private companies that have accumulated power that makes them arbiters of global affairs, not just bystanders.

Trust will be a differentiator. But earning it is hard, and sustaining it will be even harder.

“The positive outcomes of our investment into decarbonisation today will be realised closer to 2030, but the process will be neither linear nor elegant, as different sectors will transition on different timelines. There is still a lot of important work to be done in terms of innovation, technology adoption and diversification, and leaders should be planning over short- and long- term horizons.”

Cathryn Carver

Group Executive, Corporate and Institutional Banking, NAB

05 The energy shift

An inelegant transition without a coherent story

The energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables is slower, more fragmented, more complex than anticipated. The pace of progress has slowed due to economic volatility, increased geopolitical confrontations, technological shifts and the hottest years on record several times over.

We’re witnessing an uneven adoption around the globe. And a coherent, common narrative about direction, progress and impact fails to emerge. Limiting negative fallout from the energy transition is now becoming more urgent, as is finding new ways to accelerate the transition.

We could further lose momentum. As the adoption of artificial intelligence ramps up, the demand for generative searches and generative content could skyrocket, and with it the demand for electricity to power data centres.

You’ll continue to manage the tension between having a vision and a roadmap for the future of your company while still being grounded in the reality it finds itself in today. This shift involves risks and responsibilities for your organisation and its social context. It also creates opportunities to lead if you get the transition right.

For you to meet these five shifts and move through this decade with readiness and confidence, **you'll need to acquire new skills.**



**“ We’re always constantly learning.
The CEO has to embody that,
that we’re always out there trying
to work out how the world is
going to change.”**

The Hon. Arthur Sinodinos AO
Former Australian Ambassador to the US



Leading the next decade

Your guide to navigating what's ahead

How do you lead in a world that's becoming increasingly disoriented and disorienting?

In a world fuelled by shifts that fracture established orders and challenge proven approaches?

In a world where change happens continuously, in many parts of your business and life at once?

The response is learning and upskilling.

You'll need to reorient yourself and be responsive to the coming changes to understand emerging risks and make use of new opportunities. You'll need to learn new skills and unlearn old ones. You'll need to craft initiatives to upskill your leadership teams.

The Skills Horizon provides orientation.

It tells you what you need to know now, what to learn next and what to look out for. The Skills Horizon is your guide to navigating what lies ahead, through learning and upskilling. It provides you with a strategic lens for prioritising your organisation's leader development.

What we take for granted.

New skills always build on existing capabilities. They're most effective when they're met by deep expertise. The Skills Horizon distills responses to emerging shifts in the environment into key skills to learn and master. It doesn't, however, tell you everything you need to know as a leader.

Horizon skills complement and amplify your expertise and capabilities as a leader.

We know that the future of education, and of leadership development, will have to be more responsive and diverse—but it will also build on existing strengths. Degree programs will still provide the kind of formative education that sets up graduates for their careers. Postgraduate degrees offer pathways for professional specialisation and career change. And deep domain expertise and capabilities are gained through experience “on the job”. All this we take for granted.

You won't find foundational capabilities on the Skills Horizon. We expect you already know that disruptive times require critical thinking, creative problem-solving and emotional intelligence. You don't need the Skills Horizon to tell you that.

For everything else, we invite you to keep reading ...

“To be creative it is very important to keep learning about things that are really new. Great leaders never stop learning. They study throughout their entire career.”

Ferran Adrià

Former Head Chef, El Bulli

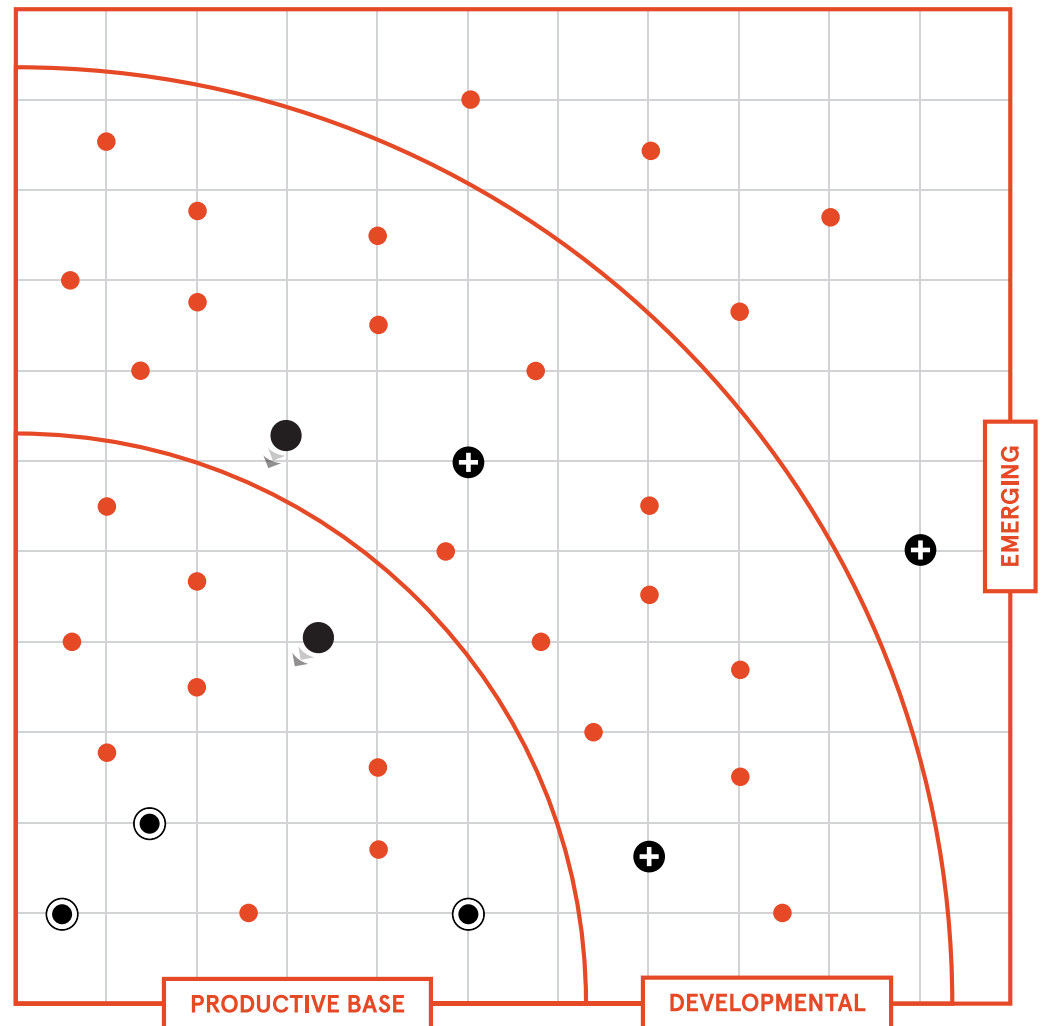


A closer look at the Skills Horizon

What it is and how to read it

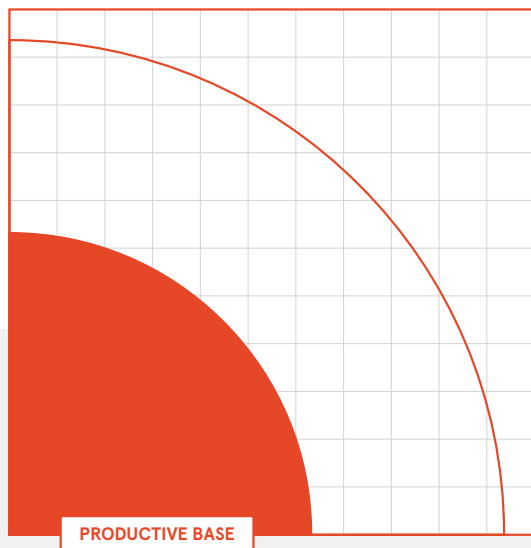
The Skills Horizon gives you a visual representation of the things you need to know now, what you should be learning next and what you should consider exploring.

It summarises in-depth qualitative and quantitative analyses and actionable recommendations that provide insight into the relevancy, maturity and criticality of skills required to thrive in a decade of disorientation. Understanding our methodology will help you get the most out of the Skills Horizon when you use it to evaluate your own skills, your team's skills, resourcing, skills development and career management. The Skills Horizon cautions against short-lived needs and helps with strategy and strategic planning, capability mapping and strengths assessments.



The Skills Horizon is based on data- and insight- driven analysis backed by a structured methodology that takes into account a range of resources.

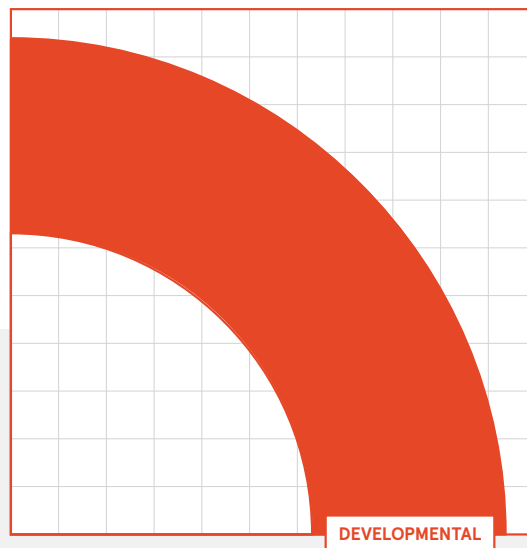
Based on this analysis, we position skills on three horizons:



Productive skills

These are things you need to know now. You need to have proficiencies in this space already or be developing them urgently. Having these skills will provide you with immediate benefits.

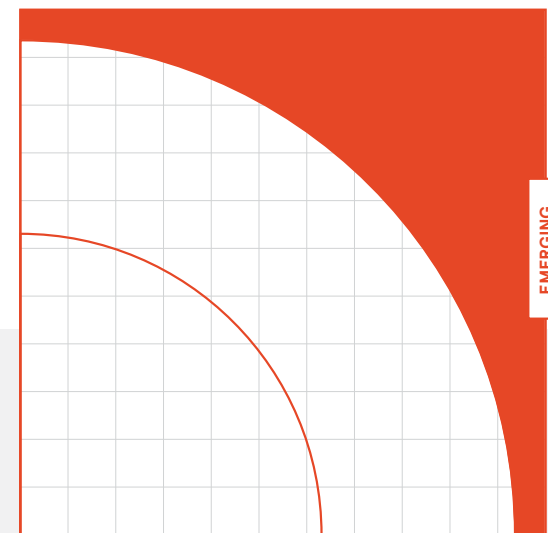
All current and emerging leaders require an essential core in order to operate in this changing world. These are critical and scarce skills that should be acquired or honed immediately; baseline capabilities we expect for successful ongoing management and leadership.



Developmental range

This is what you need to learn next. You should already be planning on developing these skills or ideally be starting to learn them. Developing these skills will prepare you for near-term opportunities and risks.

Skills that are in the developmental range have come into focus. We know how to build those capabilities, and forward-thinking current and emerging leaders are already adding them to their core.

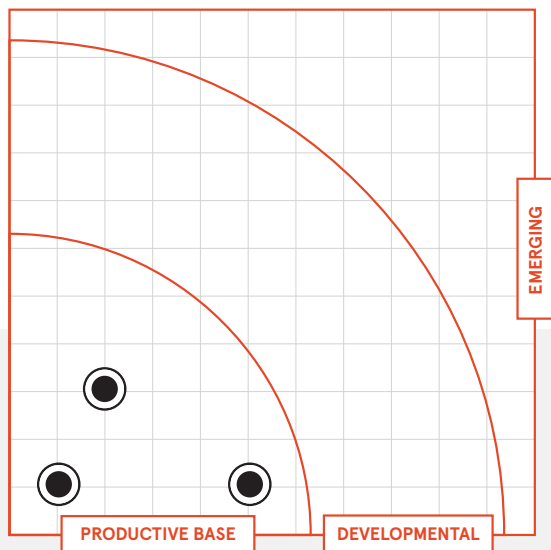


Emerging skills

This is where you need to explore. You should consider these for the longer term because they could be gamechangers. New business models could emerge, entire industries could be reshaped and novel risks might surface.

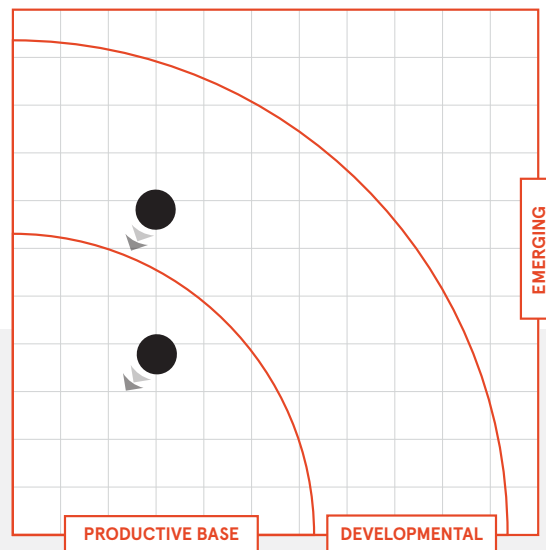
Emerging Horizon skills are capabilities that might become essential in the next 10 years. Strategic, future-focused leaders and emerging leaders will experiment with these today to future-proof their organisations.

To make it easier to understand what to focus on, we've identified three categories of interesting moves that deserve special attention: **Amplifiers, Big Movers and Unexpected Emergers.**



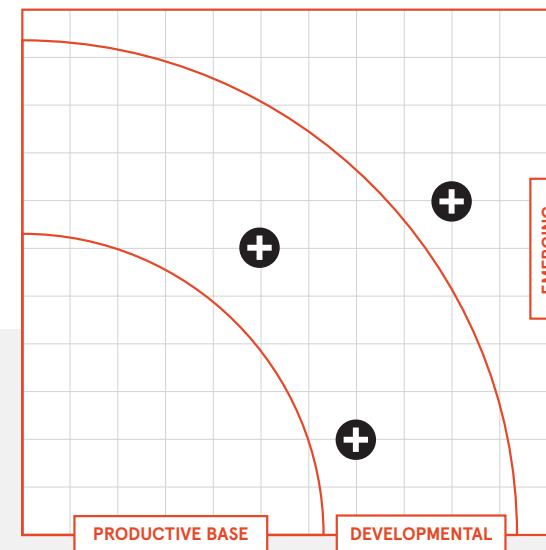
Amplifiers

These skills have the potential to dramatically speed up or enhance other capabilities. They're force multipliers that can help you make your organisation more productive, take advantage of other skills or get an edge on your competition.



Big Movers

These skills have seen a significant shift in emphasis in the time period of the report, often in response to major global events or trends. These are skills that may have been on the radar for a longer time but have suddenly become critical to success or moved from the fringes into the developmental range.



Unexpected Emergers

These skills have quickly risen to prominence due to changing circumstances. These are the new wild cards that can catch you and your organisation off guard if you're not paying attention, but which represent big opportunities if used effectively.

How we built it

Breaking down our methodology



What skills do leaders need to prepare for a fracturing world—now, and for the coming 3–7 years?

This is the main question at the heart of our Skills Horizon research. To answer this question, we draw on a variety of sources and techniques, in three dimensions:

Scope

We study the context in which skills are needed and we study skills directly. We actively engage with how the world around us is changing, which drives the requirements for new skills. And we study the need for new skills directly by analysing existing skills reports, and through our conversations with senior leaders.

Timelines

We look back and we look forward. We study existing materials available in the public domain: skills reports and various media that focus on the future of business, society and leadership. And we practice strategic foresight, using signals we observe in the environment and eliciting the views and intuitions of leaders in their fields to understand emerging skills requirements.

Sources

We incorporate public material and we collect and create our own. We tap into the public conversation around change and skills, as it unfolds in both the media and research. And we engage in private conversations with a diverse group of senior leaders, as well as hold our own private conversations, using foresight techniques to make sense of the future of business.

We bring these three dimensions together in four interrelated studies, from which we have synthesised the Skills Horizon and the detailed skills outlines presented in this report:

1. Thematic media analysis

To map how the world is changing, and what the big developments are that shape society and the economy, we built a corpus of data featuring key future-focused publications and conferences. These include *Harvard Business Review*, *The Economist's World Ahead* editions, the World Economic Forum programmes, the SXSW conference and the books that made the "Top Business Books" lists. We then applied topic modelling, thematic analysis and frequency analysis techniques to understand the topics that stood out from these public conversations over time.

2. Strategic foresight analysis

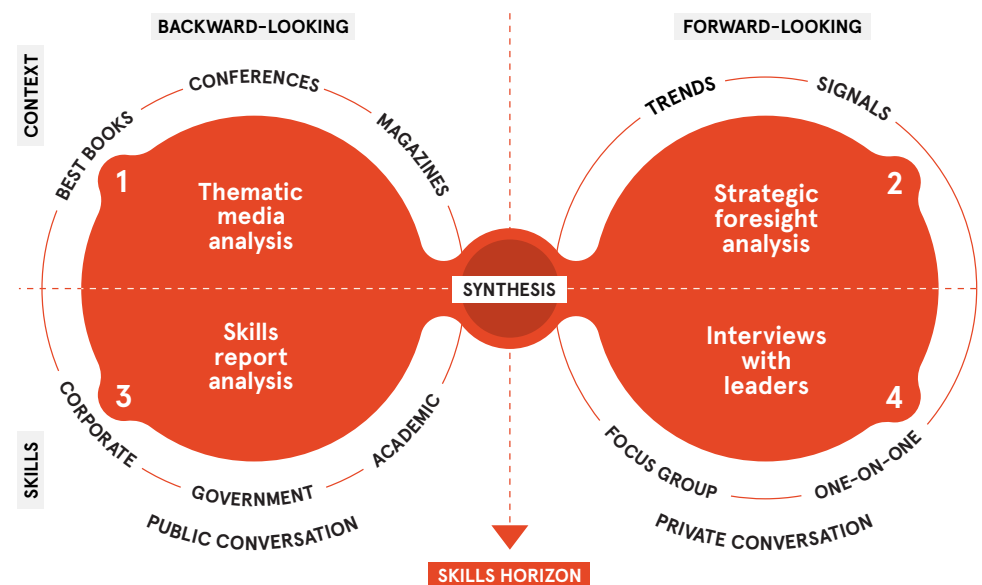
Our research team uses a set of strategic foresight methods to track and trace emerging trends and early signals to anticipate possible futures. We combine the use of well-known megatrends, such as the ones published by Sydney Business Insights, with signals analysis and scenarios to gain an understanding of how the world is changing. When complemented with insights from our senior leader interviews, our foresight work provides the narrative presented in the introduction to this report.

3. Desk research on skills

We reviewed more than 50 reports on the future of work and skills, as well as those exploring key trends impacting organisations, business and leadership. These reports feature significant inputs from management consulting firms; global bodies like the OECD and the World Economic Forum; large corporates like Microsoft and Salesforce; as well as government reports and academic research. While reports rarely address skills needs for leaders and executives directly (focusing instead on the broader workforce), this research provides important context for leadership skills.

4. Senior leader interviews

Gaining insight into the private worlds and thoughts of leaders is more challenging, because it involves bringing conversations that happen organically to the surface. At the core of our study are personal interviews and focus group sessions with senior leaders and executives in business, government, academia, defence, culture and the arts. Among others, we spoke with global and Australian CEOs, CHROs, former prime ministers, army generals, government secretaries, NGO and charity leaders, head chefs and arts executives. We asked what they saw impacting their respective organisations over the next decade and what skills they thought leaders would need.



The world in words

How we map the public conversation



This is a behind-the-scenes look at how we did some of our research. It'll give you an idea of how we identified and analysed the public conversation. For everything else, keep reading.

To map the public conversation, we built a corpus that includes the metadata for a number of future-focused outlets (for the period 2021–2024), such as:

Best Business Books of the Year lists

This is what everyone's reading and/or considers readworthy. Books take a while to write and publish. This gives us a good sense of where the conversation is coming from.

Harvard Business Review

Everyone's favourite business research outlet. Research takes some time to do and publish. This adds to our base.

The Economist

The editors of the *World Ahead* editions know how to make sense of what's happening in the economy. This represents the conversation as it happens now.

World Economic Forum Annual Meeting

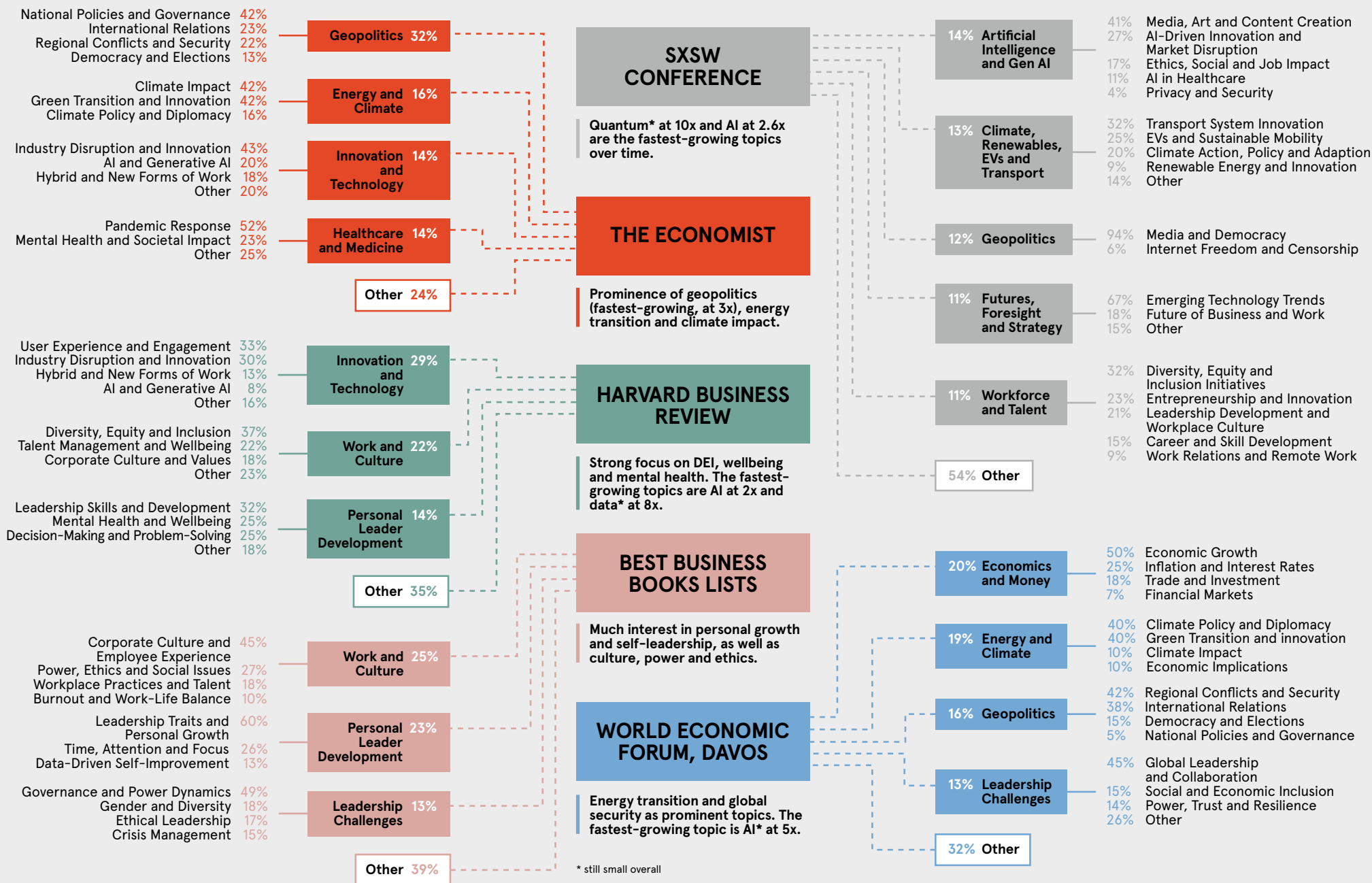
World leaders meet in Davos every year to discuss big changes ahead—as they happen and as they make them. This gives us a glimpse of the big picture ahead.

SXSW Conference

Every March, the who's who of tech, media and the arts flock to Austin (TX) to reveal the future, as driven by technology.

For the analysis, we did as we teach—we employed AI. We used large language models (LLMs) for topic modelling across a sample of these five outlets. We used TopicGPT, a new, prompt-based, topic modelling framework to identify the topics and sub-topics that characterise the conversation. Frequency analysis gave us percentages. We present the top topics for each outlet, and some of the standout insights.

Mapping the public conversation



Make it work for you

How to use the Skills Horizon



Think of the Skills Horizon as a dynamic guide to help you and your team stay prepared for what's ahead.

It should always be read in the context of how we see the world changing, along with your own life and career trajectory.

The Skills Horizon will help you to:

- + Strategically plan and track what skills you need to acquire or hone now, what you need to learn next and what you might explore and experiment with.
- + Create a shared vocabulary with your team.
- + Evaluate and understand your, and your team's, skills.
- + Feed insights into broader strategy processes.
- + Prioritise professional learning and development actions by considering timing, resource implications and, integration into individual development plans and performance reviews. This is crucial in preparing the next generation of leaders in your organisation.
- + Promote a leadership culture that fosters continuous learning. And encourage team members to do the same.
- + Impress people at dinner parties. If you think cheese boards are popular, you should see the attention an AI anecdote gets at a soirée.

Skills-based leader development

What it can do for you

A skills-based approach to workforce management sheds light on the skills and capabilities certain jobs and roles demand. As a philosophy, it improves inclusion and diversity, builds more adaptable and resilient workforces and makes organisations more responsive to changes by widening their talent pool.

Its challenge lies in backgrounding the role of deep expertise and capabilities, in particular for technical professions and leadership roles.

Yet, for leadership development, a skills-based approach can be useful when taken as one of many modules in a comprehensive approach to an organisation's knowledge base. It offers a rigorous focus on skills assessment, learning and upskilling, and adaptability—all of which make it useful in changing environments.

“Disruption now comes in two, three, four-year cycles, much faster than before. What leaders need is continuous learning, to bring in multiple perspectives, and to understand different future scenarios.”

Nickle LaMoreaux

Chief Human Resources Officer, IBM

Skills-based development

A

Assess and adapt

Understand your leaders' skills against external changes and future needs. What do your leaders need to know next?

B

Build a shared base

Think about leadership skills as shared, not individual, as broad, not exclusive. Are your leaders on the same page?

C

Chart leaders' careers

Think ahead when crafting your leaders' career pathways. Are you strategically developing leaders?

D

Develop and learn

Make learning and upskilling part of your organisation's DNA. Are you continuously developing your leaders?

E

Evaluate and evolve

As your leaders advance, adjust your program accordingly. Are you keeping your leader development future-proof?



**What do you need
to know next?**



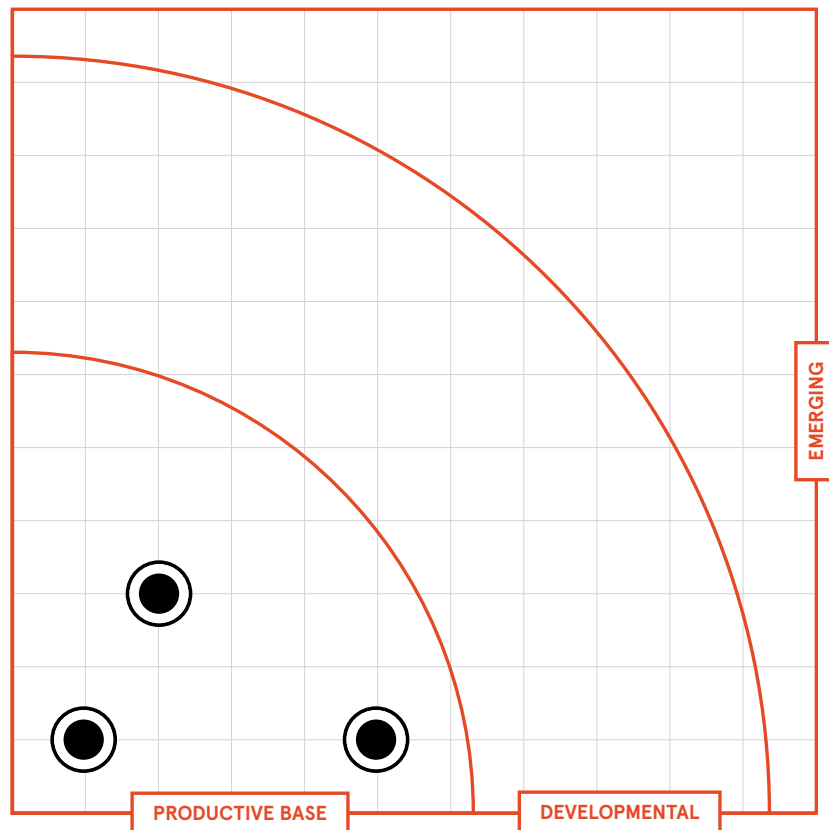


“Productivity will be the key focus for businesses for the next five years. How do we combine virtual work, in-person work and drive culture and productivity, while taking advantage of technological advancements like generative AI?”

Adam Powick
CEO, Deloitte Australia

Amplifiers

Need a lift?



These skills need your urgent attention. They're performance-enhancers that boost the existing capabilities and skills within your organisation.

AI fluency

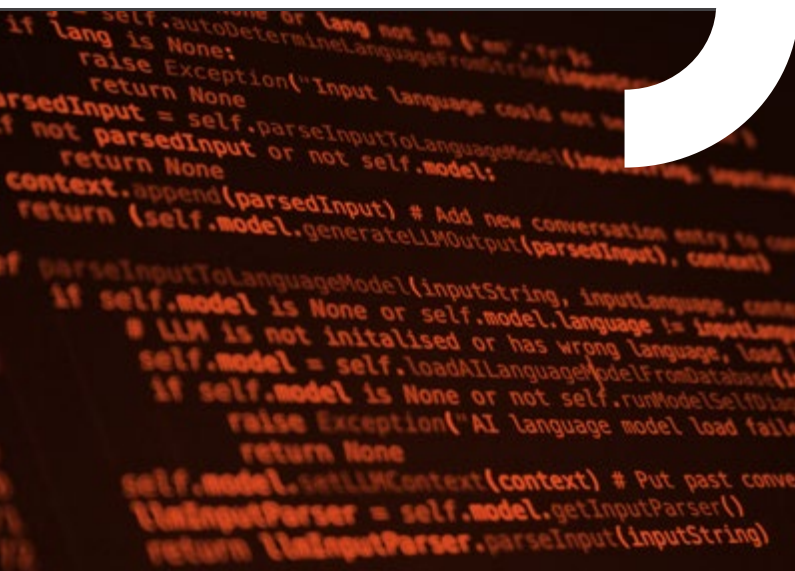
This is the ability to understand, engage with and leverage artificial intelligence technologies practically and effectively for your organisation. You don't need to be able to code or build AI, but as a leader, you need to know the technology deeply enough to make effective decisions—whether that's around the alignment of AI initiatives with the strategic objectives of your organisation or the possible impacts of AI on work and people.

Fluency includes the use and application of generative AI (Gen AI) but it goes well beyond that. Don't forget that there are many other forms of AI. In fact, it's often the boring AI that can benefit your organisation most. Chatbots aren't everything—data is. And using your own data to train algorithms for tasks specific to your organisation can be a huge amplifier. For example, the use of Gen AI can make services more accessible for broader stakeholder groups and increase inclusion. AI can also help with efficiencies and energy saving by accelerating your energy transition (so long as you keep an eye on its thirst for energy); it's an important tool in cybersecurity; it sits at the heart of digital transformation projects; and it broadly has the potential to transform your organisation's services and processes.

Once mastered and shared across your team, AI fluency becomes an enabling skill for your organisation.

“Ignoring generative AI as a leader is like refusing to learn email in the '90s. You can do it, but why make your job harder?”

Claude, by Anthropic



“We're all trying to understand the ultimate potential of AI. Each business needs to understand how AI can improve their business, whether it's in efficiency, whether it's new products and services, understanding how customers are using AI, how competitors are using it, but also the boundaries within which they feel comfortable using AI.”

Cosima Marriner

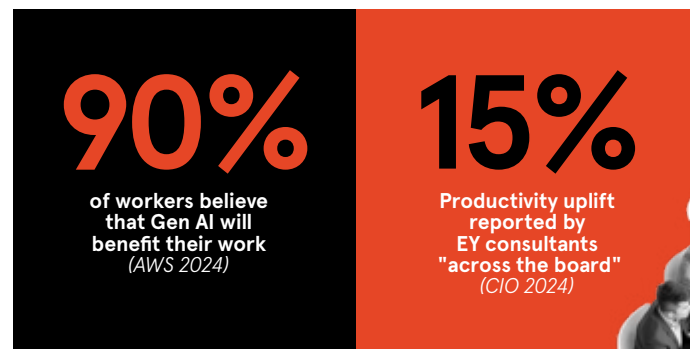
Managing Editor, The Australian Financial Review

Generative AI for personal productivity

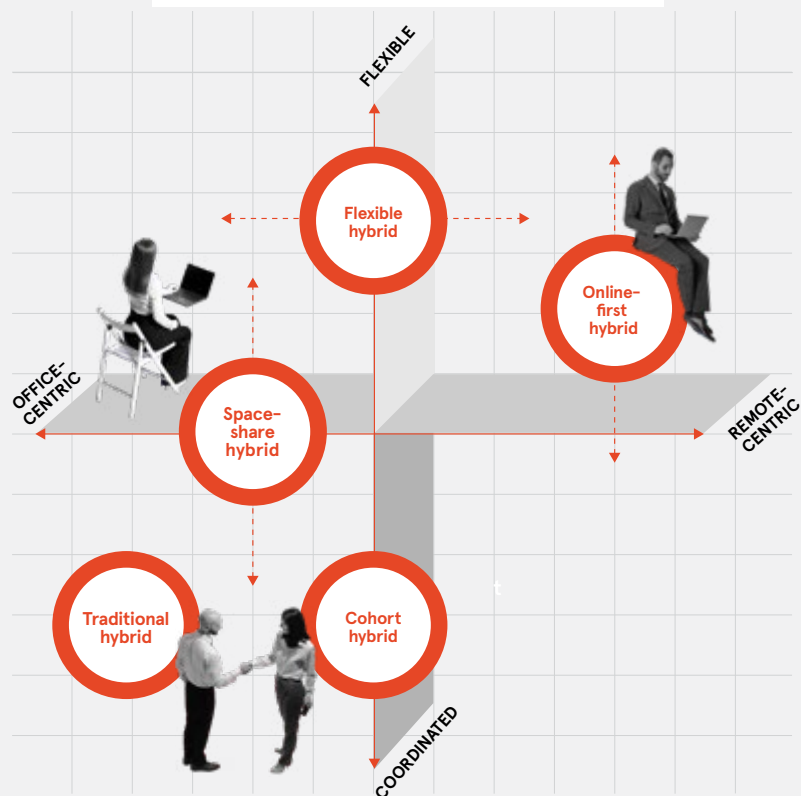
As a forward-thinking leader, you need to know what Gen AI can do for you. You need to understand what its limitations are and how to prompt, and interact, with it effectively. To do that, it takes experimentation, a creative mindset and openness to failure. Once you figure out how to make Gen AI work for you, it can significantly enhance productivity—yours and your team’s.

Gen AI can assist with a range of writing and document-related tasks, such as summarising, editing and thematic analysis. It can generate various kinds of content, carry out data analysis and lend a hand with coding tasks. It can help you brainstorm, explore concepts and run meetings. Long story short: it can do a lot. Which makes it a powerful amplifier for many of your other leadership skills, including self-leadership, staying organised, digesting information, quick ideation, even making your messaging more persuasive.

Think of Gen AI not as a way to automate tasks, but as a way to amplify your strengths.



Types of hybrid work



Traditional hybrid: revolves around the traditional nuclear office. Some people work (almost) permanently from home (akin to the telework of old); most people work in the office.

Flexible hybrid: this is the “anything goes, each to their own” model. There are no fixed rules about where and when to work; the office runs like a campus, with teams coordinating their own rhythms.

Space-share hybrid: the office is the focal point, but people rotate through the space doing desk-sharing. It’s either a first come, first serve basis or more coordinated, with allocated seats.

Cohort hybrid: here, the team is the focal point, rather than the space. Under this enforced hybrid model, teams are always together: some days in the office, some days remote.

Online-first hybrid: everyone works mostly remote. The physical space is used only for socialising or client meetings. Coming together physically can be coordinated or flexible.



Productive work communities

Post-Covid, work hasn’t been the same. Diverging expectations of where, when and how to work persist. While employees want individual flexibility, many leaders champion the importance of in-person mentoring and ideas exchange.

In many ways, work is less about *where* it happens and more about *how* it happens (and how people work together). That’s why the ability to create productive work communities has become an urgent skill to master—one that underpins everything else you do in your organisation.

You and your leadership team need to learn how to craft a balance between flexibility and complexity. Work flexibility increases individual productivity but it also drives complexity at the system level. When people are dispersed and work at different times, the coordination costs are borne by your leadership team. Rather than managing people’s work, your focus will need to be on facilitating productive communities that can both function in the same room and remotely via digital tools.

By building such communities, you increase effectiveness and prevent team issues from manifesting. It’s a true amplifier (or inhibitor, if you get it wrong).

“The landscape of the workplace has changed a lot and we are still learning. People entering the workplace have high expectations of flexibility. Bringing people together in a hybrid workplace is very different today.”

Fiona Allan

CEO, Opera Australia



“When it comes to clean energy, our ability to actually deliver on some of that opportunity, the next five years are super critical.”

Elizabeth Mildwater
Secretary of the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, NSW



“We are, at this moment, on the precipice of the collapse of the stabilities that underpin the kind of life that we live here in Australia, and the certainty that business can operate with around the world.”

Deborah O'Neill
Senator for NSW



“The system we are facing is not fully stable. We’re at a point of particular economic and geostrategic, geopolitical stress. We really haven’t been in a world where the rules-based order has been under such challenge throughout our lifetimes.”

Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM
Australian Public Service Commissioner

“AI is geopolitical. The more relevant you are in the AI world, the more you play an important role in the geopolitical conversation, similar to what happened with atomic energy.”

Dragoş Tudorache
Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Special Committee on AI

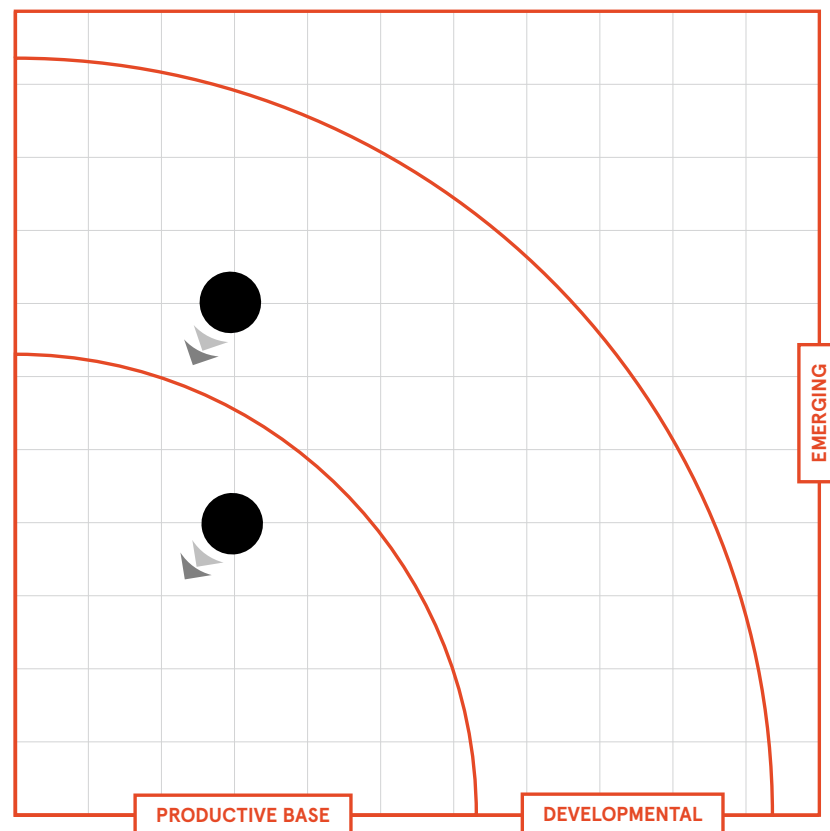
“For the first time in decades, business leaders must understand the geostrategic situation, because we now live in a newly dynamic global system, where the rules of free trade are changing.”

Major General (Retired) Gus McLachlan AO



Big Movers

Coming in hot



These skills have gone from being on the radar to being of heightened importance. Their prominence has come in response to global trends.

Geopolitics in business

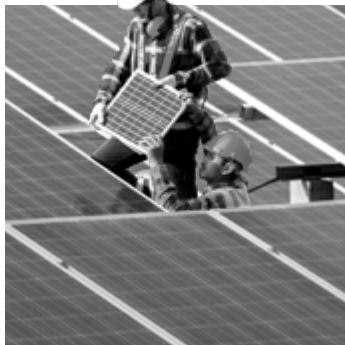
The global balance of power is shifting and the way governments wield economic tools is increasing. The question of what comes next remains an open one.

If you're a leader in any organisation that's exposed to international trade, cross-border sourcing or global supply chains, you'll need to be far more informed about geopolitical developments. You'll need to become skilled at reading and interpreting the policy moves by nation states through a business lens. And you'll need to understand the long-term implications of short-term global events and crises.

Recent conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe have disrupted international supply lines. Growing nationalist and protectionist tendencies in countries across the globe are changing the trade landscape. And this year will see more elections than any time in human history, which will alter diplomatic dynamics.

Geopolitics has dominated the headlines this year and will continue to hold the spotlight for some time. It's a big area to prioritise in 2025.

An increase of
+1°C
 in global temperature
 leads to a **12%** decline
 in world GDP
 (NBER 2024)



In 2023 China
 commissioned
 as much solar
 PV as the entire
 world in 2022
 (IEA 2024)

15%
 Year-on-year decline
 in Southeast Asia climate
 development finance
 in 2022, despite drop in
 fossil fuel spend
 (Lowy 2024)



The green transition
 could create
30mil
 jobs globally by 2030
 in clean energy and
 efficiency tech
 (WEF 2023b)

Net zero transition

In response to the growing evidence and awareness of the effects of climate change, businesses globally are adopting net zero emissions goals.

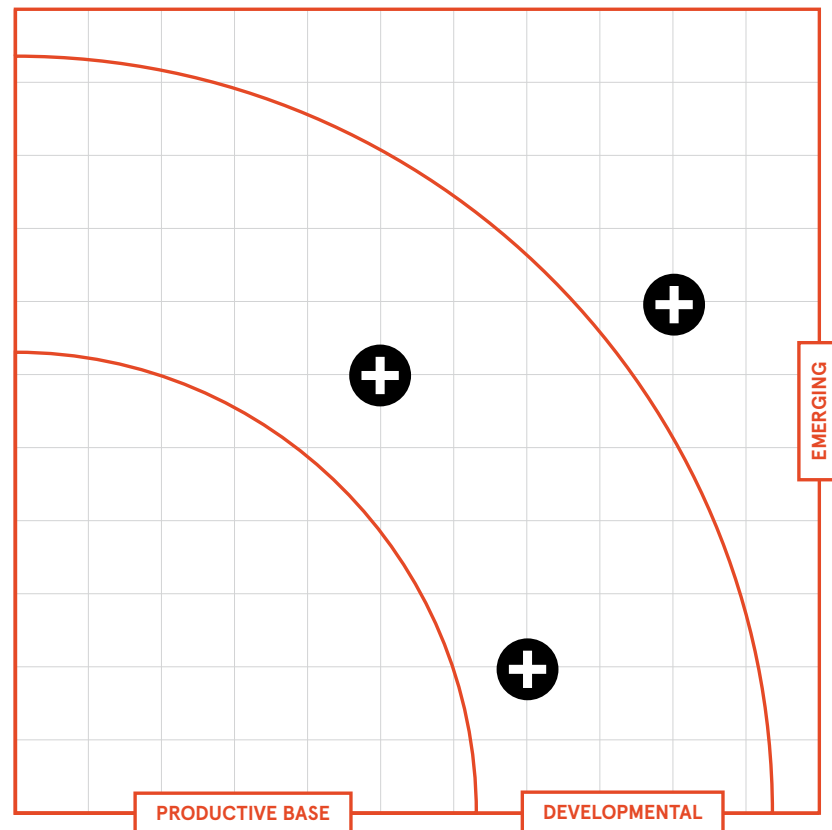
Your organisation, now or in the near future, will face legal requirements to report on its energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. With energy costs from carbon-rich sources set to rise in the short- to medium- term, it makes good economic sense for you to think about your organisation's transition to a net zero energy mix. Financial institutions and markets will be increasingly sensitive to your exposure to carbon and climate risks. And with ongoing concerns about climate change, the public will be keeping an eye on your carbon footprint.

To smoothly guide your organisation's transition, you and your leadership team will need a sound, strategic understanding of the reporting requirements, risk implications and frameworks for setting and managing decarbonisation goals.

From reporting requirements to risk management, legislative changes to social responsibility, understanding net zero transition is a key skill for leaders to learn. As such, it's a Big Mover on the 2025 Skills Horizon.

Unexpected Emergers

Keep an eye out



These skills are the new wild cards, brought about by changing circumstances. If applied effectively, they'll allow you to capitalise on big (and possibly surprising) opportunities.

Leading across generations

In our research, we were surprised by how many leaders told us about the growing challenges and difficulties with managing intergenerational difference. This comprises differences in work practices and styles, as well as differing expectations about what work and careers are for.

As people live longer and work longer, more generations will come together in your workplace, which increases diversity. Diversity is a good thing. When harnessed productively, it provides different perspectives and inputs.

But how will you communicate effectively when the gulf of intergenerational expectations is widening? And how will you balance difference with the need for inclusion and belonging?

Your ongoing challenge as a leader is to create environments in which you can cultivate diverse perspectives across generations, without conflicting expectations causing chaos across age groups.

As such, the ability to lead across generations is an explicit skill you'll soon need to hone.



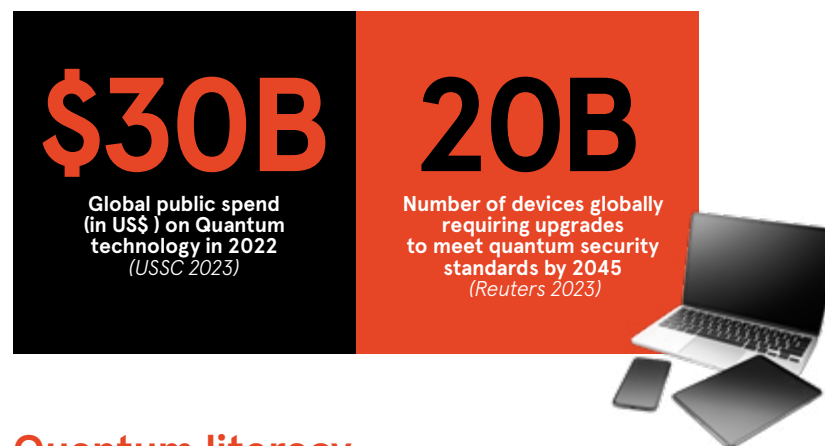
Humanities thinking

We live in the most technological age, with more data than ever and powerful AI to help us make decisions. And yet, unexpectedly, in our research we heard repeatedly from leaders that we must embrace the humanities.

The coming decade of disorientation brings with it many uncertainties. Uncertainty means incomplete information and unclear paths forward. When established values and practices are fractured, old ways no longer work and new ones need to be found.

In the absence of clear information, reflective thinking is needed. In the absence of clear answers, good questions are needed. To complement your analytical acumen, consider what the humanities have to offer. Interpretation, sense-making and imagination. Crafting narratives with analogies, metaphors and counterintuitive examples. The ability to learn from history, change your mind confidently and find solutions in unexpected spaces. All these techniques are part of humanities thinking.

The future will be messy. This is where humanities thinking shines. Upskill accordingly.



Quantum literacy

Quantum computing and quantum technology are still emerging topics on the Horizon. So we were surprised to see strongly growing interest in our conversations with leaders, and in other data sources like conferences and media publications.

There's a need to get your head around quantum early. Soon enough, you'll find yourself in conversations where it comes up, exploring questions like: What will quantum mean for AI? Will it break encryption? Which industries will benefit most? Which ones will be disrupted? What should we know today, and when should we prepare for quantum's arrival?

It'll be equally important for you to know what quantum is and isn't. If you're in an industry that'll be affected, quantum will need to be on your strategy roadmap. Being across it now will allow you to confidently engage with stakeholders—if only to outline why quantum might still be an early days move for your organisation.

The United Nations declared 2025 the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology. If you prepare for it now, it'll pay off.



“Human nature has not changed radically. The human faults that the great observers of human nature, like Shakespeare, pointed out centuries ago, are as relevant as ever. As a leader you can either read the latest leadership literature or you can go to the core of the observers of human nature. I’m in the latter camp, but that is a personal choice, there are many paths.”

Ian Narev
CEO & MD, SEEK

“Leading complexity will be one of our great challenges: leadership for generational change, for individualised complexity in the workforce, for mental wealth, not just mental health.”

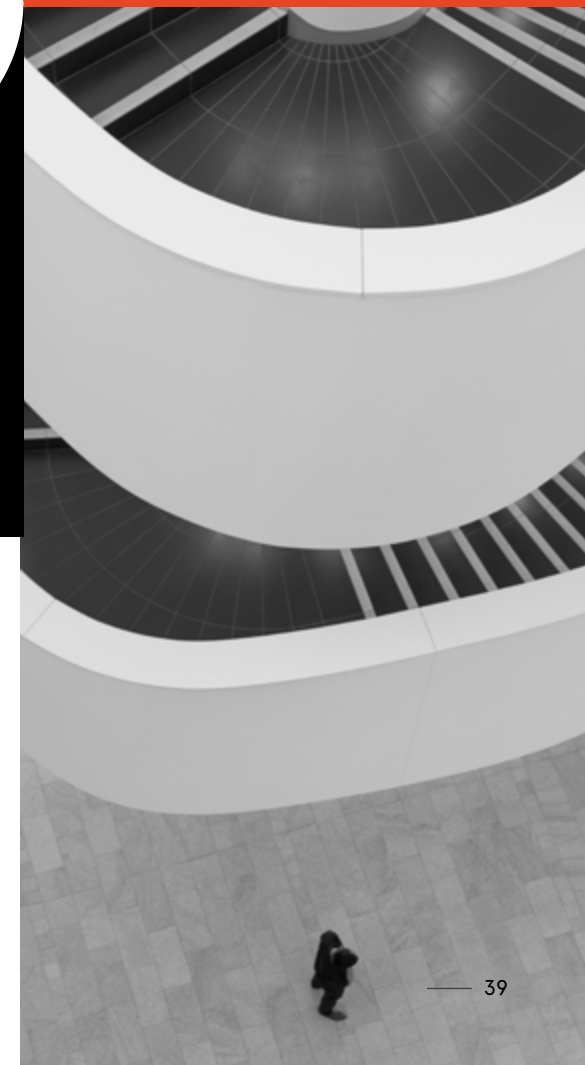
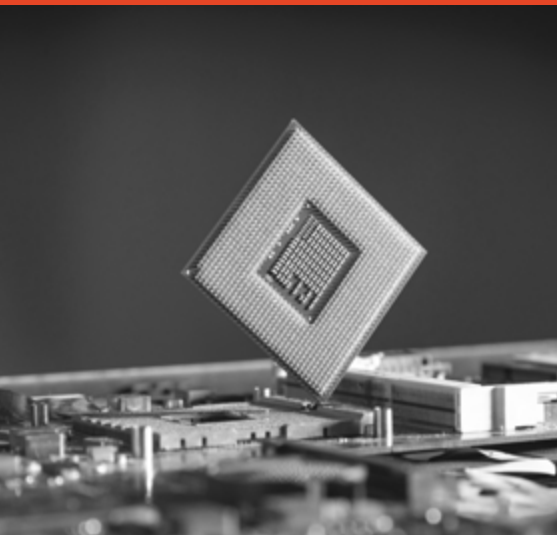
Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President,
The University of Sydney

“I think that, paradoxically, the more sophisticated the AI will get, the need for STEM as we know it is not going to increase, but rather stabilise or even decrease. On the contrary, what you will need is a new type of competence that blends traditional skills and competencies, like social sciences and humanities.”

Dragoş Tudorache
Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Special Committee on AI

“New technology is an enabler for business, but leaders will always have a role to play in effectively ‘decoding’ the data to make decisions. Being able to listen to deeply technical perspectives and insights (whether it’s AI, quantum computing, decarbonisation technologies), extract meaning from it and move ahead in a way that delivers value for the business, its colleagues and clients is an essential executive skill.”

Cathryn Carver
Group Executive, Corporate and Institutional Banking, NAB

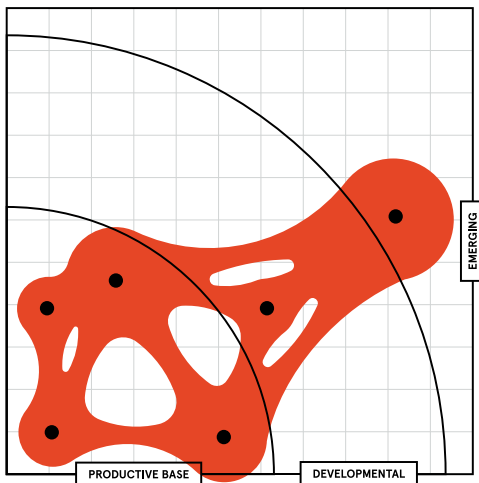




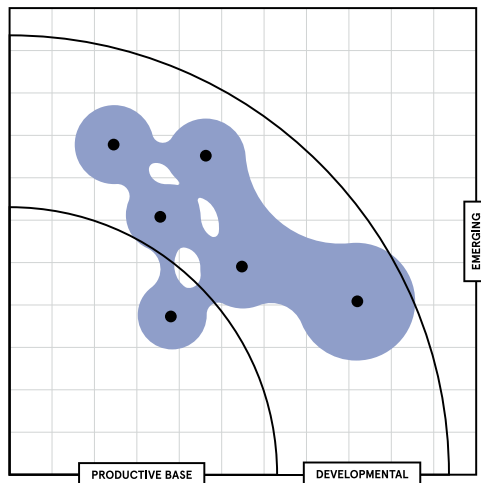
**There are areas of
convergence in the skills
you need to know next.**

We call them Blobs.

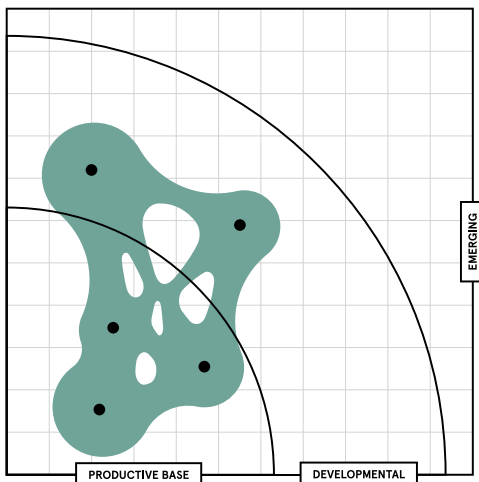
BLOB 1:
Speaking the language of tech



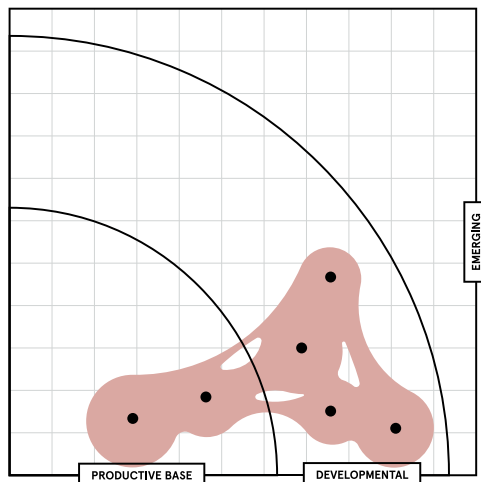
BLOB 2:
Solving problems of scale



BLOB 3:
Working across difference



BLOB 4:
Thinking through complexity



The shape of things to come

The skills you need next, in four Blobs

Why Blobs? We called them that because... that's what they look like. Sometimes it's best not to overthink things.

Our quartet of Blobs play an important role in thinking about leadership upskilling. They visually embody how skills converge around key topics and perspectives that are relevant to your leadership journey and your organisation's future.

These areas of convergence: **technology** and its implications, **large-scale challenges** in the external environment, **people and workplace** issues, and the **complexity and uncertainty** that you yourself face as a leader. You'll need to master new things in each of these areas.

A man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey sweater over a collared shirt and tie, is shown in profile from the waist up. He is holding a laptop and looking towards the right. The background is a server room with rows of server racks, illuminated with a warm, reddish-orange light. A large white circular graphic element is positioned behind the man, partially overlapping the server racks.

“Every leader will need to have a relationship with AI, be it shaping, governing, driving, or simply using AI. Technical upskilling of leaders has become imperative.”

Julie Bedard

Managing Director and Partner,
The Boston Consulting Group

“We have a big focus on AI and automation. At this stage the impact has the potential to be incredibly significant. We're thinking about these in terms of introducing efficiency, improving employee experience, driving productivity and the removal of unattractive work. Of course, this means our people will have more time to spend with customers. The combination is a huge shift in the skill sets that people need.”

Fiona Thompson

Group Executive, People, Culture & Advocacy, Suncorp

“Leadership will also involve more of a personal journey to become comfortable and conversant with new technology, and AI won't be the last one. There will be further waves of disruptive technology.”

Andrew Shearer

Director-General of the Office of National Intelligence



“You won't need to be an expert in all emerging areas, such as AI, carbon and energy transition, but a base level of knowledge and skill, familiarity with the language of those areas, will be required to be an effective leader.”

Mark Rigotti

CEO & MD,
Australian Institute of Company Directors

“I don't think most leaders are familiar enough with technology and digital innovation. I think there has been this common view that we will hire a specialist to be on the board to handle the technology topics. I don't think that's acceptable anymore. You don't need to be a deep technology expert, but directors need to know enough to have an understanding of technology's potential to make a difference in your industry— be it healthcare, accounting, in research or in supporting small businesses.”

David Thodey AO, FTSE

Chancellor, The University of Sydney

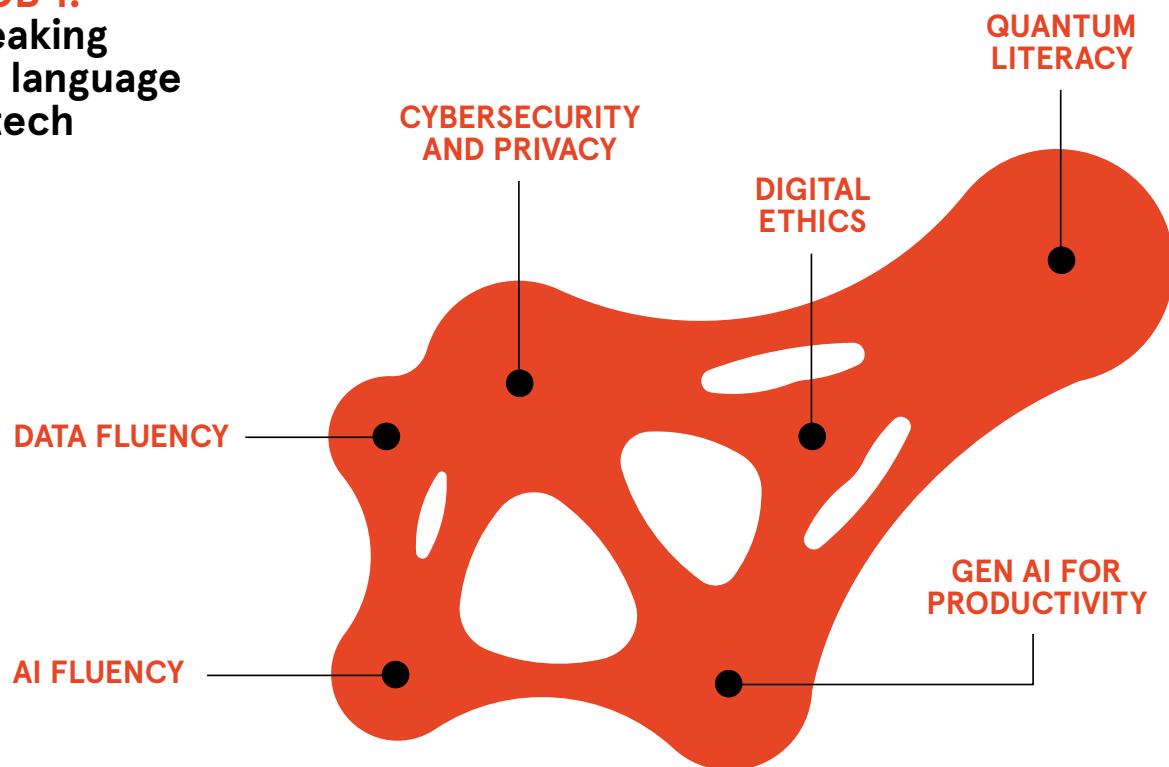
“We're going to see that rapid pace of change continue to accelerate. AI is one of those profound shifts that brings massive change and disruption in how businesses operate and how the community engages with the technology.”

Steven Worrall

MD, Microsoft ANZ



BLOB 1: Speaking the language of tech



Tech touches everything

Tech today reaches deeper into business, society and policy than at any time in the past decades.

We're in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In the Third, we computerised many operations and, with the emergence of the Internet, moved business online. But now, with the primacy of data, the emerging "digital first" paradigm, and AI and robotics ready for prime time, we've created new building blocks for deep transformation of business models, industries and societal processes. All this is well underway and without clear direction.

A multitude of shifts catalysed by technology—in values, institutions and geopolitical orders—are happening at the same time. While the destination is hard to predict, this transformation poses existential questions for many businesses. As processes become datafied and digitised—the digital transformation market is expected to grow 81% between 2023-2027 (Statista, 2024)—and as algorithms augment more and more aspects of our organisations and lives, you'll require a deeper understanding of the functioning and effects of technology.

Tech is more undefined than ever

Digital technology can no longer be understood as just tools for certain problems or tasks. Rather, digital technology such as AI is best seen as general-purpose infrastructure for rethinking work, processes and business models.

Digital technology is open-ended. It affords more opportunities for innovation than ever, but it requires your interpretation in context. At the heart of the "digital first" paradigm is the need to strategically rethink how things work and how they could work better. Given its open-ended nature, technology demands your involvement.

Tech is different these days

The newest generation of computing technology is different to what you've grown used to.

AI brings powerful new predictive and generative capabilities. But it lacks the accuracy, accountability and transparency of traditional computing. The role of data has changed, too. And when it comes to AI, data is everything. AI needs a lot of it, and it needs to be good quality. According to Statista (2024), data management is the leading AI infrastructure challenge.

On the other hand, AI now simulates, quite convincingly, many human traits: communication, problem-solving, content creation. In a recent study, 79% of respondents found AI-generated responses more empathetic than those written by doctors (JAMA, 2023). Yet AI still functions quite differently to us. Those nuances and differences will matter to your business, so you need to know about them.

Tech is everywhere

Digital technology permeates our workplaces and society, and AI is rapidly changing the way we work. According to AWS (2024), as much as 84% of employers expect productive use of Gen AI in their workplaces in the next five years. Even if you don't pay attention to Gen AI, you'll still encounter its output at the office. In a 2023 Salesforce survey, 55% of workers said they'd used unapproved Gen AI apps, while 64% had passed off the output of generative AI as their own work.

Many leaders find themselves playing catch-up with their employees on using Gen AI for personal productivity. Consider getting in front of this trend by upskilling yourself.

Tech brings new challenges and risks

Since tech is everywhere and touches everything, it also brings new risks and vulnerabilities. AI, in particular, goes to the heart of our humanity. The datafication of life brings with it questions about data sovereignty and privacy. The digitisation of core processes creates vulnerabilities to cyberattacks. The use of algorithms in decisions about work and people raises questions of fairness and ethics.

Data and algorithm regulations are fast-evolving both nationally and globally. This creates complex and sometimes conflicting requirements for executives and directors. Cybersecurity, privacy and digital ethics are no longer specialist topics—they call for your attention and informed leadership.

Tech is for generalists now

In 2025, decisions about tech and digital-first approaches are strategic, not operational. Executing on tech might be for specialists, but deciding on tech is for generalists. That means you and your leadership team.

It might be time to audit your leadership teams' digital, data and AI fluencies. How well is your organisation speaking the language of tech?

“It will increasingly be important to create an AI-ready organisation. Rather than, ‘Can AI solve this problem?’, how can you set up the organisation so it can make use of AI, formulate business problems so that AI can help –what data you collect, how you create value, in a way so that machine learning can solve that for you.”

Michael Spranger

President, Sony AI
COO, Sony Research

The skills in this Blob

AI fluency: the ability to understand the nature, capabilities, and challenges of (generative) AI; converse confidently with AI stakeholders; and guide the strategic development of AI use cases and decisions for their operational implementation.

Gen AI for productivity: the ability to understand how generative AI fits into your (and your team's) work practices. Fluency in advanced prompting of Gen AI systems. Background knowledge to understand ethical, risk and productivity implications.

Data fluency: an understanding of the importance and nature of data as an asset and as material in transformation and decision-making. The ability to audit internal and external data sources and appreciate their strategic value and bottom-line impact.

Digital ethics: the ability to navigate complex ethical considerations of digital technologies, data use and algorithmic decision; identify potential risks; and devise strategies to ensure that practices align with organisational values and societal norms.

Cybersecurity and privacy: the ability to comprehend fundamental cybersecurity and data privacy concepts; identify potential threats and measures to protect digital assets and sensitive data; and foster regulatory compliance and a culture of security awareness.

Quantum literacy: an understanding of the basic principles and potential applications of quantum technologies. The ability to stay informed about the latest developments in quantum science, to assess their feasibility and identify early use cases and strategic value.





Speaking the language of tech, in numbers

DIGITAL TECH IN BUSINESS STILL GROWING

+81%

Increase in global spending on digital transformation services from 2023-2027
(Statista 2024b)

LEADERS ARE EXCITED ABOUT AI

88%

of leaders are excited about the potential of AI in their business, but 44% don't feel ready
(WEF 2024c)

GEN AI IS ALREADY IN YOUR BUSINESS

55%

of workers say they use generative AI, even though it isn't approved for their work
(Salesforce 2023)

CYBERSECURITY NEEDS YOUR ATTENTION

+69%

Expected increase in cost of global cybercrime from 2023-2027
(Statista 2024a)

LEADER SKILLS CRUCIAL FOR ADOPTION

46%

of US companies cite a gap in leadership skills as the reason for lack of tech adoption
(WEF 2019)

GEN AI EXPECTED TO PROLIFERATE

84%

of employers expect workers to use generative AI on the job within five years
(AWS 2024)

AI CONTENT SOUNDS MORE HUMAN-LIKE

79%

of people in a research study found chatbot responses more empathetic than those of doctors
(JAMA 2023)

QUANTUM MAKES A SURPRISE ENTRY


+400%

Increase in global investment in quantum technology start-ups from 2019-2022
(USSC 2023)

AI PRESENTS NEW KINDS OF CHALLENGES

70%

of Chief Information Security Officers see AI benefitting attackers more than defenders
(WEF 2024b)



“Effective leaders need to ‘zoom out’, think about tomorrow, the bigger picture, what’s coming, what is strategically important, and pick when to ‘zoom in’ and focus on the detail, down in the trenches.”

Mark Rigotti

CEO & MD,

Australian Institute of Company Directors

"Leaders require a solid understanding of Australia's global role, and the move away from unipolar to a multipolar trading bloc, to remain competitive vis-à-vis emerging economies."

Antony Shaw
CEO, HSBC Australia

"We just took for granted that supply chains worked and could be global. Covid has changed our thinking. Supply chains get a lot more focus now, and it's a matter of decoding what they mean for different businesses, and different environments."

Dr Mike Green
CEO, United States Studies Centre

"To take their organisations forward in this new, geopolitically-driven world, leaders have to have information, or at least access to analysis, which gives them a feel for what may be going on."

The Hon. Arthur Sinodinos AO
Former Australian Ambassador to the US

"Nature-based accounting is coming into effect and that'll connect corporates and communities in a practical way."

Shane Webster
CEO, Jawun



"Organisations have to adopt a distributed business model when they operate in complex ecosystems. In such a scenario, organisations no longer control their value chain, and they have to learn how to collaborate with others, sometimes with their direct competitors."

Laszlo Peter
CEO, KPMG Origins

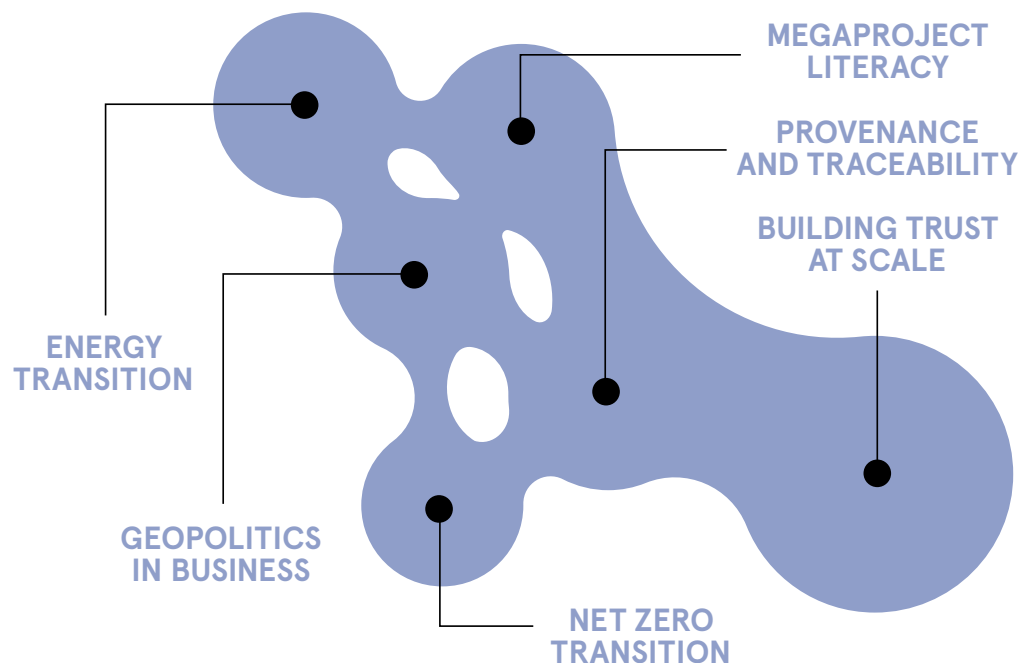


"In order to make progress in the energy transition, it is critically important that leaders understand enough about the basics of energy generation and storage, to make informed decisions for their organisations."

The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull AC
29th Prime Minister of Australia



BLOB 2: Solving problems of scale



The global order is changing

When your office air-conditioning breaks and can't be fixed because the necessary ball bearings are sourced from Ukraine, you'll feel the heat of geopolitical impact on supply chains first-hand. Aside from air-con, do you know your exposure to geopolitical risk?

Decades of stability in the global geopolitical order have ended. You're facing a new era of instabilities with unclear trajectories. Various factors like the economic power shift towards China (and Asia more broadly), changes in US trade policy, and various military conflicts have led to geopolitical disruptions that have yet to find a new, trusted equilibrium. According to KPMG's 2024 *Top Risks Forecast*, global CEOs named global trade policy restrictions and vulnerabilities from global conflict as their most pressing future risk.

Heightened global tendencies towards nationalism and protectionism have led to bureaucratic frictions and new tariffs that have raised the costs of international trade. Nation-states use business subsidies and trade sanctions as measures of geostrategic competition. Growing populism in many democracies comes with implications for immigration and global talent mobility. And military conflicts are putting strains on supply chains, again leading to higher costs. According to Howden's 2024 *Geopolitical Risk Report*, the Russia-Ukraine conflict caused a three-fold increase in freight rates for certain routes and significantly higher insurance costs.

If your organisation is exposed to international markets or depends on global supply chains for access to customers, suppliers, parts, resources or talent (and really, whose doesn't?), you'll need to understand the strategic impacts of geopolitical developments.

Climate risks and energy transition need your attention

Climate change presents long-term risks for most businesses: financially, in terms of access to investment capital; and physically, in terms of exposure to extreme weather events. BCG (2023) predicts that leading global corporations face a potential reduction in annual EBITDA of as much as 15% from extreme weather impacts. Aon points to significant under-insurance in global assets, quantifying the global protection gap against extreme weather at 69%, with a total of US\$262 billion in uninsured losses globally in 2023.

At the same time, the global energy transition comes with significant opportunities. While transitioning your organisation to renewable energy and net zero brings early cost advantages, any business with a considerable exposure to energy costs will need to pay attention as fossil fuels are phased out, taxed or become more expensive. Finally, investment in clean energy creates new business and markets. According to Goldman Sachs Asset Management (2023), the US Inflation Reduction Act alone resulted in US\$282 billion in investment in 2022, funding 280 clean energy projects across 44 US States.

Whether driven opportunistically or by cost and risk considerations, you'll benefit from foundational skills to lead your organisation's net zero transition in the context of the wider energy transition.

Accountability and dependencies at the systems level

Increasingly, you need to be aware of accountability requirements and dependencies at the scale of global systems. Provenance refers to the tracing of and accounting for the cumulative origin of products and services at the system level. It extends to a diverse range of issues, including: human, labour, Indigenous and local community rights; biodiversity and climate impact; product quality and safety; and various compliance matters.

For example, the new European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) stipulates that commodities like soya, wood and cattle for export to the EU have to meet new rules relating to the land on which they were produced. Exporters need to reliably demonstrate that no parts of their products are associated with possible deforestation, which raises novel requirements for accountability through provenance tracking.

Similarly, carbon accounting will need to move to the systems level, as organisations start accounting for Scope 3, their indirect carbon emissions that affect their products and services. According to the World Economic Forum, in complex global value chains like food and fashion, Scope 3 upstream emissions can represent up to 70% of a company's carbon balance.

If accountability and dependencies at the systems level are becoming mission critical to meet regulatory requirements and retain market access, you'll need to become familiar not only with new requirements but also new provenance and traceability approaches.

Thinking bigger

Solving problems of scale takes a number of convergent skills: geopolitics, net zero transition, energy transition, accounting at the systems level through provenance. These skills interact in complex ways, all driven by increasingly complex global regulation. You'll also need to be able to build trust at scale. In addition to the aforementioned skills, solving problems of scale requires complex, multi-party ecosystems and an understanding of the unique characteristics of large-scale projects. This means working with local and global communities and governments at all levels to maintain legitimacy and retain your social licence to operate.

“We live at the end of the unipolar era of US world leadership, with a resurgence of state-on-state competition, with ample potential for business disruptions to supply chains.”

**Major General (Retired)
Gus McLachlan AO**

The skills in this Blob

Geopolitics in business: the ability to understand and interpret geopolitical developments through a business lens; make sense of policy moves by nation states; and assess the long-term implications of short-term geopolitical events and global crises.

Net zero transition: understanding the strategic risk implications, reporting requirements and frameworks for setting and managing decarbonisation goals in guiding your organisation's transition to net zero carbon emissions.

Energy transition: understanding the evolving energy mix, clean energy investments and new technologies in generation and storage. The ability to assess strategic cost and pricing implications, and identify business opportunities from the energy transition.

Provenance and traceability: comprehension of regulatory requirements and business cases necessitating the establishment of provenance and traceability. The ability to navigate complexities of accounting in multi-stakeholder ecosystems; and build trust and assurance for automatic data capture, secure storage and transmission.

Building trust at scale: the ability to engage with government and policy; communicate effectively in complex public environments; and maintain legitimacy and social licence to operate. Proficiency in data-based measures to build trust and influence stakeholders.

Megaproject literacy: the ability to lead and collaborate in complex, multi-actor projects and initiatives; configure collaborative ecosystems that include competitors; and navigate conflicting incentives, to drive successful outcomes for your organisation.





Solving problems of scale, in numbers

GLOBAL EXPOSURE INCREASES

40%

Increase in international trade of goods volume since 2010
(UN 2023)

DEMOCRACY IS UNDER THREAT

64%

2024 democracy dissatisfaction rate across 12 high-income, democratic countries
(Pew 2024)

THE RISING TRANSITION OPPORTUNITY

282B

Investment (in US\$) in clean energy projects across 44 US States in the first year of the Inflation Reduction Act
(GSAM 2023)

CLIMATE REGULATION INCREASES

155%

Increase in global ESG regulation in the past decade
(ESGNews 2023)

CRISES AND MILITARY SPEND INCREASE

6.8%

Year-on-year increase in total global military spending in 2023, to a total of US\$2.4T
(SIPRI 2024)

EXPOSURE TO CLIMATE RISK IS UP

40%

Above 20yr average: global losses from weather-related disasters in 2022, exceeding US\$200B
(BCG 2023)

PROVENANCE IS GETTING REAL

292B

Exposure (in US\$) of annual global commodities imports into the EU, following new EUDR regulation
(Harvard 2024)

UNDERRATED SCOPE 3 EXPOSURE

70%

Proportion of carbon balance Scope 3 upstream emissions for complex supply chains like food
(WEF 2023a)



“We have to be much more deliberate with the diversity in our executive teams, much more disruptive and create the conditions for different voices around the table to enable good diagnostic capabilities.”

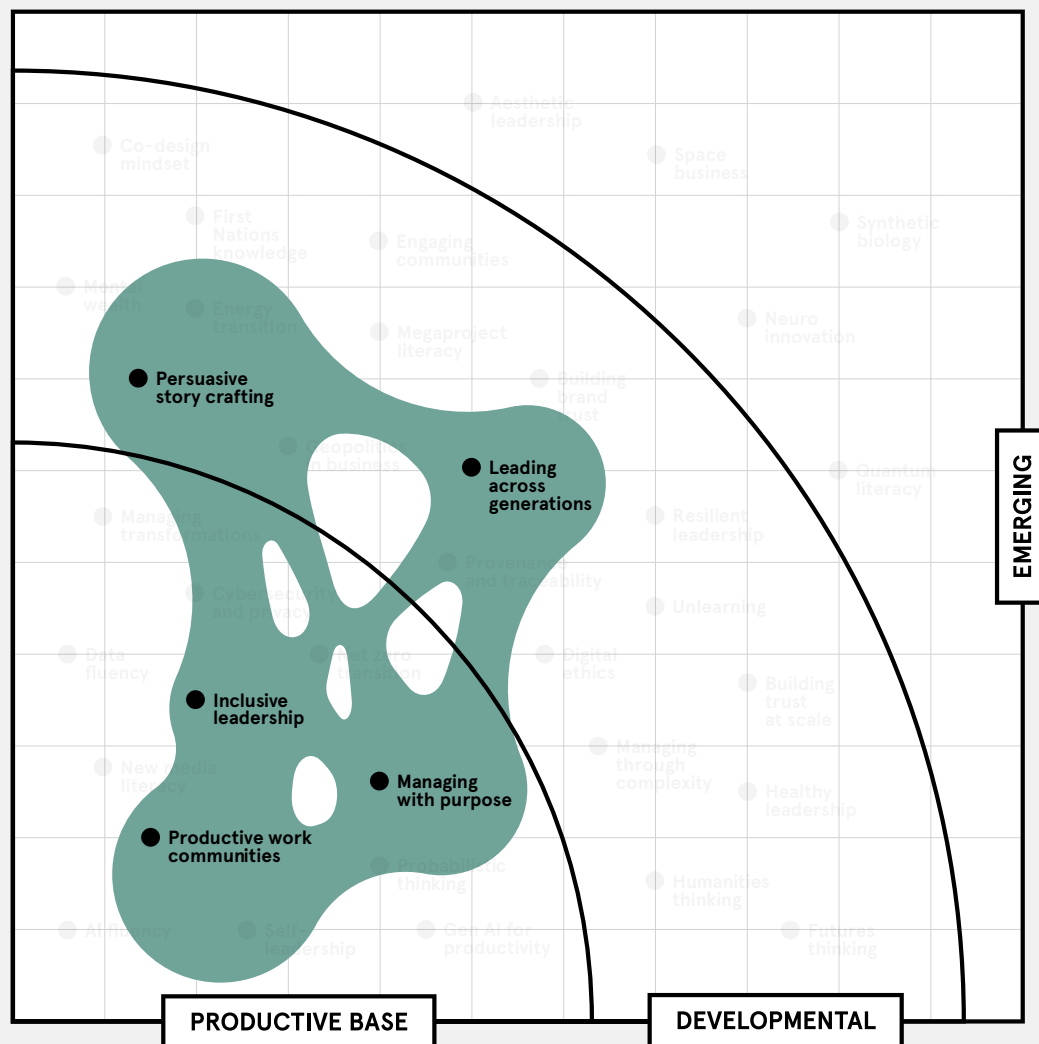
Steven Worrall

MD, Microsoft ANZ

BLOB 3

Working across difference

You need to reach common ground



We've made great strides in increasing diversity and representation in our workplaces. We cherish each individual for their unique differences, celebrating the richness and creativity that diversity brings. But how do we foster diversity without getting lost in difference?

The very premise of an organisation is to bring people together through shared goals, values and routines. Yet as we welcome more diverse perspectives, we must also grapple with the complexities that arise when differing expectations meet—around work styles, flexibility, performance, communication, and the organisation's role in society and public discourse.

You're at the forefront of navigating these differences and complexities. So, you must ask yourself: How can we use difference productively while finding and amplifying commonalities? How can we value each individual, and their differences, while building inclusive, cohesive and productive communities? How can we craft a sense of belonging and balance the needs of individuals with those of the collective?



"We have removed friction from systems and this has changed how people participate in public and corporate conversations. It has created huge problems in terms of what people say and how quickly they say it."

Robert Thomson
Chief Executive, News Corp

"Many Indigenous leaders often share with me, the most successful relationships they have (beyond the relationship with their own communities) is with corporate Australia. And it's because there's high capability on the corporate side, there's less churn of staff. So, you tend to have longer term relationships, and corporates have a strong focus on practical reconciliation, and doing things that create value and increase productivity."

Shane Webster
CEO, Jawun

"When we have so many things that are automated, where technology does it for us, human interaction skills become more and more important. Knowing how to persuade people, how to inspire them, knowing how to resolve conflict, how to make sure everyone's getting what they need out of an interaction, knowing how to put boundaries—that is important as a leader."

Cosima Marriner
Managing Editor,
The Australian Financial Review



"There is great variation between countries and regions when it comes to hybrid work. Leaders will have to figure out what this will do to company culture, the sense of belonging to a company, to learning and upskilling, the ability to learn from others, and even productivity over time."

Morten Wierod
CEO, ABB

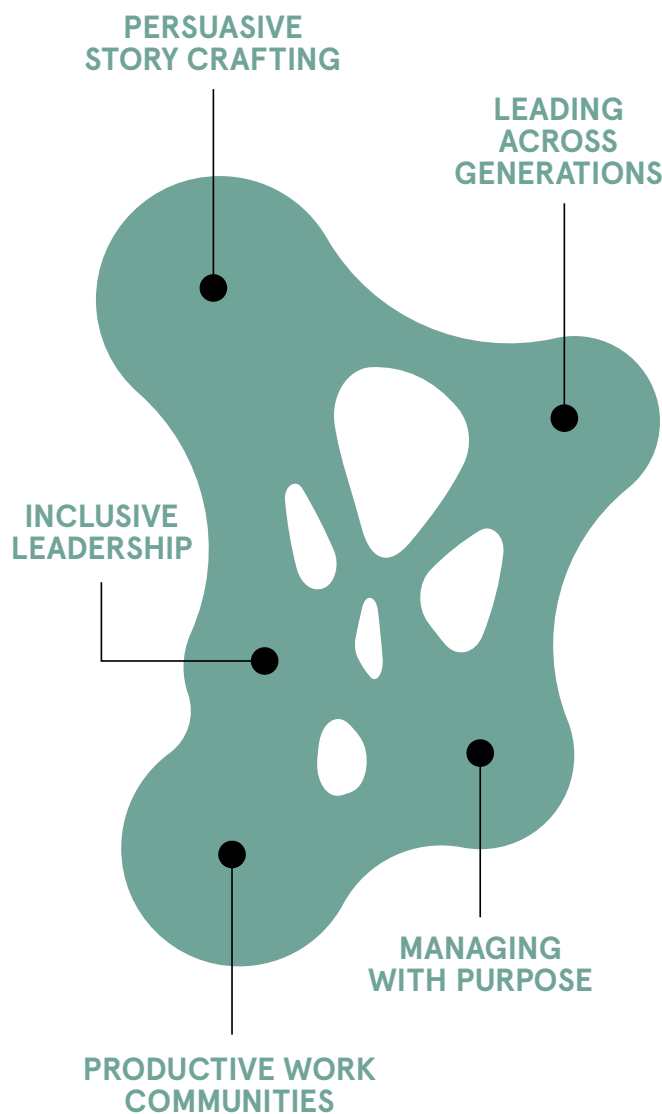


"The cultural winds are blowing almost towards ageism. We seem to increasingly put more weight on younger generations' views. And the elder statesmen are denounced or derided, just simply because they're old."

Nathan Birch
CEO, Interbrand ANZ



BLOB 3: Working across difference



Diverse differences

Diversity itself is diverse. From age and gender to ethnicity and neurodiversity, the dimensions of difference in today's workplaces are as varied as they are numerous.

Each form of diversity brings its own unique opportunities and challenges. For example, while older employees bring valuable knowledge and experience, they may face ageism. Younger employees bring fresh thinking, but they often have very different expectations about the meaning and purpose of work—not to mention diversity itself. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), 68% of Gen Z employees are dissatisfied with their organisation's progress on diversity and inclusion. Global differences in culture and expectations add another layer of complexity, highlighting the tension between the need to standardise large-scale initiatives and cater for local diversity.

To understand your workforce and customer base better, it's crucial to reflect diversity in your leadership teams and boards. Ask yourself: Is their diversity reflected? Can your younger employees see themselves in a leadership role in your business?

Crafting communities

Merely collecting diversity isn't enough; it must be harnessed productively and woven together to create inclusion and belonging. A 2017 Salesforce study found that employees who feel a sense of belonging are 5.3 times more empowered than those who don't. While focusing on differences can highlight divisions, it's essential to recognise the many commonalities that unite us.

It's your role to hone the differences while managing the collective, with organisational culture playing a key role in this process. You need to learn to facilitate and foster productive work communities.

Balancing purpose and positions

More and more, you're being asked to balance the expectations of a growing number of stakeholders regarding your organisation's purpose. In the global Edelman Trust Barometer, 75% of respondents said that a company's primary duty is to engage in societal duties, including tackling climate change and discrimination (Edelman 2024). But how do you put that into practice?

Public and private spheres continue to overlap, so activism and politics continue to enter our workplaces. Your employees might demand that you and your organisation take a position on controversial public issues. But doing so will always alienate one or another stakeholder group. All this is compounded by frictionless communication in digital media, which amplify differences, making discourse heated and fast-paced.

When addressing social issues, success lies not in avoidance or seeking unanimous support, but in finding a set of principles aligned with your organisation's values to guide your approach in engaging with public debate.

Hybrid is not one thing

Hybrid work is here to stay. The post-Covid reality has revealed that flexibility means different things to different people, leading to a complex landscape of individual expectations and preferences. Some employees thrive on the autonomy of remote work; others crave the structure and social interaction of the office. It's on you to navigate these diverse needs while ensuring that the organisation's objectives are met.

Hybrid work increases complexity and coordination costs for leaders. You must find ways to accommodate different work styles and communication preferences while synchronising joint activities and maintaining fairness and inclusivity in the team. This may involve experimenting with new approaches, flexible schedules and output-based, instead of activity-based, performance metrics.

Collective resilience

Remote work can lead to loneliness. A recent Gallup survey found that 25% of remote workers had experienced feelings of loneliness in the 24-hour period prior to being surveyed. Isolation isn't the only challenge to contend with. The complexity of managing diverse workforces can lead to stress, fatigue and mental wellbeing challenges for leaders. Although mental health is now an important leadership priority, only 34% of employees report that their leaders speak openly about mental health (MHA 2022). Promoting organisational wellbeing has become a leadership imperative.

Bridging differences, fostering belonging

Working across difference is a delicate balancing act. You must develop the skills to use difference productively while fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. This requires navigating the complexities of diverse expectations, finding common ground, and creating inclusive communities where individuals feel valued and empowered to contribute their viewpoints.

No one experiences these differences and complexities more than you. Your ability to bridge differences, resolve conflicts and persuade people to work together towards a single goal will be crucial in creating resilient, cohesive, diverse teams that thrive.

“Executives will need to exercise their minds on how they can cultivate a good life, and an exciting and fulfilling life, for those who work for them.”

David Gonski AC

Chancellor, UNSW

The skills in this Blob

Managing with purpose: the ability to inspire employees by clearly articulating and embodying organisational purpose, values and goals. Aligning decision-making and actions with a strong sense of purpose to drive engagement, productivity and impact.

Inclusive leadership: the ability to foster a productive environment that values, respects and leverages diversity in all its forms. Promoting equity and inclusivity, and a culture where individuals feel a sense of belonging and are empowered to contribute.

Leading across generations: the ability to navigate the complexities of a multi-generational workforce with diverse expectations, communication styles and work preferences. Fostering understanding, productive collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Productive work communities: the ability to cultivate productive teams across all modes of work: physical, remote and hybrid. Balancing individual flexibility and collective requirements of work coordination, fairness and inclusivity.

Persuasive story crafting: the ability to develop compelling narratives that engage, persuade and inspire audiences. Leveraging data, insights and rhetorical techniques to communicate complex ideas, evoke emotions, influence stakeholders and drive action.





Working across difference, in numbers

POLITICAL GENDER GAP WIDENS

27%

...and strongly increasing. Gap by which young men are less liberal than young women globally
(The Economist 2024)

SENSE OF BELONGING EMPOWERS

5.3x

Factor by which employees with a sense of belonging feel empowered to perform their best work vs those who don't
(Salesforce 2017)

BUSINESS EXPECTED TO PERFORM SOCIETAL DUTIES

75%

of global survey respondents say that performing societal duties is central to a business' purpose
(HBR 2024)

REMOTE WORK STILL COMMON

37%

of Australian employees regularly work from home; down from 40% in 2021
(ABS 2023)

LONELINESS IN REMOTE WORK

25%

of remote workers say they experienced loneliness the previous day
(Gallup 2023)

GEN Z EXPECTS MORE ON DIVERSITY

68%

of Gen Z employees are dissatisfied with their organisation's diversity and inclusion progress
(WEF 2023b)

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT IS COSTLY

8.9T

Global cost estimate (In US\$) of low employee engagement; 9% of global GDP
(Gallup 2023)

LEADERS DEVOTE MUCH TIME TO STAKEHOLDERS

25%

of a leader's day is spent building internal relationships and responding to external stakeholders
(The Economist 2022)

LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

34%

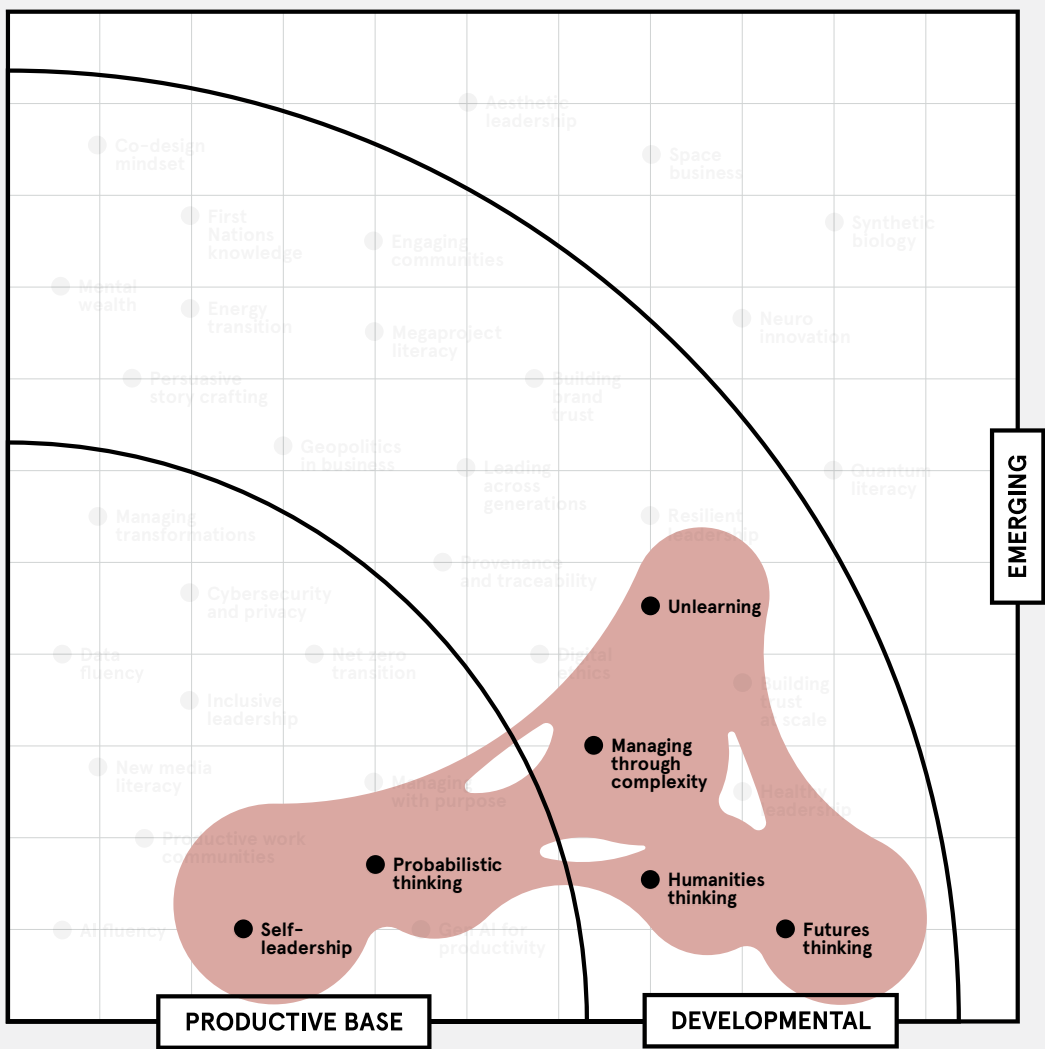
of employees say that their leaders speak openly about mental health
(MHA 2022)



**“We face a decade
of vast complexity.”**

Professor Mark Scott AO

Vice-Chancellor and President,
The University of Sydney



BLOB 4
Thinking through complexity

You need to find the right question

The complexities of our shifting world and the uncertainties of our messy future demand a certain kind of leader. One who embraces thinking, thrives on probability, works with conflict, and stays open to changing their mind. In a world of information overload, constant connectivity and perpetual crises, you'll be both short on time and capacity; at once overloaded with, and short on good, information.

Rather than finding answers, your first job will be to decide what questions to ask.





“The world is not Texas. So many things connect us all as humans, but culture shapes how people operate, think, talk, surface and solve problems. Understanding the deep drivers is extremely important.”

Nick Leeder

Vice President, Customer Solutions,
Google APAC



“For effective transformation you need to lead in a goal-oriented way. You need to be less manager, telling people what to do, and more coach, allowing people to have agency and autonomy. Don’t stipulate the work, but don’t compromise on the goal. That can be highly uncomfortable for people, but sometimes you need that forcing function for people to having to find new ways of working themselves.”

Bridget Loudon

Co-Founder and CEO, Expert360

“Leaders would do well in adopting a style of probabilistic thinking—be very comfortable with the idea that they might be wrong but still keep making bets, to try something else and follow an iterative process, and learn along the way, the same way scientists work. It gives them the freedom of not being tied to one rigid expectation or outcome, but find the best solution.”

Saul Perlmutter

Nobel Prize-winning astrophysicist

“I see AI in social sciences, law and ethics as new curricula. The world will grow towards a place where you will come to blend these skills together more and more. The more the world is going to be algorithm-driven and technology-driven, the more we need the humanities.”

Dragoş Tudorache

Member of the European Parliament and
Chair of the Special Committee on AI

“One of the worst things with trying new things or asking people to pivot is fear and dealing with fear. Making people understand the different levels of fear and manage them is an essential leadership tool.”

Rene Redzepi

Chef & Co-Owner, Noma



Compounding complexities

The world you need to navigate is one of compounding complexities. Shifts in the nature of technology, societal values, trust in institutions, and the geopolitical landscape will create a web of interconnected arenas that compete for your attention.

These shifts are joined by unforeseen shocks, crises and conflicts that further increase complexity, as their impacts ripple through global systems in unpredictable ways. At the same time, the speed at which new issues emerge and require your response has accelerated due to digital communication.

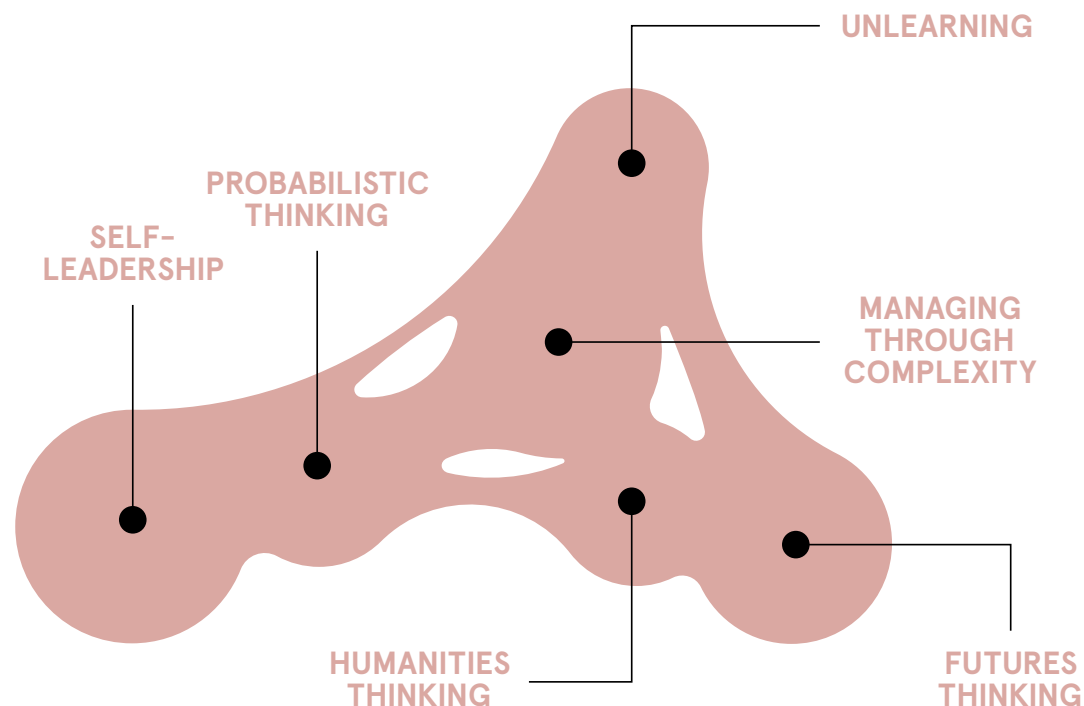
As a result, you'll often find yourself needing to make decisions without full information, as stakeholder expectations for swift action add pressure to an already challenging situation. Complexity, characterised by the many moving, interconnected parts that interact with each other in unpredictable ways, makes it difficult to predict outcomes.

To manage in this environment, it'll pay to adopt probabilistic over deterministic thinking, and to embrace the inherent uncertainties in complex situations, rather than trying to control a situation that's hard to grasp in the first place.

Messy uncertainties

Complexity is joined by uncertainty. According to KPMG's *Keeping us up at night* report and Ai Group's *Australian CEO Expectations survey (2024)*, there's a strong increase in feelings of uncertainty among leaders. In times to come you'll face more and more messy, unclear and ambiguous issues—often lacking the information or understanding needed to navigate them to your satisfaction.

BLOB 4: Thinking through complexity



Your challenge is intensified by the prevalence of disinformation, highly ideological debates and polarisation in society. As such, leadership becomes less about making factual decisions and more about navigating dilemmas, conflicting values and matters of right and wrong.

To address this, you'll want to draw on techniques from the humanities, such as interpretation, sense-making and imagination. You'll also benefit from alternative approaches to thinking, including First Nations wisdom and other diverse perspectives.

Connectivity and information overwhelm

For most leaders, time is their scarcest resource—and it gets used up fast.

Constant connectivity, coupled with the sheer volume of available information enabled by digital technology, is overwhelming. Too many workplace apps, and the need for frequent switching between them, compete for your limited time and attention span. In a study by Microsoft (2023), 68% of respondents said they don't have enough uninterrupted focus time. The abundance of data and information before you can lead to overload. And data quality concerns mean you often need to fill in the blanks.

To combat this, you need to invest in self-leadership, prioritise effectively, develop a balanced media diet and employ techniques to stay informed without losing track of what needs attention.

“You have to keep looking for your critics and bring them in to disagree with you, rather than avoid them. It’s dramatically easier for them to see the flaws in your ideas than for you to, so that’s the best way to make true progress on your ideas.”

Saul Perlmutter

Nobel Prize-winning astrophysicist

When things change, you’ll be wrong

In a values-laden environment, you must find ways to productively work with disagreement and embrace criticism to learn and improve. Engaging with diverse perspectives and dissenting opinions can help you see blind spots and challenge your assumptions. When presented with compelling evidence or arguments, balance decisiveness with the ability to change your mind.

In a complex and uncertain world, being able to adapt your thinking and strategies in light of new information will become a leadership advantage. As circumstances evolve, the ability to unlearn outdated approaches and embrace new ideas will become a competitive advantage.

Leaders who can admit mistakes, learn from failure and course-correct when necessary not only show commitment to evidence-based management but also have the edge this decade.

Questions lead to clarity

In the absence of clear information, you need thinking. In the absence of clear answers, you need to find good questions. Only by identifying the right questions can you lead your organisation through uncertainty and complexity.

Developing your skills in probabilistic thinking, humanities thinking, futures thinking, self-leadership and the ability to unlearn will be essential in thinking through our messy future.

The skills in this Blob

Self-leadership: the ability to manage your attention in the face of hyper-connectivity and information overload; develop a balanced media diet; prioritise tasks; maintain focus; and cultivate mindfulness to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace.

Humanities thinking: the ability to engage techniques such as interpretation, sense-making and imagination to navigate uncertainty; learn from history; and craft compelling narratives, using analogies and metaphors to communicate effectively.

Probabilistic thinking: the ability to consider multiple possible outcomes and their likelihoods under uncertainty; overcome oversimplification and deterministic thinking; and make decisions based on available information while remaining open to changing course.

Managing through complexity: learn to unpack complex phenomena without resorting to reductionism; address root causes and deep cultural drivers of problems; navigate competing expectations; and bring stakeholders along on issues without clear solutions.

Unlearning: the ability to use surprise and intractable problems as opportunities to uncover and challenge tacit and non-obvious assumptions. Develop a willingness and ability to change your mind and let go of established concepts that no longer serve you.

Futures thinking: the ability to craft and envision multiple possible futures, considering emerging trends, potential disruptions and long-term consequences of present-day actions. Become proficient in scenario analysis, strategic foresight and signals methods.



Thinking through complexity, in numbers

CEOs WITH HIGHLY UNCERTAIN OUTLOOK

-80pts

Net uncertainty score (from -100/+100) among Australian CEOs in 2024, with 90% expecting a negative impact (Ai Group 2024)

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK DARKENING

63%

of leaders assess their 10-year outlook as "turbulent" or "stormy" (WEF 2024a)

BIG RISKS FROM DISINFORMATION

53%

of leaders see AI-generated disinformation as the biggest technology risk (WEF 2024a)

CONNECTIVITY MAKES INFO RETRIEVAL HARDER

54%

of respondents say tools to improve connectivity make it harder to find information (Workgeist 2021)

LEADERS SUFFER INTERRUPTIONS

68%

of people don't have enough uninterrupted focus time, with leader numbers even higher (Microsoft 2023)

TASK SWITCHING EATS PRODUCTIVITY

9.5mins

Average time to get back into a productive workflow after switching between apps (Workgeist 2021)



We've talked about the disorientation to come and the skills you will need next. Now we're going to talk about the power of curiosity, which came up repeatedly in our conversations with senior leaders.

While not a skill, your curiosity can be honed.

The Curious Leader

In 2025, curiosity isn't just a valuable asset but also a critical necessity for strong leadership.

It's The Curious Leader who'll be best equipped to make sense of the mess and lead through it.

Curious Leaders ask good questions

In a disorienting time, figuring out the way forward starts with asking the right questions. Model inquisitiveness in your interactions with people across your organisation. Every exchange is a learning opportunity. *Develop the habit* of asking probing, open-ended questions that stimulate deeper thinking and discussion.

Curious Leaders experiment

Nurture and promote experimentation. Curious Leaders recognise and reward innovative ideas and efforts—even if they don't always succeed. *Develop the habit* of being open to new approaches and exploring the opportunities failure can present.

Curious Leaders are omnivorous

Take an interest in the past and in the future; in your immediate domain and in more peripheral areas. Keep your mind fresh by feeding it a mix of topics and formats. *Develop the habit* of broad consumption across books, articles, podcasts, newsletters, conferences. Encourage your team to do likewise.

Curious Leaders build relationships

You already know your employees, colleagues and customers. Try going beyond your everyday circle. As you extend your network, make sure you listen to the different ideas and perspectives of new people you meet. *Develop the habit* of surrounding yourself with a diversity of thinking, backgrounds and expertise.

Curious Leaders are lifelong learners

Staying on top of shifts and ahead of technology means actively seeking out new knowledge and experiences. Curious Leaders bring this spirit to their organisation and help their teams grow. *Develop the habit* of making time for personal and professional enrichment. Foster the development of others. By reading this report, you've already made a solid start! Next comes mastering the skills.

“Given the changing environment, and developments in technology, leaders need to be very curious, and create a place where it is safe to try things without fear of failure.”

The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull AC
29th Prime Minister of Australia



“Remain curious. Always be open for new things, for new trends, meeting people and listening to them with an open mind. As leaders, not taking for granted that what we have learnt throughout a long career is necessarily going to be valid two or five years from now.”

Morten Wierod
CEO, ABB

“It's almost more about mindset than skills. It's about having the curiosity, not having a fixed mindset, being adaptable, agile, open to developments that you then need to get on top of.”

Cosima Marriner
Managing Editor,
The Australian Financial Review

“Leaders are responsible for creating environments that are open to new ideas –creating environments that are more porous to new ideas. Many organisations are insular, but given the speed of information flows today, it is essential that we are all much more open and having an attitude of continual learning.”

David Thodey AO, FTSE
Chancellor, The University of Sydney



“We should have cultures of curiosity in which people are able to ask, why do we do this? Because curious people won't accept that something's done just because everyone does it.”

Dr Simon Longstaff AO
Executive Director, The Ethics Centre

“As a leader you have to be curious and passionate about many things, always learning.”

Ferran Adrià
Former Head Chef, El Bulli

“Leaders need curiosity –we all need to be continually learning, sensing, gaining new skills, and trying to work out what seems like a reasonable course of action in an uncertain, ambiguous world.”

Adam Powick
CEO, Deloitte Australia

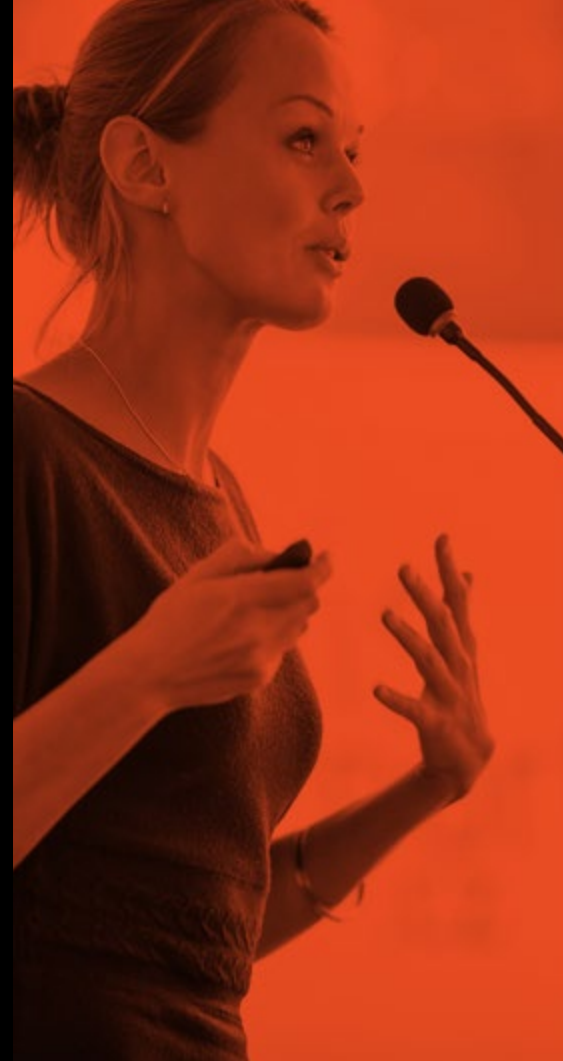




“Leaders will be required to make technology decisions that will then impact communities or employees in ways that they don't necessarily understand or foresee. From time to time, leaders will need to touch some grass, go deep and learn new stuff. This requires humility and curiosity.”

Nick Leeder

Vice President, Customer Solutions,
Google APAC



“Deep listening is essential. How do you know where you are going if you don't know where you are?”

Professor Mark Scott AO

Vice-Chancellor and President,
The University of Sydney

“How people behave is essential: you have to be open and engaged and listen, be empowering other people in the room, rather than just yourself.”

Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM

Australian Public Service Commissioner

“To make sure team members can thrive in our organisation in the future, we need to have a constant flow of creativity coming in to us, we need to be constantly refuelled and inspired. We need to be better at that sort of mental disruption of learning and unlearning.”

Rene Redzepi

Chef & Co-Owner, Noma

“Leaders in government, business or academia must cultivate a multidisciplinary mindset. We should really remain generalists and curious about many things.”

Rafał Kierzenkowski

Head of the Strategic Foresight Unit,
Office of the Secretary-General, OECD

“In situations of higher uncertainty, leaders need to be comfortable with and embrace ‘I don't know’ and ‘I changed my mind’.”

Alison Deans

Chair, Cochlear

One last thing

The next 10 years will be the most disorienting of your career. They could also become the most impactful. To stay ahead as a leader, you'll need to learn new skills and continue nurturing your curiosity. This final thing, about changing your mind, will help you with both.

In our last public conversation, Danny Kahneman (my intellectual hero), said that what he was proudest of and enjoyed most was changing his mind:

"The occasion for changing your mind is always when you find that you've been wrong. And for me, this is a real joy, finding that I've been wrong, because that discovery means that I've learned something. And it's those failures, those challenges, that make work exciting."

Danny, who died in March, received almost every award possible for a psychologist. And an economist. Most notably, he was awarded the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics. It's hard to think of any psychologist whose work has influenced so many different fields. But I will remember him most for teaching me that the big accomplishments of one's life are also in how we do things: the joy of finding out you're wrong and then changing your mind.

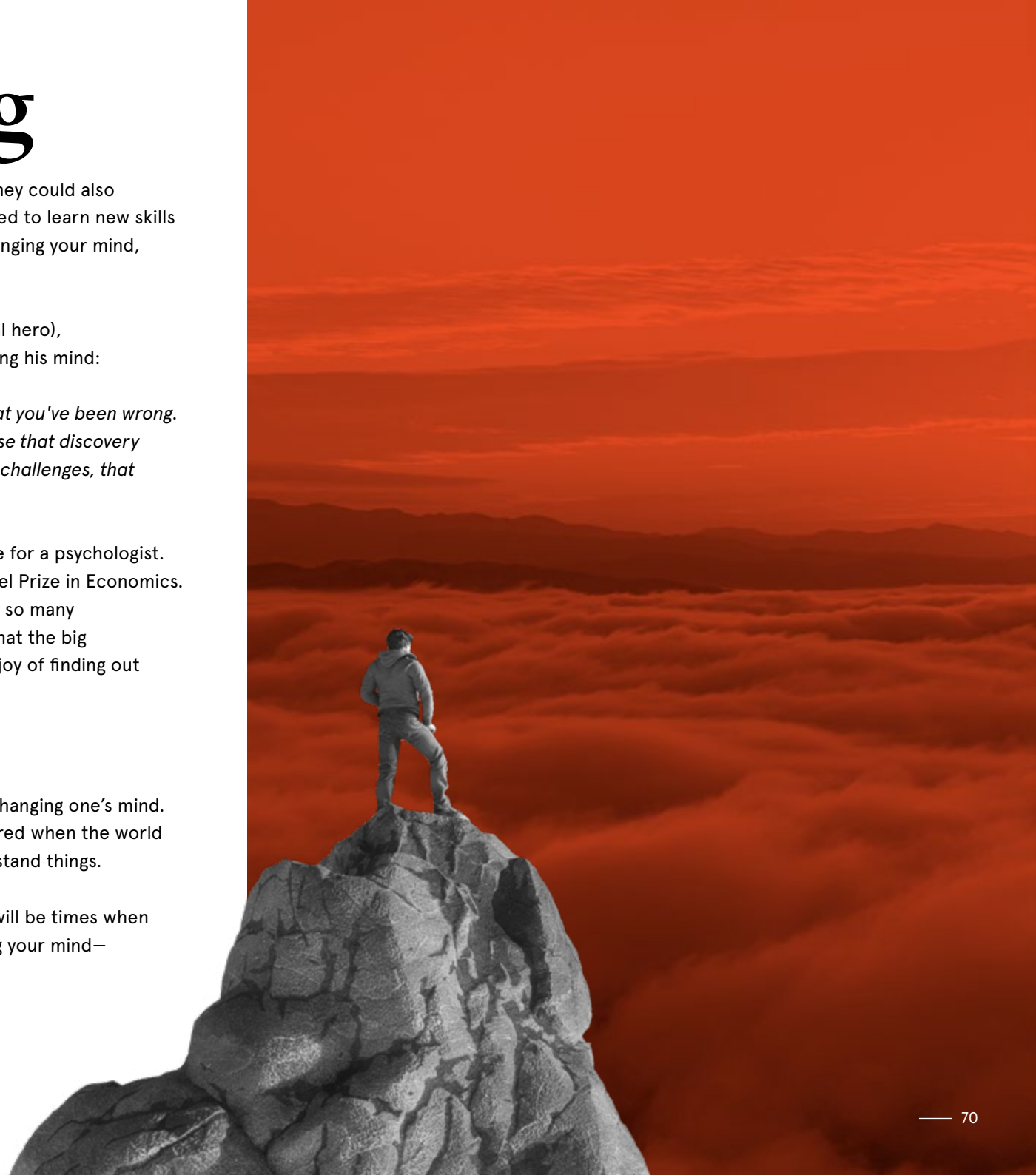
It's great life advice but also great leadership advice.

In life and in business (schools), there's very little emphasis on changing one's mind. There's almost a stigma attached to it, which leaves us unprepared when the world changes or when we make research advances and better understand things.

We face a decade of disorientation. A messy future. And there will be times when you'll be wrong. I hope you'll find joy and excitement in changing your mind—it'll help you learn, grow and make discoveries. So...

What will you change your mind about?

- Sandra



It takes a village to build a report.

About Sydney Executive Plus, a strategic initiative of The University of Sydney Business School

We're part of Australia's most iconic,
global top 20 university.

We're reimagining executive learning:
digital-first, one sprint at a time.

We're focused on cutting-edge
and emerging areas around
disruption and leadership.

We're collaborative: co-designing
and delivering each sprint alongside
best-in-class industry partners.

We're rigorous and practical
—using case studies, insights,
strategies and stories from the
field to make knowledge tangible.

We're here to give you the skills
you need to lead through anything.

We're Sydney Executive Plus.

Thanks to all the villagers who helped bring
The 2025 Skills Horizon report to life. The senior
leaders, featured and not, who were generous
enough to share their wisdom and insight with us.
The data-wranglers and stat-seekers.
The creative craftspeople who put the hard
yards into making it pretty and making it sound
good. Our respective caffeine purveyors. And the
members of our wider team who made us laugh
when we were stressed, offered us mints when
we needed to stay fresh, gave things a once-over
when our minds were weary.

In particular, we'd like to thank our marvellous
multidisciplinary team, who collaborated closely
on this report: Dan Steiner, Anderson Chang,
Thy Mai, Sven Eric Prüß, Fanny Burdin-Egloffé, as
well as the wider Sydney Executive Plus team and
interns. Thanks also to the CEMS Global Alliance.

Thank you all!



Dr Sandra Peter



Dr Kai Riemer



Dr Pat Norman

References

ABS 2023: Working arrangements, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 13 Dec 2023: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/working-arrangements/latest-release>

AI Group 2024: CEO Expectations Survey, Australian Industry Outlook for 2024, Australian Industry Group, Jan 2024: <https://www.aigroup.com.au/globalassets/news/reports/2024/research-and-economics/ai-group-australian-industry-outlook-for-2024.pdf>

AWS 2024: AI skills could boost salaries and accelerate career growth for workers in Australia, Amazon Web Services, 20 Mar 2024: <https://aboutamazon.com.au/news/aws/digital-ai-skills-report-australia-2024>

BCG 2023: Coming to Grips with Corporate Climate Risk, Boston Consulting Group, 20 Nov 2023: <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2023/coming-to-grips-with-corporate-climate-risk>

CIO 2024: 3 areas where gen AI improves productivity – until its limits are exceeded, CIO Magazine, 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.cio.com/article/1312721/3-areas-where-gen-ai-improves-productivity-until-its-limits-are-exceeded.html>

Economist 2022: How modern executives are different from their forebears, The Economist, 16 Jun 2022: <https://www.economist.com/business/2022/06/16/how-modern-executives-are-different-from-their-forebears>

Economist 2024: Why young men and women are drifting apart, The Economist, 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women>

ESGNews 2023: Global ESG Regulation Increases by 155% Over the Past Decade, ESG News, 20 Jun 2023: <https://esgnews.com/global-esg-regulation-increases-by-155-over-the-past-decade/>

Gallup 2023: State of the Global Workplace, Gallup: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

GSAM 2023: The US Inflation Reduction Act is driving clean-energy investment one year in, Goldman Sachs Asset Management, 31 Oct 2023: <https://www.gsam.com/content/gsam/us/en/institutions/market-insights/gsam-insights/perspectives/2023/us-inflation-reduction-act-is-driving-clean-energy-investment-one-year-in.html>

Harvard 2024: The Atlas of Economic Complexity, Harvard Growth Lab, 2024: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/>

HBR 2024: How Companies Should Weigh In on a Controversy, Harvard Business Review, Mar-Apr 2024: <https://hbr.org/2024/03/how-companies-should-weigh-in-on-a-controversy>

IEA 2024: Renewables 2023: Analysis and forecasts to 2028, International Energy Agency, Jan 2024, <https://www.iea.org/reports/renewables-2023>

Jama 2023: Comparing Physician and Artificial Intelligence Chatbot Responses to Patient Questions Posted to a Public Social Media Forum, JAMA Internal Medicine, 28 Apr 2023: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/article-abstract/2804309>

Lowy 2024: Southeast Asia's green energy transition hampered by significant decline in climate development finance, Lowy Institute, 16 Jun 2024: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/southeast-asia-s-green-energy-transition-hampered-significant-decline-climate-development-finance>

MHA 2022: Mind the Workplace 2022 Report: Employer Responsibility to Employer Mental Health, Mental Health America, Feb 2022: https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/MTW_Report_2022.pdf

Microsoft 2023: Work Trend Index: Annual Report, Microsoft, 9 May 2023: https://assets-c4akfrf5b4d3f4b7.z01.azurefd.net/assets/2023/09/e3227681-b882-4050-b201-a631431ad2a5-WTI_Will_AI_Fix_Work_060723.pdf

NBER 2024: The Macroeconomic Impact of Climate Change: Global vs. Local Temperature, National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2024: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w32450>

Pew 2024: Satisfaction with democracy has declined in recent years in high-income nations, Pew Research Center, 18 Jun 2024: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/18/satisfaction-with-democracy-has-declined-in-recent-years-in-high-income-nations/>

Pham et al. 2023: TopicGPT - A prompt-based topic modeling framework. arXiv, 2 Nov 2023: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2311.01449>

Reuters 2023: U.S. and China race to shield secrets from quantum computers, Reuters Special Re-port, 14 Dec 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/us-china-tech-quantum>

Salesforce 2017: Special Report: The Impact of Equality and Values Driven Business, Salesforce Research, 2017: https://www.salesforce.com/content/dam/web/en_us/www/assets/pdf/datasheets/salesforce-research-2017-workplace-equality-and-values-report.pdf

Salesforce 2023: More than Half of Generative AI Adopters Use Unapproved Tools at Work, Salesforce, 15 Nov 2023: <https://www.salesforce.com/news/stories/ai-at-work-research/>

SIPRI 2024: Trends in World Military Expenditure 2023, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Apr 2024: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2404_fs_milex_2023.pdf

Statista 2024a: Cybercrime Expected To Skyrocket in Coming Years, Statista, 22 Feb 2024: <https://www.statista.com/chart/28878/expected-cost-of-cybercrime-until-2027/>

Statista 2024b: Spending on digital transformation technologies and services worldwide from 2017 to 2027, Statista, 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/870924/worldwide-digital-transformation-market-size/>

UN 2023: Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade 2023, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctab2024d1_en.pdf

UN 2024: For a livable climate: Net-zero commitments must be backed by credible action, United Nations, 2024: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition>

USSC 2023: Quantum technology: What's in it for Australia?, United States Studies Centre, 23 Oct 2023: <https://www.ussc.edu.au/quantum-technology-what-is-in-it-for-Australia>

WEF 2019: Towards a Reskilling Revolution: Industry-Led Action for the Future of Work World Economic Forum, 22 Jan 2019: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/towards-a-reskilling-revolution-industry-led-action-for-the-future-of-work/>

WEF 2023a: Scope 3 emissions are key to decarbonization – but what are they and how do we tackle them?, World Economic Forum, 19 Sep 2023: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/09/scope-3-emissions-are-key-to-decarbonization-but-what-are-they-and-how-do-we-tackle-them/>

WEF 2023b: Future of Jobs Report 2023, World Economic Forum, May 2023: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf

WEF 2023c: The world is heading for a 'quantum divide': here's why it matters, World Economic Forum, 18 Jan 2023: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/the-world-quantum-divide-why-it-matters-davos2023/>

WEF 2024a: The Global Risks Report 2024, World Economic Forum, Jan 2024: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2024.pdf

WEF 2024b: Cybersecurity is on the frontline of our AI future. Here's why, World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2024: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/01/cybersecurity-ai-frontline-artificial-intelligence/>

WEF 2024c: AI is changing the shape of leadership – how can business leaders prepare?, World Economic Forum, 10 May 2024: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/05/ai-is-changing-the-shape-of-leadership-how-can-business-leaders-prepare/>

WEF 2024d: Fostering Effective Energy Transition 2024, World Economic Forum, 19 Jun 2024: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/fostering-effective-energy-transition-2024/>

Workgeist 2021: Workgeist Report, Qatalog & Cornell University, 2021: <https://language.work/research/workgeist/>



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

**Sydney
Executive
Plus+**