



Match skills to tasks, not people to jobs

How changing your organisation design can help
you address talent shortages

How to move from a world where we match people to jobs to one where we match skills to tasks

In their recent [blog](#), Robert Bolton and Mark Essex set out the case for rethinking organisation design from outdated role specifications and instead putting more emphasis on the skills people have – a skills-led approach.

Why outdated? It comes down to the idea of a fixed job and whether this is relevant for a modern enterprise. Practically, it's not about 'either-or' but we should certainly look to an 'and-both' approach.

Throughout mature economies we are seeing fundamental shifts in the labour market as a result of discoveries we cannot un-make. And this isn't going to stabilise quickly, either to how things were in 2019 or a new normal. The World Economic Forum states that the next few years will be characterised by constant churn in the employment market: roles being created, some of them never existed before, others being removed, as well as humans and machines working together a lot more. On top of this is the 'atomisation' of work into its component tasks: the 100-year life, the rise of hybrid working, the emergence of talent marketplaces and the growth of contingent working.

For organisations seeking to address skills needs there are broadly six approaches they can take:



Buy

Offer more competitive salaries to attract new talent



Bind

Retaining your existing talent



Borrow

Using a contingent workforce such as a freelancer, consultant or independent contractor



Build

Creating 'new' talent by upskilling existing talent from within



Bot

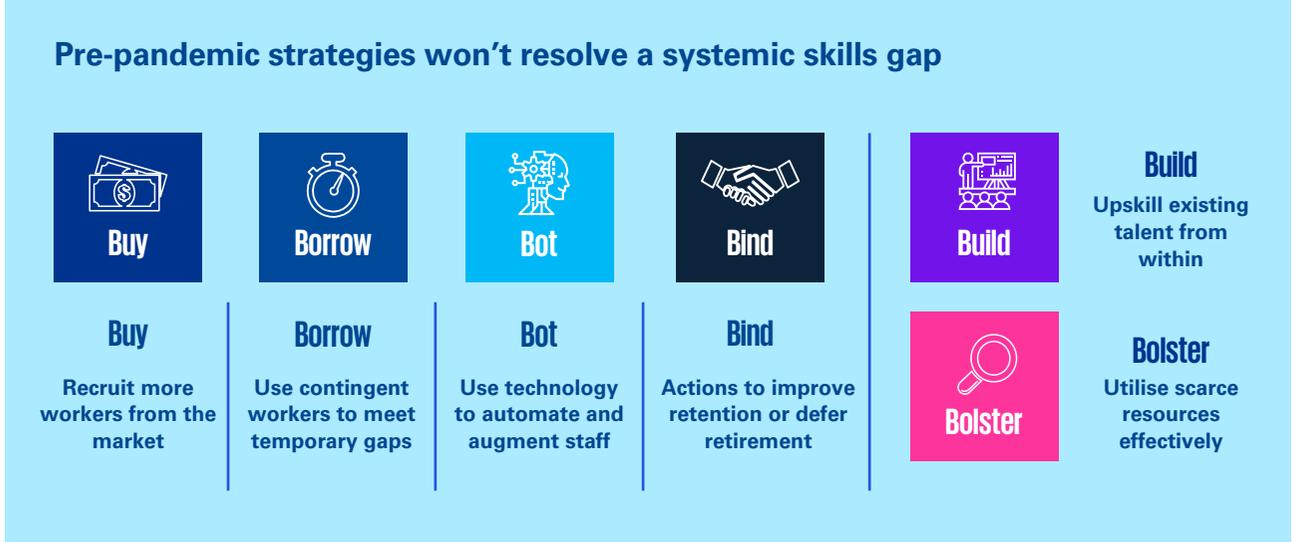
Using technology to automate or augment your workforce



Bolster

Removing delegable aspects from people with scarce in-demand skills and back-filling with other resources





Now, in the very different pre-2019 world, the easiest answer would have most likely been to “Buy”. But in the systemic shortages we face in the 2022 labour market, those trying to buy talent are frequently outbid by competitors. And it is small comfort if you think the overbidder is over-paying. Borrow – using contingent labour – is also getting tough – in a systemic shortage the contractor market is being bid up by those who can’t recruit permanent staff.

Bot – increasing automation is a great strategy but we know that there are limits to the tasks which can be automated.

Bind is a good move too. Your existing staff don’t need to be recruited, onboarded. They already live your values and have organisational knowledge. But as anyone who’s been on the wrong end of a golden hello will tell you, your existing staff can be tempted away by some eye-watering offers.

Which leaves Build and Bolster. Businesses need to look at what’s available to them in their existing workforce, and in the talent market, and find a solution that meets their needs through a mix of flexible sourcing as well as reskilling of the existing talent they have.

The benefits of the skills-led approach

Roles today are moving too fast for formalised job descriptions and so focusing on skills over jobs provides the agility needed to maintain productivity, while also adapting to technology-led change. And technology can be harnessed to keep pace by helping you build skills ontologies, competency frameworks and skills taxonomies which are flexible and adaptable.

And that brings benefits for employees too. Skills-led organisation design can bring variety to work, while also focusing on skills team members can develop and practise to pursue a promising and fulfilling career path within your organisation.

We have seen in our HR [Pathfinders](#) research that organisations who develop a strong skills-led approach are gaining ground over their competitors. Organisations who take an integrated approach to Workforce Shaping, and are responsive to their external talent environment, are excelling in their strategic ambitions. They are getting the balance right in designing organisations, roles and resourcing functions which major on skills matched to tasks, provide sufficient flexibility, and meet the external circumstances of an under-supplied talent market.

By 2025, the World Economic Forum anticipates:

43% of companies will reduce their workforce

41% will expand their contractor base

34% will expand their workforce

70% of employers will offer reskilling

50% of workers whose jobs are displaced, companies hope to redeploy



Significant changes to the location of where work gets done

50-50

work mix between machines and humans

We believe all of these will add up to significant job churn across sectors and industries. Our research of HR [Pathfinders](#) find those top 10% of organisations in this field are challenging existing approaches to talent management and embracing a new 'total workforce' philosophy that fills talent gaps, going beyond the high-performers, and focusing on everyone for both current and future skill needs. They are experimenting with new ways of working and emerging technologies to help employees adapt to a disrupted reality, while rethinking preconceived notions of how work gets done to shape the workforce of the future.

Source: World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2020

Seven steps to success



How KPMG can help

We help our clients to:



Assess an organisation or function's current skills and capabilities, providing guidance on what they will need to meet their current Target Operating Model, and implementing a process to address the skills and capability gaps.



Build a capability for hypothesis modelling, that helps you think about what skills you are going to need in the future based on various external and internal factors.



Provide guidance on how to adopt an agile operating model that assigns people to tasks based on their skills requirements, rather than reporting lines.



We leverage our alliances with orgvue and Simply Get Results to provide leading-edge insight and analytical software to help leaders make better decisions about their workforce.



We create the best talent marketplace in terms of systems, digital platforms and processes, where organisations provide – and workers find – opportunities most relevant to their mutual benefit and success.

We have helped clients in a range of sectors, sizes, ownership structures. And we've helped at all levels of skill – from recruiting entry level talent through to acquiring specialist professional and leadership skills.



Case studies

IT specialists - take a red pen to the person spec

Our client based in the Midlands was finding it gradually harder to fill vacancies in their IT function. London employers were offering significant wage premiums to staff, happy to have them work remotely. 2019 job descriptions were attracting fewer and fewer applicants and the organisation was carrying vacancies for months. We mapped out their person specifications and analysed the skills demanded. We compared those skills to the thousands of CVs available in their labour market and to the skills demanded by other employers also trying to recruit.

We found a number of opportunities to improve the person spec to better match the labour market:

Stop demanding skills the market doesn't offer

Information security was really important to our client and listed as an essential skill. But it ranked number 60 in the list of skills candidates put on their CVs. That was putting off otherwise well-qualified candidates when it is something the organisation could consider training during onboarding.

That isn't free, but when compared to the cost of carrying a vacancy, rethinking the approach to gaining that skill – to build not buy – had high potential.

What was missing?

Another skill which was hard to acquire was systems architecture. By including it as an essential feature of the developer person spec the client was missing out on candidates describing themselves as "systems architects" who wanted to focus on that aspect of the work and who were put off by other aspects of the person spec. Competitor employers were advertising for systems architects not "developer – architect hybrids". One solution was for our client to reshape the teams to create dedicated roles, and take out systems architecture from the general developer spec. This reshaping provided an opportunity to tap into skills which otherwise might have bypassed their ads. They reshaped their organisation to match the skills market.

Identify the target market, and tailor the job ads

Our client was facing significant difficulties recruiting social care workers. The system is constrained on what it can afford to pay and care homes are facing 30% churn in staff. By definition, care is a human-to-human activity; not much of the work can be done remotely. Together with the wages offered, this leads to a constrained catchment area and our client was facing a systemic shortage of care skills; the answer was to encourage new entrants to the system. That means attracting those who currently don't participate in the labour market or switchers from alternative sectors and careers.

We analysed thousands of CVs to understand where people had previously switched careers to social care. By analysing the previous roles of social carer CVs we identified that carers came from retail, hospitality sectors with relevant transferable skills. This informed our client in where to target recruitment effort.

We analysed the ads themselves in the light of the target market. What would appeal to those currently out of work or in a different sector? We noticed that the ads used a lot of jargon and complicated language.

We ran a readability test and this revealed that the language used was compatible with a graduate level of education even though the roles typically required level 2 qualifications. This puts candidates off who worry that the role is "not for them", particularly those with lower self-esteem after a period of unemployment.

The ads also referred to skills which could be relatively easily trained – in a matter of days – as essential. And they included phrases such as "two years care experience desirable". This is not helpful if we are actively seeking career switchers.

We also analysed the careers people went on to do after working as care assistants and we discovered people had moved on to management roles, and nursing roles demonstrating wage progression. Providing this information helps careers advisors to show a compelling future and growth to those candidates who wanted to develop future skills.

By carefully considering which skills were available in the target audience of career switchers, which were transferable and which we could build our client increased their pool of potential recruits.

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