

# Preparing Front-line Workers for Organizational Change

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## Future work is fundamentally changing. How can we help our employees keep up?

In our current digital revolution, adapting to change is less about management than it is about building momentum. In large-scale digitalization, momentum relies upon both the speed of technology adoption and how quickly a massive workforce can evolve. Given the scale of these challenges, how businesses will evolve the workforce for the future is a critical question.

As businesses begin to break down industry silos and participate in emerging business ecosystems, neither technology solutions nor re-skilling will be enough to succeed. With platform-based business models on the rise, the potential for new value lies in the new ways that people interact with one another through digital touchpoints. In these customer-centric business models, the front-line worker becomes an essential point of contact for the customer. And for many businesses, front-line workers constitute the bulk of ecosystem participants.

Leaders must bring the workforce into the future and respond more adeptly to customer insights. By building new work design, capabilities, and ecosystem relationships, businesses can empower front-line workers to realize and enact digitally transformative practices where they are most impactful.

## Reskilling is dominating the conversation today – but is it enough?

If businesses are to focus beyond skills, they need new work design to influence work practices that people enact every day. Skills in isolation are too tactical to develop the momentum that is required for organizational change.

Today, long-term operational strategies must address several factors that impact the very nature of jobs and roles: evolving business models, talent needs according to growth objectives, automation in future work, and emerging employment contracts. Tomorrow, those strategies must adapt and incorporate forthcoming impacts to jobs as business models mature and new relationships form.

The task of designing new ways of work cannot be reduced to merely finding new people or catching up on new skills. Changes to work, horizontally across organizations, will become a constant condition. Consequentially, business leaders should consider the following:

- Every shift in new business models will usher in shifts in work design, so plan accordingly, even iteratively, and ask tough questions about how jobs themselves will change.
- In the future state, expectations for workers will expand beyond skillset toward work practices and ways of working. For example, what individuals know will have less organizational potential than how they learn. How will leaders cultivate the latter?
- As workers partner with machines more and more, how people get jobs done cannot be a reactive response. New work has to anticipate a blended human-machine workforce.
- Employees will be able to choose from an array of different work arrangements that suit them personally (e.g. contract work, gigs, freelance), and alternative employment will fundamentally change the relationship with employers.

So what do businesses cultivate through work design if not skills?

Organizations should focus on common abilities and behaviors to prepare the front-line workforce for change

Organizational capabilities become foundational to executing business strategy and empowering successful participation in new business ecosystems. They enable the relationships and experiences that put platforms into operation. **Below are a few examples of capabilities that the future front-line workforce will need to cultivate now, as change becomes the new norm.**

1

CONTINUAL LEARNING  
AND FUTURE ADAPTABILITY

2

SUPERIOR  
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

3

COLLABORATIVE CROSS-  
DISCIPLINARY TEAM



Capability 1

## CONTINUAL LEARNING AND FUTURE ADAPTABILITY

We foresee a dramatic shift in the workforce as roles, jobs, and partnerships are redefined to meet organizational goals and objectives. Resilience and flexibility will need to reside in the hands of workers while organizations provide the necessary tools and capabilities to enable transformation.

### Desired behaviors and practices:

- Learning collaboratively through peer-to-peer value exchange
- Moving from transaction-based practices to reasoning and problem solving
- Analyzing information to address work-related issues
- Pursuing the changing nature of work with emerging digital counterparts

### Value realized by the business:

- ☑ Encouraging purposeful participation
- ☑ Driving individual accountability and ownership
- ☑ Building organizational resiliency

Capability 2

## SUPERIOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Many organizations are shifting priorities, putting the customer in the center of their business model. As a result, the degree of separation between front-line workers and the customer is closing. Front-line workers need to embrace their new role in building and enabling customer experiences for the long term.

### Desired behaviors and practices:

- Gathering new customer insights and contributing to organizational knowledge
- Providing a street-level view of customers and their needs
- Creating new relationships beyond traditional services that focus on closing the gaps for customers

### Value realized by the business:

- ☑ Strengthen customer loyalty
- ☑ Generate new modes of revenue
- ☑ Enable customer choices

## COLLABORATIVE CROSS-DISCIPLINARY TEAM

As organizations move towards nimble and open structures, they open the channels for front-line workers to collaborate, interact, and connect with other workers across the business ecosystem in purposeful ways. Empowering front-line workers to engage in real-time experimentation, innovation, and problem-solving enables the design of great experience and solutions for the organization.

### Desired behaviors and practices:

- Problem solving happens with multi-disciplinary teams
- Day-to-day decisioning guides people to good outcomes in daily work
- Shifting focus to creativity and critical thinking to develop new ideas and find solutions

### Value realized by the business:

- ✓ Continual feedback as a byproduct of interaction
- ✓ Diversity of thought and ideas
- ✓ Experimentation and innovation as cultural norms

## Conclusion

Given the fundamental restructuring of business ecosystems around a customer core, the workforce of the future will be virtually unrecognizable. As work adapts toward blended roles, the idea of “front-line workers” will become obsolete. The insight-based value that workers contribute will pervade the customer journey.

### LEARN HOW TO TRANSFORM YOUR ORGANIZATION

LDS helps market leaders realize their most important business and people strategies through technological innovation. [www.LDS.com](http://www.LDS.com)

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