Digital Skills in the Workforce
Ci Virtual Roundtable – Wednesday, 20 March 2019

Participants came together from diverse industries and countries to explore drivers of change and resulting employee skills needs. This followed a previous Roundtable on technology disruption (see graphic).

PART 1: INSIGHT

Organisations shared their technology focus:

- Estimated pace of change in skills varied between 'slight' to 'rapid/dynamic' (the majority), partly depending on sector.

- Multiple drivers (e.g. customer behaviour, business models innovation, new tech) are creating fast, unpredictable change.

- Examples included open banking, streamlining legal services, connected devices, renewable energy…

- Changing skill requirements are not just technological. Participants mentioned culture and ways of working, including agile project management.

- Challenges around geographical differences, and motivating people with 'legacy skills'.

PART 2: INNOVATION

Today's provocateur was Leyla Yildirim, Chief Strategy Officer for PwC Channel Islands.

Leyla described the most recent annual global PwC survey of CEOs. This shows a dramatic increase in concern over the availability of skills – seen as a significant threat to growth. Amongst CEOs, 'almost every conversation was about upskilling'. Companies are reversing the decline in L&D budgets. For example, AT&T is investing $1bn in its 'Future Ready' programme.

Communication
- Where technology enables workers to exchange information and collaborate.

Digitisation
- Where technology turns physical goods and knowledge into a digital kind that can be shared and replicated.

Disintermediation
- Where technology allows workers to connect directly with consumers and clients.

Automation
- Where technology completes tasks or changes who is responsible for completing them.

Unfortunately many skills initiatives fail, as revealed in this HBR article. It requires organisational design, management structure, culture and incentives to be right.

Going digital is top of mind for PwC and their clients. Their focus is not only on technology disruption, but how we think about becoming more agile, data-driven, customer-centric, and innovative. There was agreement about the need to equip people with a continual learning attitude for a complete organisational shift.

PART 3: IMPACT

What does it take to equip workers in response to changes in technology? PwC's Digital Upskilling Platform has many facets:

- 90% adoption was achieved through senior commitment and a group incentive of several days' holiday.

- Digital Fitness App, a Digital Accelerator programme, personal trainers for senior members of the firm are just 3 of the initiatives supporting employees to stay digitally relevant.

- Extraction of rich data has led to next phase as they continue momentum.

Other challenges, learning and successes from the group included:

- The challenge of data on current workforce skills and quantified future requirements when the target is ever-shifting.

- Digital skills (e.g. data science) are so sought-after that most employers are seeking to 'upskill' the existing workforce.

- Tactics include social incentives (sharing self-assessments), experts as mentors, and open learning platforms e.g. Coursera.