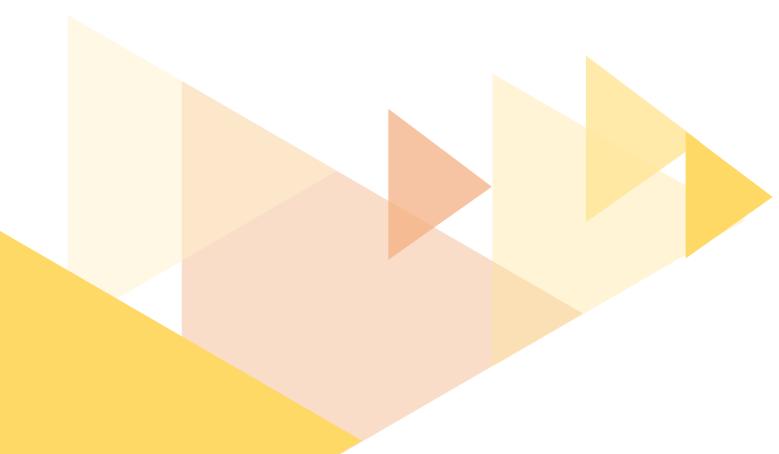


**Post-Session Notes on** 

# **FUTURE OF WORK:**

Shifts in the Workforce, Workplace & Workday

7<sup>th</sup> Edition of the QED Changemaker Series On 27 & 28 May 2021





## **ABOUT POST-SESSION NOTES**

These notes are a **15-minute read**, and contain **3 main segments** on the Future Workforce, Workplace and Workday, respectively.

## **ABOUT QED'S CHANGEMAKER SERIES**

The Changemaker Series by QED Consulting brings together senior management and leadership from enterprise and governmental organisations, to engage in dialogue and discussion around critical industry issues in an intimate closed-door setting. The session aims to both challenge and chart the future for their respective industries and organisations, and empower change for the better.

Supported by The Adecco Group and Microsoft Singapore, this 7th edition of QED Changemaker Series was held virtually in view of the COVID-19 situation and brought together 58 pre-eminent industry leaders to exchange views and share candid opinions and personal insights about the Future of Work. The session discussion on "Future of Work – Shifts in the Workforce, Workplace and Workday" focused on the actionable steps that leaders can take to operationalise and realise their ideal Future of Work.

The event (including these post-session notes) adheres to the <u>Chatham House Rule</u>. Beyond the information received at the session, no identities nor affiliations to the attendees have been included in these notes.

## **OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS**

For this edition of the QED Changemaker Series: Future of Work – Shifts in the Workforce, Workplace and Workday, QED Consulting had the pleasure of having The Adecco Group and Microsoft Singapore as strategic partners for the event.

## **ABOUT THE ADECCO GROUP**



#### THE ADECCO GROUP

The Adecco Group is the world's leading HR solutions company. We believe in making the future work for everyone, and every day enable more than 3.5 million careers.

We skill, develop, and hire talent in 60 countries, enabling organisations to embrace the future of work. As a Fortune Global 500 company, we lead by example, creating shared value that fuels economies and builds better societies.

Our culture of inclusivity, entrepreneurship and teamwork empowers our 35,000 employees. We are proud to have been consistently ranked one of the 'World's Best Workplaces' by Great Place to Work®.

The Adecco Group AG is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland (ISIN: CH0012138605) and listed on the SIX Swiss Exchange (ADEN). The Group is powered by three global business units: Adecco, Talent Solutions and Modis.

## MICROSOFT SINGAPORE



Microsoft enables digital transformation for the era of an intelligent cloud and an intelligent edge. Its mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.

## **ABOUT QED CONSULTING**

QED Consulting brings together the best senior minds from Asia to collectively solve challenging and complex digital, marketing, and communications issues on-demand. With this vision, we formed a company of Senior Management Executives to change how organisations can grow their businesses.

To find out more, visit <a href="http://www.ged.sg">http://www.ged.sg</a>.

## LEGAL DISCLAIMERS

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the participating leaders, and do necessarily reflect the opinions, policy, or recommendations of QED Consulting.

**Terms of use:** This publication may be reproduced electronically or in print, and used in discussions on radio and television, with prior written permission obtained from QED Consulting and due credit given to the company. Please contact <a href="mailto:info@ged.sg">info@ged.sg</a> for further editorial queries.

**Reporting Errors:** Should there be any errors found in these post-session notes, please highlight them to info@ged.sg

# TOPIC OF FOCUS – FUTURE OF WORK

There have been many discussions surrounding the key concepts on the Future of Work even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the current circumstances, there is a need to graduate discussions from being conceptual to operational in nature.

Unlike the usual approach that often covers Automation and AI, the discussions of this session bring the attention back to the heart of the matter – The Human Capital. Without humans, there will not be much of a future of work worth discussing about.

The discussions detailed in these post-session notes are focused on realising and operationalising the Future of Work. This includes approaches, actionables, case studies, and examples from organisations or industry experiences.



ABOUT POST-SESSION NOTES	2
A DOLLT OFFIC CHANGENALVED CERIES	
ABOUT QED'S CHANGEMAKER SERIES	2
OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS	3
ABOUT QED CONSULTING	1
ABOUT QED CONSOLTING	······
	_
LEGAL DISCLAIMERS	4
TOPIC OF FOCUS	5
SESSION NOTES:	7
PART 1 OF 3 – THE FUTURE OF WORKFORCE	-
SUMMARY OF THE FUTURE OF WORKFORCE (PART 1)	
TAPPING INTO GLOBAL TALENT	
GIG AND GEN Z WORKERS	_
BUILDING TRUST WITH PEOPLE YOU HAVE NEVER MET	
WHITE-COLLAR VS BLUE-COLLAR WORK	
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE	
NECESSARY SKILLS FOR A RESILIENT WORKFORCE	
KAIZEN – CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	
Part 2 of 3 – The Future Workday	11
SUMMARY OF THE FUTURE WORKDAY (PART 2)	11
WELLBEING AND WELLNESS	12
Workday Structure	12
FOCUS ON TASK-ORIENTED	13
LEAVE, COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS	
BRIDGING FUN INTO THE WORKDAY	14
PART 3 OF 3 – THE FUTURE WORKPLACE	
SUMMARY OF THE FUTURE WORKPLACE (PART 3)	
NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL FUTURE WORKPLACE	
In Lieu of Cubicle Bonding	1/
APPENDIX	18
Attendee Profile	10
ATTENDEE PROFILE	
ATTENDEED JURVET REJULIS	



# **SESSION NOTES:**

Part 1 of 3 – The Future of Workforce

## Summary of The Future Workforce (Part 1)

- 1. Through technology, talent crowdsourcing is now possible, with both employers and employees alike not being bound geographically. Employers must find ways to continue sending their workers outstation so that they can remain competitive on the global stage.
- 2. With a dispersed workforce, organisations need to shift from a control culture to one of trusting and empowering staff as long as the job gets done. For this to work, tasks and deliverables need to be very well-defined.
- Trust and organisational culture can be built up via online shared experiences, onboarding sessions, and even interview processes, which can be effective if designed well.
- 4. The future workforce may be transient workers, and organisations must prepare for this by understanding them (e.g. reverse mentoring) and offering them flexible HR options (i.e. contracts).
- 5. In up-skilling workers, leaders have to be mindful of emotional resistance and inertia, which might be overcome with a sense of purpose.
- 6. Given the speed of change, high-level leaders in organisations should take stock at closer intervals of whether they are on the right track.
- 7. Organisations must spend resources in protecting workers whose jobs may be disrupted in future by doing what they can today to avoid it.
- 8. The top skills or traits which are needed today are self-motivation, adaptability and flexibility.
- 9. Leaders increasingly need to be able to make decisions with little or no information.
- 10. Creating change in small incremental steps which respond to changes along the way may be more effective than one big transformation.

## **Tapping into Global Talent**

Technology is enabling **talent crowdsourcing**, like an Airbnb for talents, where workers from around the world who may be freelancers are selected, recruited and rated per project. Numerous instances were shared by the participants of working well with reliable talents from another country whom they had never physically met. While this means that Singaporeans will have to compete with international talent for jobs, it also presents an opportunity – not just for outsourcing, but also insourcing.

When it comes to developing talent, in-person interaction with people in different countries is more impactful and culturally valuable than just online collaboration. Organisations which want to ensure their Singaporean staff can compete on the global stage should find ways to continue sending their workers outstation, where possible.

## Gig and Gen Z Workers

Leaders must prepare for the fact that the contracts of old – where someone joins an organisation as a permanent staff working 40 hours per week – will likely go the way of the dinosaur. Workers in this gig economy might want to work for multiple organisations and "move on" after some time or have a side-gig. Organisations which find themselves increasingly reliant on such workers might have to think about issues like whether the other jobs would affect the worker's productivity or well-being, as he or she might have less downtime. **One possibility is to offer flexible contracts** where workers have the option to commit a certain number of hours to the organisation per week.

To try and understand Generation Z who will form the workforce of the future and whom few leaders understand today, **reverse mentoring** – whereby leaders tap on and learn from younger staff – might be effective.

#### Building Trust with People you have never met

**Leadership culture has to shift from a control culture to one of trusting and empowering staff.** This is likely one of the biggest challenges to new work models. The concern is also about loyalty, for as one participant pointed out, how much loyalty can staff have if the only interaction with the company is virtual? This "ceding" of control to staff and having to trust, engage and listen, might be culturally challenging and is a huge shift from just a generation or two ago, but is necessary.

Solutions to build trust include **carefully designing shared experiences**. One participant said that in his organisation, one such well-designed and organised session over a few days, led to all participants feeling like they really got to know each other very well.

Trust may be built up when the organisation shifts towards a task-oriented culture. Task deliverables and measurable goals will have to be clearly and carefully outlined and communicated.

In a situation where new hires might not meet the people they are working with, reporting to or supervising for months, and who might also be spread across countries, the **virtual onboarding process has to be very intentional, structured and well-planned** to build trust both ways. Sometimes this starts at the interview. In one case, a participant who had to undergo over 10 interviews – half of which were peer interviews – before joining an organisation said the rigour and spread of the interviews helped to prepare her to dive straight into working with people she already "knew" via Zoom.

#### White-Collar vs Blue-Collar Work

In the white-collar vs blue-collar debate (with white-collar work represented by knowledge workers in the knowledge economy who can work from home over computers, and blue-collar work represented by people who have to do their work physically like chefs) the concern is how the future of work should be designed for blue-collar work.

In shifting workers to higher-level work, the **change management is not just about teaching blue-collar workers how to use machines, but in managing emotions**. In one case, workers were anxious and concerned over issues like missing the colleagues they had been working with for 30 years or having to take different public transport to a new workplace. The leaders spent time listening to the workers, tried to provide solutions, and created group support networks.

Workers may also be very averse to having a conversation about how they can simplify their jobs which they have been doing for decades using machines, and shift to more value-added work. This is where authenticity and purpose become key. It might be good to lead the workers to think – Why are we doing this?

#### Preparing for the Future

To prepare for the future, organisations could **take stock of whether they are moving** in the right direction by reflecting at closer intervals. Instead of annual reviews, they could perhaps consider quarterly ones. This builds in regular information-gathering or thinking checkpoints.

This could take the form of a quarterly skills assessment, or an organisation could **look** at the roles which its workers perform, and categorise them according to risk of disruption over the next 5 - 10 years;

- Low (likely to be performed by a human),
- Medium (a mixture of machine and human), and
- High risk (likely to be performed by a machine)

Leaders then have to start thinking today, about how to prepare the workers in the high or medium-risk categories before their jobs disappear. This has to be led from the top, and business leaders should work on this with their HR departments, and even Board members who have a strategic view.

Similarly, when it comes to evaluation and appraisals, organisations should take stock at closer intervals in order to build a culture of development. **Instead of once or twice a year, evaluations and appraisals could be done every month**.

#### **Necessary Skills for a Resilient Workforce**

Organisations should invest in people with the skills of being **self-motivated**, **flexible**, **and adaptable**, as these are the workers who can deal with unknowns. These skills are what defines a resilient workforce. Many of the "experts" in a new field or who will be leading its development may not have even studied it in school but learnt along the way.

Likewise, in a world of constant grey, leaders need to be able to make possibly ambiguous decisions based on incomplete and potentially inaccurate information, and then respond in an agile manner when things shift once more. These soft "higher-level" skills which go beyond hard, technical, operational skills, are increasingly important for leadership today, as well as for workers on the ground, as they must adapt to technological incursion.

Given that up to 55 percent of meaning is conveyed through body language<sup>1</sup> an important skill for online meetings would be the ability to extract greater meaning from the usage of words and language nuances from other team members, and to be able to communicate better using words. Courses in neuro-linguistics programming, for instance, would help.

On the topic of re-skilling, while there may be a desire to search for a formal structure or tried-and-tested approach, it might not be possible in an age where few have trod the same path. Workers would have to get creative and curious in broadening their knowledge in adjacent and new fields. Leaders have a role to play too, in role-modelling, encouraging, and giving staff opportunities to do this. This is particularly important because it is not that there are no jobs – there are plenty of jobs, but there tends to be a mismatch with what workers can do.

## Kaizen – Continuous Improvement

In all attempts to transform, **proceeding in small steps may be more effective than taking one big leap.** One participant shared that in a project to shift manual processes online, ongoing improvements were made every year, and this created a mindset among the staff of constant change.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Based on Albert Mehrabian's research published in a book titled Silent Messages in 1971



# **SESSION NOTES:**

Part 2 of 3 – The Future Workday

## Summary of The Future Workday (Part 2)

- 1. To address the fatigue of workdays and meetings with seemingly no boundaries, mental breaks need to be intentionally built in.
- 2. Addressing pandemic stress should start from the top, by leaders sending clear signals that they understand and care.
- 3. Empathetic leaders can set aside time for no-agenda chit-chats with staff and share their own vulnerabilities.
- 4. It is important that validation and appreciation is shown online, via appreciation "buttons" or sessions to just give a pat on the back.
- 5. With a global workforce working across time zones, organisations need to set clear boundaries for "collaborative" hours which suit everyone. This can start from how leaders schedule their own diaries.
- 6. The workday may comprise working slots scattered throughout the day.
- 7. In a task-oriented culture, leaders, managers and supervisors have to be trained to assess their staff by deliverables rather than the number of hours they are at work.
- 8. The idea of a fixed number of days leave in a year may well become irrelevant.
- 9. With feedback from staff, compensation and benefits should be updated to reflect the fact that many people are working from home.
- 10. To bring fun into the workday, leaders can utilise devices like games, or run "themed" meetings.

#### **Wellbeing and Wellness**

The workday has become a lot more compressed, with numerous back-to-back meetings. As people work from home and with official working hours frequently extending beyond the usual, anger or frustration levels can potentially rise. We may need to intentionally **build in health and safety measures like mandatory breaks**; the same way those working at dangerous worksites wear hard hats and safety boots. Rather than blocking an hour-long meeting, it could be capped at 45 minutes with a 15-minute break for a quick recharge before moving on to the next work item. There could also be a designated "no meetings allowed" day, which could be set aside for quieter reflection or an opportunity for inspiration, or "no lunch meetings" so people can eat in peace.

While conversations on mental stress, depression and wellness are more established in countries like the UK and Australia even pre-Covid, it has not been a focus area in Asia and this needs to change, especially now. Within organisations, "it's OK to not be OK" needs to first be acknowledged by leaders.

A great way of doing this is to **send the signal from the top**. Termed 'empathetic leadership', leaders must be the ones to set the boundaries, for instance in telling people that they should not be working if they have family matters to attend to.

Leaders can also admit that they are vulnerable and are going through the same situations as their staff; for having to make decisions in an ambiguous age is incredibly stressful and exhausting. In some cases, senior executives were asked to share their personal experiences of going through the stresses and strains of the pandemic. This was a great encouragement to those down the line to open up and share.

Leaders can also check in more regularly with staff. One way is through **scheduled 30-minute no-agenda sessions**, **simply to ask "How are you doing?"** This shows care and empathy, to bring the human aspect into the workplace and appreciate what staff may be going through in their personal lives.

Virtual "hugs" could be built into the system. In one case, in a system which allows people to "see" where their co-workers are and contact them, they could also click on an **Appreciation Button** and send off an email which not only goes to the worker but also his or her boss. The button cost almost nothing and was easy to build into the system. Essentially, **public appreciation** of workers – which could be in the form of giving vouchers or certificates in recognition of service – goes a long way today.

#### **Workday Structure**

As the workforce of the future is globally sourced, the workday will not be 9-to-5. There may be a two-hour window of time where collaboration can take place across time zones, after which workers work at a time which suits them.

The fact is that regional teams in MNCs already had such workdays pre-Covid. The factors which made it work can be applied to the workday today:

- There were **clear no-go zones** (for instance, no meetings on Monday because it is Sunday in the US)
- Leaders who understood the round-the-clock nature of work would allow flexibility throughout the day
- Mature employees made sure they did their work
- Workers remained contactable
- Clarity in deliverables

Leaders who clearly structure their own workday according to their own preferences – for instance, 1-on-1 meetings in the morning, collaborations in the afternoon and global meetings in the evening to take time zones into account – set well-defined parameters for their workers, who may need to schedule meetings with them, to follow. Simply setting aside lunchtime also sends a signal about welfare.

#### Focus on Task-oriented

With WFH, the focus would be put on finishing tasks, rather than fulfilling a certain number of hours at work. Leaders will have to be **very clear on what the outcomes or deliverables should be, and internally tweak appraisal processes to reflect this.** This would mitigate the possibility of those coming in to work and who see their supervisors being judged more favourably than those who are home and are never seen. There are also tech tools available, such as from Microsoft, which can measure productivity of workers at home.

The challenge may lie in trying to pin down deliverables which are difficult to measure or quantify, and is an opportunity for organisations to think through the value of those roles.

Ultimately, with a task-oriented focus where people WFH, productivity and evaluation become critical. **Training of the managers and leaders** to understand and apply this to those they are supervising is equally important.

#### Leave, Compensation and Benefits

The **concept of "leave" may well diminish in importance and even become irrelevant.** Someone who has completed their work could potentially be allowed to take off for the day. How this progresses would depend on the maturity of organisations in being flexible, and individuals in being accountable.

With WFH, electricity and data bills will go up. While that is counterbalanced by transport savings, organisations should **engage their staff to get a better sense of how to update compensation**. In a one-off measure, an organisation paid for ergonomic chairs and tables for call centre staff who had to start answering calls from home.

## Bridging Fun into the Workday

To address the dreary loneliness of working alone at home, the element of fun and distraction could help. One participant played online games with her staff – like jigsaws, charades and more – once a week.

Another way could be to **give online meetings a fun theme**, such as Star Wars. Participants could come in dressed up to some extent, or with a special background. Rather than an hour-long meeting, 20 minutes of it becomes fun, as people talk about what inspired them, which lightens the mood and staff come away feeling like the company cares for them beyond just work.



# **SESSION NOTES:**

Part 3 of 3 – The Future Workplace

## Summary of The Future Workplace (Part 3)

- 1. There is no one-size-fits-all for the workplace of the future, which would differ for every organisation based on certain considerations.
- 2. With a hybrid model, organisations might turn to a hub-and-spoke model with smaller satellite offices where workers (not given dedicated work desks) come in to collaborate and network.
- 3. Office spaces must be well-designed and superior to the home environment, so workers are happy to come in.
- 4. Co-working spaces allow organisations greater flexibility to scale up and down on the number of people coming into the "office" instantly.
- 5. More resources must be spent on cybersecurity as home networks are not as well-protected as enterprise networks.
- 6. In an online "workplace", technology or professional facilitation could help to democratise the collaborative process, so even those who are quiet are heard.
- 7. The random and spontaneous nature of interaction in a physical workplace is important for relationship-building and even productivity. This could somewhat be replicated through no-agenda chit-chats.
- 8. Physical interaction is still important and every opportunity for physical teambonding should be seized upon.
- 9. New staff joining a company who have never, or seldom, meet their colleagues might be enthused by leaders placing the emphasis on how something is achieved, rather than just what is achieved.

#### No one-size-fits-all Future Workplace

There is no one-size-fits-all for the workplace of the future. How much of it is at home or in the office, which would be configured differently, depends on a few factors:

- Nature of work. Some jobs Michelin-starred chefs, surgeons, cleaners, waiters
  must be done onsite, especially if human physical interaction makes a difference to the customer experience.
- Extent of collaboration required, whether it is a solo task or a project which requires group work.
- Each worker has **different personal situations**, **personalities**, **and preferences**, which affect whether they do their best work at home, or in an office. Ideally, they should be given the flexibility to have some choice.
- **Security and confidentiality issues**, which would require workers to come into a secured office space.
- **Culture**. In some cultures, for instance in Japan, it is expected for workers to come into the office and leave after their bosses do.

In a hybrid scenario, one can expect the death of huge office spaces and the rise of smaller distributed or satellite offices, a hub-and-spoke model. What workers might get is not a dedicated workspace, but a dedicated locker and facilities for hot desking at a "site" office which is in their neighbourhood. While workers might focus on doing solo work at home, they would come into the office for specific networking, team-building or collaborative purposes. For this, organisations might want to stipulate "core days" in the middle of the week where workers must come in to at least nurture some semblance of organisational culture and have the option to WFH on Mondays and Fridays.

Organisations could look more into **utilising co-working spaces**, **which would allow them to scale up and down instantly.** They could "book" a few desks on usual days, where workers who want to get away from home come in to work, and bigger conference rooms on "get-together" days when the whole team comes in.

With WFH, **organisations need to invest in better cybersecurity**. This is an issue which was glossed over in 2020 due to the need to adapt quickly. Away from enterprise network protection, the personal devices of those working from home – especially for SME workers – may not be adequately protected and put systems at risk.

As workers have a choice between working from home or in the workplace, the workplace of the future will ideally be beautiful and inspirational – a superior option to the home environment.

Hybrid meetings – where some people are gathered in-person, and some are attending online – are an uneven experience. To try and even out the experience and avoid remote participants becoming "second-class citizens", organisations are deploying collaborative technologies such as whiteboarding and brainstorming

which can "democratise" the collaborative process. Professional facilitators can also be hired to conduct the meeting.

## In Lieu of Cubicle Bonding

Random, spontaneous office conversations which may have taken place over the coffee machine or water cooler in the pre-Covid workplace, or when people bumped into each other, build relationships, and may indirectly spark work ideas. It is important to intentionally replicate the experience in the virtual workplace. Some organisations did this by scheduling 30-minute one-on-one sessions with staff, with no work agenda, to replace the "walking by the cubicle" chats. They might also start formal meetings with informal chit-chat. Others intentionally encouraged their children to appear on screen, to show that it is OK for their staff to do the same.

In addition to online meets, leaders can also **leverage more informal "chat" platforms like WhatsApp** to engage staff on a personal level. A company used Facebook as its main engagement tool, sharing news about what different people in the company are doing.

In another team, its members actually set up a **separate "fly-on-the-wall" camera which showed them working at home**, even though they might not be having a meeting, so the team had a visual sense of working together and could indulge in the occasional chit-chat.

Organisations can **seize opportunities for physical team bonding**, for workers who are in the same country, outside of work. In one case, staff started getting together for group hikes. Teams of five or eight (depending on the social gathering restrictions of the moment) would start a fixed distance away from the destination, and all end up at the same point where they would take a "group" photo which was stitched together. The good vibes from these hikes went a long way.

For workers who joined an organisation last year, employee satisfaction or engagement scores fell to an all-time low. In response, the leadership crafted a new purpose statement – which it never had before – and new values, which **shifted the focus from what is achieved to how it is achieved**. Workers would then be better able to bind their own personal narratives, stories, and values to the organisation.

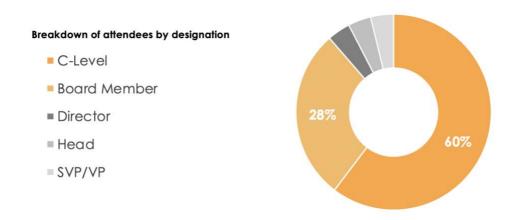
**End of Session Notes** 



# **APPENDIX**

## Attendee Profile

All **53 attendees** were senior leaders and key decision makers in their organisation, with around **88%** at the C-Suite and Board level.

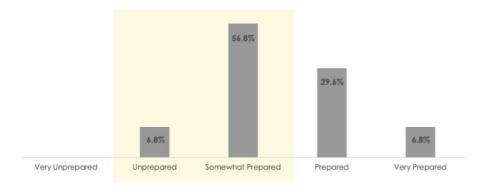


## **Attendees Survey Results**



#### We're not prepared for the challenges of the Future of Work

**63.6%** of organisations are **not prepared** to deal with the challenges that come with adapting to the Future of Work.

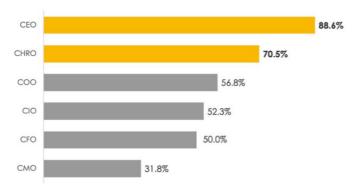


<sup>\*</sup> Question: How prepared is your organisation to deal with the challenges that come with adapting to the Future of Work?



## Realising the Future of Work is a shared responsibility

Majority of organisations agree that **CEOs and CHROs** are most responsible for operationalising the Future of Work.

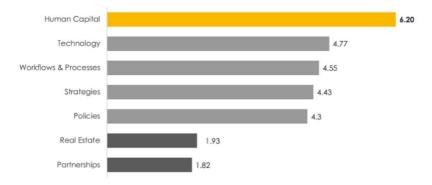


<sup>\*</sup> Question: In your opinion, who should bear the responsibility of operationalising and realizing the Future of Work in an organisation? (Choose all that apply)



## Human Capital is at the heart of the Future of Work

Majority of organisations are prioritising investments into **Human Capital** to realise the Future of Work (e.g. employee training & upskilling, re-deploying people / talent reorganisation)



Question: Which area(s) should organisations prioritise for investment (of attention, money & time) to realise the Future of Work? (With 1 being the least priority and 7 being the top priority)



## info@qed.sg

Tel: +65 6808 5629 Fax: +65 6808 5801

1 Raffles Place Tower 2, #19-61 Singapore 048616