

# The 'O' for Generation Z

Looking back from the future at the ubiquity of a free agent economy. Last in a series.

By Patricia Taylor



Employment has rapidly evolved in the past 10 years. Companies and individuals have moved away from the traditional models of employment, talent management, and human resources provisioning. Now, sometimes change happens because the current state is disturbed by a one-time event. Change that is wrought by such a temporary shift goes away eventually, after which the status quo resumes. This is not such a time.

A decade from now, employment will be a fixed status for only half the population. Industries and markets that are in a position to do so will deliver value to their customers, make and sell their goods, and provide a return on shareholder investments without significant numbers of permanently employed resources. Leaders in these companies will align their resources with current requirements, morphing and changing their composition quickly as deliverables are secured and the next challenge is lined up. Functions will grow and shrink as a percentage of the overall resource requirement based on phase of growth and current risk. Some functions will be sourced in components.

In B2C markets, entire sales and marketing campaigns have been created, delivered, and retired in an "outsourced" manner for decades...think *Mad Men*. This has worked because the consumer is fickle, products move quickly, and differentiation is often a function of packaging, rather than content. This trend is now starting to move to B2B sales, as services and products evolve quickly, bets on entire business lines or divisions need to be hedged, and the time and investment required to build, manage, and maintain a dedicated B2B engine becomes too heavy for lithe, post-recession companies to bear.

So, wrap your head around a business world in which companies secure talent, resources, and capabilities as purpose-built teams. Units of functions will be fitted together like building blocks. Expensive and specialised resources will be deployed for limited periods of time; the architect of the plan and the management of its execution will be the real intellectual property of the business, delivered by fulltime employees who are invested in the medium term success of the business. Everyone else will be purpose-built and purpose-

bought. That means that HR as we know it—identifying, securing, support provisioning, planning, training, developing, and compensating talent—will become the core skill required to grow businesses that sell and deliver to meet these building block requirements. And this HR skill will need to be creative, process-light, and responsive to innovations and changes. Talent mashup will be critical to success—the ability to rapidly combine the right resource ingredients in the correct measure to deliver a specific outcome and then adjust and adjust again, based on small differences in need, preferred regional delivery, specific price points, specialised knowledge.

And, this requirement will take a "Master Chef of HR." That means someone who knows business dynamics, product and service development, how to hold together teams and develop and incentivise talent for short, sharp bursts. The technology used to enable this revolution will be ubiquitous and driven by the users themselves, the powerful end-clients, who will demand interaction and information about the progress in building, deploying, and evolving these teams. Business outcomes will be measured and proven as a function of return on investment in the building block components. Professional contractors will focus technology to enhance their options for success. How to join, how to showcase your contribution, and how to connect to benefit programmes and support structures of the contractor's (not the employer's) choice will be paramount in this world.

Prototypes of this reality are already in play today. Crowd-sourcing of software development, wholesale outsourcing of B2B sales campaigns, fragmented supply chains with multiple component vendors in manufacturing, and even outsourcing of back office functions are the forerunners and enablers of this change. HRO won't be required.

The 'O' will be everywhere, and HR skills combined with business savvy will rise to the challenge, grab the opportunity, and innovate the world of work. Look around you and ask, who is the next Master Chef?

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