

## Career resilience is key to success in the age of disruption

*This COVID-19 crisis has presented a burning platform for CEOs to accelerate digital transformation for their firms. From an organisational perspective, this will have a significant impact on how leaders recruit external and develop internal talent. As a society career change, side-hustle and freelancing between jobs will be the norm for most people over the next decades. To acquire career resilience, it is best for everyone to think like a leader and adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to thrive in our digital future.*

By Stephen Choo, Managing Director of **Digital Survey Research Insight (DSRInsight)**

In Asia-Pacific (APAC), like everywhere else in the world, increased uncertainty during this COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decline in external hiring and this trend is anticipated to continue until mid-2021.

For example, numerous multinational corporations (MNCs) in Singapore (where I have spent the last 15 years working there) have delayed candidates' start dates and put on hold many job openings that were available before March. So, the recruitment picture in Singapore and across other parts of APAC is looking rather grim.

The impact of COVID-19 is being felt by all businesses around the world. As companies slowly shift their efforts from response to recover, leaders are seizing the opportunity caused by this unprecedented disruption to exponentially accelerate digital transformation and automation. This shift to business digitalization will have a significant impact on how employees are able to thrive in the future.

Since the global pandemic breakout, lots have been written about the need for employees to build resilience to survive future shocks. Although they are all useful, most tend to be medical or spiritual in nature. I like to offer two mental models on how you can build career resilience to achieve success in the next normal:

### **Think like a leader**

According to [LinkedIn's](#) future of skills 2019 report, the top 10 most desirable skills by employers in APAC, were mostly digital including artificial intelligence, blockchain, continuous integration, gesture recognition technology and robotic process automation. As talents with digital skills have been in short supply over the past 5 years, it is not surprising the vast majority of APAC recruiters surveyed by [GRID](#) still regard skills shortages as their No. 1 hiring challenge.

This renewed trend of companies undergoing digital transformation is expected to drive our skill gap even deeper. So, do we now rush and train all our university graduates to be data scientist, network architects or software engineers? The answer is most likely to be ambivalent – “yes or no but.”

We absolutely need more STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduates. However, we also risk producing an army of technical specialists who are likely to face limited job promotion opportunities if they are not interested to take up management responsibilities later in their careers.

Business professionals who have successfully risen to the C-suite levels, compared to technical specialists, are able to significantly demonstrate non-technical competencies such as learning agility, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and others.

So, whether you have a tech degree or not, it is important to think this leadership question to thrive in the digital world – What makes someone a great digital leader? Taking lessons from a study by [Korn Ferry](#) on leaders who led digital transformation successfully, it's time for you to acquire and develop these leadership competencies - making complex decisions, managing execution, building collaborating relationships and influencing people.

## Adopt an entrepreneurial mindset

Over the past decade in APAC, firms have come to realise they cannot afford to keep buying talent for new roles. The war for digital talent post pandemic is expected to be fought with lots more intensity as firms upped their game on digital transformation. It is time for leaders to seriously commit to re-skilling, up-skilling and cross-skilling their internal talent to keep them future-proof.

Unfortunately, the current report cards on the performance of leaders to developing their talent's in-demand skills is dismal. According to a recent report by [Deloitte](#), only 17 percent of leaders are making significant investments in reskilling their employees to support their artificial intelligence (AI) strategy.

Similarly in [Aon's](#) 2020 digital readiness report, most organisations have yet to define the critical competencies needed to compete in an age of disruption. They also do not have a process in place to assess digital readiness in their own people.

Not everyone is fortunate to work at [Amazon](#), which has committed to invest US\$700 million to upskill 100,000 of its employees on future skills over 25 years. The trend I am seeing is employers are increasingly relying on their employees to take charge of their own learning and career planning. This is because companies are struggling to keep up with the continuous change caused by successive economic, business, and technological disruptions.

Another means to acquire career resilience is to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset when dealing with frequent job disruptions. This COVID-19 pandemic has truly put an end to our traditional linear career path. Career change, side-hustle and freelancing between jobs will be the norm for most people over the next decades.

So, how does one think, feel and act more like an entrepreneur? Researchers have been trying for decades to determine the most common characteristics of entrepreneurs. This is because entrepreneurs are a very heterogeneous bunch and so we are still unclear what those special individual characteristics that consistently lead to entrepreneurial success.

I strongly recommend you read the latest [Harvard Business School's](#) (pdf) latest research on those key characteristics that have served as foundation to the study of entrepreneurship. They include the Big-5 model (conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness), self-efficacy, innovativeness, locus of control and the need for achievement.

As we head into the next normal, three words will increasingly define the way we work in the future – digital, transformation and resilience. Governments, companies, industries, and educators need to work together to equip our employees the future skills, competencies and attitudes to be continuously employed in the digital world. However, this is only one-half of the equation as we ourselves need to be motivated to take charge of our own continuous learnings and careers by thinking like an entrepreneurial leader.



About Digital Survey Research Insight – [DSRInsight](#) is a management consulting company that helps organisations across Asia-Pacific to strategize, design and deliver Employee Experience programs