

# The lessons Marie Kondo can teach us about the future of work



Employers scrambling to prepare for the future of work could learn a thing or two from Marie Kondo, says one senior research analyst. *Photo: The New Daily*



**Euan Black**

**SHARE**

TWEET SHARE REDDIT PIN EMAIL COMMENT

Look. The robots *are* coming, and they *will* take our jobs. But research suggests they'll replace them with better ones – so long as we have the skills to perform them.

The question is: how do we expect workers to develop the skills needed to thrive in this brave new world, when increasing numbers are complaining of **burnout and exhaustion**?

Aaron McEwan, head of research and advisory at Gartner, thinks **Marie Kondo** has the answer.

The way Mr McEwan sees it, too much unnecessary work clogs up our days, sapping precious brainpower from our already limited reserves. The average manager receives an average of 130 emails a day, he says, and spends about a

third of their time in meetings – meaning they can **waste up to 60 per cent of their time on “non-value-adding activities”, according to the Boston Consulting Group.**

“Every time one of those emails come through, it erodes a bit of your cognitive capacity,” Mr McEwan told *The New Daily*.

“So I think there’s this massive opportunity to have a look our workplaces and ask two questions: Does this bring joy to employees? And if it doesn’t, then maybe we should fix it.

“The second question: Does this add value? And if the answer’s no, then maybe we should just get rid of it.”

## The skills needed for the future of work



**Creativity**



**Problem solving**



**Digital literacy**



**Leadership**



**Communication**



**Presentation**

**We need to develop the skills that make us innately human – and be technologically savvy**

Involving everything from streamlining work processes to providing workers with virtual assistants, this “decluttering” process would free up the time and resources needed for workers to develop the skills that robots can’t – skills that Mr McEwan splits into two categories: “social-creative” and “digital dexterity”.

The former relates to creativity, critical thinking, decision-making, communication, and emotional intelligence, and the latter relates to skills that allow us to get the most out of advanced technology.

Both skill-sets are needed to thrive in a world where robots and machines take care of our simple and repetitive tasks – which is why global analysis firm Oxford Economics recently found that **each additional robot installed in a lower-skilled region could lead to twice as many job losses as one installed in a higher-skilled region**. But Gartner research found only 9 per cent of the global workforce have these skills.

“This is where the onus is really on organisations,” Mr McEwan said.

“Employees can take some responsibility for learning, re-learning and up-skilling. But it’s very hard to do that if you are already working really long hours and you’re exhausted.

“If we want people to be digitally dextrous and socially creative, we’re going to have to change the way work is done.”

### **Employers need to help retrain workers**

Essentially, this means employers will need to train workers while they’re still on the clock – using the extra free-time created by “decluttering”. Expecting them to learn and retrain during their time off is a recipe for disaster, Mr McEwan says, as Gartner research shows **Australia’s workers are becoming increasingly disenchanted with their jobs**.

The global advisory firm found that Australia’s discretionary effort levels – defined as an employee’s willingness to go above and beyond what’s expected of them – dropped in the first quarter of 2019 to the lowest levels in five years.

And with Australian firms also being called out for not adopting innovative technologies at a fast enough rate, Mr McEwan says it’s unclear what will drive Australia’s future economic growth.

“Where is the growth going to come from, if technology is not moving fast enough and employees are less and less willing to do more?” Mr McEwan said.

“Our only option is to declutter our workforces so that we give back more time and cognitive capacity to employees, so that they can be more creative and bring back that discretionary effort.”

# Five fastest growing occupations from 2018 to 2030



**Sports & fitness workers**



**Contract, program & project administrators**



**Chief executives and general managers**



**Health & welfare support workers**



**Information & organisation professionals**

*Source: ABS, Deloitte Access Economics*

## There's cause for optimism

It's not all doom and gloom, though. Mr McEwan said employers across the globe are extracting more from workers by asking for less, with Coca Cola European Partners using technology to claw back one million employee hours, and brewer Molson Coors now offering its UK and Irish staff two weeks' extra annual leave for significant life events, such as moving house or planning a wedding.

And the winds of change can be felt in Australia, too.

In June, Swinburne University released a report that, among other things, called on **workplaces to become more like classrooms**.

And, after discovering that **70 per cent of young people are learning skills that will be redundant in 2030**, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) also called for greater on-the-job training – and created **career navigation tools to help workers grapple with the rapidly changing labour market**.

Mr McEwan believes these types of initiatives are crucial to unlocking the economy's true potential.

"Employers need to do two things," he said.

“One is to tell workers exactly what capabilities they need for the future. And the second is to give them the time and space to learn those things.”

### **How can I prepare for the future of work if my employer isn't investing in training or education?**

The Foundation For Young Australians' head of research Alex Snow offers the following tips.

1. Make a list of the skills you have developed during your education and work experience. (Think of “skills as the primary currency of success, not jobs,” says Mr Snow.)
2. Then look at internal and external job ads through a “skills lens”, so that you know which skills you will need to learn if you want to switch jobs. (A FYA analysis of 2.7 million jobs found that workers who are trained and work in one job actually have the skills to perform 13 others.)
3. Next, bridge any skills gaps by asking your employer about professional development opportunities, and by exploring short-term university courses, vocational training, credentialed online learning courses, and Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs.
4. Finally, be confident about your skills, and learn how to articulate and market them to future employers.