

Digital Disruption: Implications for the Executives

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More recently I have been asked “*what is the impact of digital disruption on the executive labour market*”? A natural question given that if the digital revolution is not currently transforming or turning your industry on its head, then it probably will next week! As the renowned management expert Tom Peters said recently “*If I hear the word disruption one more time I am going to throw up – except it is true*”.

While it is evident that technology and digital transformation is already reducing the necessity for many entry level, low and even mid-level white collar roles, what is the impact at the executive level?



Despite the fact that things are moving rapidly I think it is still too early to get a clear sense of the impact on the composition of the executive ranks. While ‘digital disruption’ has not as far as I can tell affected executive demand, what is becoming evident are trends in skills and attributes that organisations are seeking to best position themselves in a rapidly transforming world. I see the following four key trends emerging:

1

Digital disruption is global and does not respect geographic boundaries. While in the past international career experience has been seen as a ‘nice to have’, companies are

now seeking executives who can truly 'think globally'. This is a talent that is not yet fully formed and yet is already in great demand.

2

Digital disruption is shrinking the size of work teams and throwing together people with very different backgrounds who previously may not have needed to work together. Leaders who can inspire individuals across generations and with broad skills sets and work experiences will become the champions of the next decade. In this respect EQ is far more important than IQ.

3

The GFC promoted a 'take no risk' attitude at the senior executive and board level which many would argue has stifled innovation over the last few years. While the environment of digital disruption does not require risk takers what it does require is 'rapid adapters'. These are people who can move quickly to adjust and take advantage of a changing environment, sometimes before they have complete decision making evidence.

4

The work environment of the late 20th Century encouraged leaders and senior executives to acquire a broad suite of skills and become the true generalist manager. Perhaps controversially I would argue that the future we will see the rise of the specialist. The complexity of the business environment encourages smaller, more adaptable organisations led by individuals with deep specialist skills who draw upon other skills externally as required.

Just as industrialisation created a particular type of organisational leader, there is little doubt that as the nature of organisations change as a result of digital disruption, the nature of leadership will also change. The skills and competencies of the leader of the future will be something that will no doubt occupy the minds of Boards and executive search consultants alike.