

The hidden fault line in remote hiring

THE great workplace reset of the past few years has been defined by one dominant idea: access. Freed from geographic constraints, organisations have expanded their talent pools across cities, countries, and time zones. Distributed and hybrid work models are no longer experimental—they are embedded in the operating DNA of modern enterprises.

Yet, beneath this apparent abundance lies a quieter, more consequential shift—one that is beginning to disrupt hiring outcomes in ways many organisations are only now starting to confront. The challenge is no longer access to talent. It is access to the right talent.

As hiring scales across geographies, a paradox has emerged. Wider talent pools have not translated into proportionately better hiring outcomes. Time-to-hire for remote roles is stretching, onboarding cycles are lengthening, and performance gaps are surfacing—even when candidates clear rigorous technical evaluations.

The market, in effect, is sending a clear signal: technical proficiency, once the cornerstone of hiring decisions, is no longer sufficient.

At the heart of this shift lies a redefinition of "work-readiness". Distributed work environments—characterised by low supervision, asynchronous workflows, and high interdependence—demand a fundamentally different skill architecture. Employees are now expected not only to execute tasks, but to navigate ambiguity, communicate with precision, and make decisions independently. This is where the fault lines are becoming visible.

Organisations increasingly report that while candidates meet technical benchmarks, they falter in execution within distributed setups.

Unsurprisingly, hiring success rates are under pressure. A significant proportion of managers acknowledge that remote collaboration has proven more challenging than anticipated, despite the proliferation of digital tools. The implication is stark: there is a growing misalignment between what organisations

assess during hiring and what roles actually demand in practice.

This misalignment is also reshaping the definition of "job-ready" talent. Adaptability, cross-functional thinking, and execution in dynamic environments are no longer desirable traits—they are essential. Consequently, the pool of candidates who can contribute effectively from day one is narrowing, even as the overall talent pool expands.

Compounding the problem is the declining reliability of traditional hiring signals. Degrees, brand-name employers, and years of experience—long used as proxies for capability—are proving increasingly inadequate in predicting success in distributed environments. Organisations are beginning to prioritise demonstrated capability: real work, problem-solving ability, and evidence of execution under real-world conditions.

Despite substantial investments in upskilling and learning programmes, many organisations find that trained talent still lacks practical readiness.

For business leaders and HR decision-makers, the implications are profound. Distributed work is not a transient phase; it is a structural shift. Organisations that fail to realign their hiring frame-works—moving beyond technical screening to holistic capability assessment—risk inefficiencies, collaboration breakdowns, and erosion of long-term productivity.

Yet, within this disruption lies a strategic opportunity.

Forward-looking organisations are already rethinking skill frameworks. They are investing in assessment models that simulate real-world scenarios, prioritising adaptability over pedigree, and building cultures that reinforce accountability and clarity. In doing so, they are not merely adapting to change—they are shaping the future of work. Because in a world where talent is everywhere, the true competitive advantage will belong to those who can identify, cultivate, and deploy talent that is not just skilled—but truly work-ready.



Planet plastic: Time to act before it's too late

Reducing plastic use is no longer optional. It is essential for safeguarding the planet's future



DR MOHAN KANDA

POLLUTION caused by environmental degradation is among the gravest hazards confronting the future of humanity, contributing to an escalating planetary crisis. The Earth is, quite literally, drowning in plastic litter and microplastics. This is a global concern that demands urgent international response involving all stakeholders at multiple levels. Maintaining the status quo is no longer an option. Loss of biodiversity and climate change further compound these alarming challenges.

Micro-level participation is critical if future strategies are to succeed. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) must play an active role. A balanced "carrot and stick" approach is essential, rewarding institutions that perform well while holding accountable those that fail to meet environmental mandates.

Equally important is the need to build environmental consciousness through education. Integrating environmental protection into school and university curricula can help instil awareness at a formative stage, nurturing a generation that values sustainability and ecological balance.

This column has previously examined the issue from the perspective of judicial intervention and the need for greater corporate participation. However, the problem warrants renewed attention from another

angle, namely the urgent need to curb the indiscriminate use of plastics, a major contributor to pollution. Moreover, in the context of global geopolitical tensions, such as the US-Iran conflict, disruptions in oil supply are likely to increase demand for alternative fuels like gas, indirectly influencing plastic production and consumption.

Every year, on June 5, countries across the globe observe World Environment Day. Established in 1972 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the event seeks to promote global awareness and action for environmental protection. The 2025 celebrations focused on ending plastic pollution, recognising that the crisis affects ecosystems worldwide, from Mount Everest to the Mariana Trench. The Republic of Korea hosted the event for the year 2025. A country hosting the event acts as the global focal point and highlights a specific theme to drive global action, which, for the year 2025, was plastic pollution. The celebration showcases national leadership through in-country events, high-level policy initiatives, and global advocacy campaigns. India had previously hosted the event in 2018, with the theme 'Beat Plastic Pollution'.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), comprising all 193 member states, is the world's highest decision-making body on environmental matters. UNEP operates under its guidance. In 2022, UNEA adopted a historic resolution to develop an international legally binding instrument to combat plastic pollution. An Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) was subsequently established, and its work is ongoing. Founded in 1948, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the world's largest environmental network, comprising govern-



ments and civil society organisations. It is widely regarded as a global authority on the status of the natural world and measures required to safeguard it. The organisation has been at the forefront of addressing plastic pollution across more than 20 countries in six regions.

Another important institutional platform is the Geneva Environment Network (GEN), established in 1999. Supported by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment and administered by UNEP, GEN brings together over 100 international non-governmental organisations and UN bodies. Addressing environmental degradation also aligns with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to overcome barriers to a sustainable future.

One novel and innovative movement, aimed at encouraging reduction of plastic pollution, apart from saving wildlife and promoting sustainable habits to make for a healthier planet, was the 'Say No to Plastic' slogan. Also known as the anti-plastic or 'Break Free from Plastic' movement, it originated as a necessary response to the global environmental crisis caused by the rapid accumulation of plastic pollution in ecosystems, particularly oceans and waterways. The movement gained significant global momentum with the launch of the 'Plastic Free July', 2011 which, started by a single woman in Western Australia as a personal challenge, grew into

a worldwide movement. Today, it inspires millions of people to reduce single-use plastic consumption. Each July, individuals, communities, and organisations participate by rejecting plastic products and adopting sustainable alternatives. The movement offers practical ways to live more sustainably and preserve the integrity of the environment for future generations. Catchphrases such as "Switch to Eco, Let the Plastic Go" have further amplified its message. Several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations, are actively identifying unnecessary and problematic plastics with the goal of phasing them out.

A powerful example of community-driven environmental action is the clean-up of Chowpatty Beach in Mumbai. Initiatives such as the "Sunday beach cleanup" drives organised by 'Change Us', a youth-led environmental group founded in 2019, have played a significant role in raising awareness and removing plastic waste. Volunteers, students, and organisations, including the Mangrove Cell, have contributed to these efforts.

Belonging to the same genre of activist efforts directed at protecting the environment through containing plastics use is a truly remarkable venture in the shape of the first ever all women-run multi-state cooperative Society founded by Deepa Dhurjati Sanka in

Hyderabad. This organisation promotes environmental sustainability while empowering women and transgender individuals through self-employment opportunities. It produces eco-friendly alternatives such as jute bags. A notable achievement has been the replacement of plastic bags with jute bags in temples across Andhra Pradesh for distributing 'prasadam'. This columnist had the privilege of having been associated with that effort, right from its inception and enjoyed the pleasure of watching it grow into what promises to be a greatly respected and nationwide movement.

I have always believed that the spirit of conditioning one's attitudes and approaches in an environment friendly manner, much like 'charity begins at home'. In my own, humble way, but not with total success, I have had many plastic containers, boxes and bottles at home replaced by those made of steel. I have also cultivated the habit of politely saying no to the offer of a carry bag after completing my shopping in a departmental store. Instead, I carry a non-plastic bag with me and use it to fill it with the purchased items.

While achieving a completely plastic-free world may be unrealistic, significantly reducing plastic consumption is both possible and necessary. Eliminating all polymers would disrupt modern healthcare, food supply chains, and infrastructure. However, reducing reliance, especially on single-use plastics, which account for nearly 40 per cent of plastic waste, is critical. Transitioning to alternatives such as glass, metal, and sustainable materials presents challenges but remains essential for a healthier planet.

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Iran truce won't end fuel pain anytime soon

Damaged infrastructure and tight supply keep the global energy crisis alive

KEVIN MORRISON

IT might feel like a lifetime ago, but it was just last week analysts began talking about fuel rationing in Australia. This week, that prospect seems less likely. A temporary ceasefire in the Iran war has been announced, even as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese heads off to Singapore a crucial refinery hub to firm up fuel supplies. United States President Donald Trump has pledged a two-week ceasefire, while Iran has pledged safe passage for ships through the crucial Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20% of the world's oil is shipped. Does this mean the fuel crisis is over? Not by half. In its response to US-Israeli bombing, Iran didn't just block the strait it targeted the oil and gas infrastructure of its neighbours. Repairs will take months. Serious fuel shortages are now hitting many nations hard especially poorer ones such as the Philippines, Pakistan and Thailand. Australia is in a better position, as it is wealthier and can pay more for fuel. As a major exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and thermal coal, it also has leverage with the Asian nations who refine most of Australia's liquid fuels. This will help in the short term. Longer term, the energy vulnerability this crisis has exposed has to be solved by winding down reliance on oil imports.

A ceasefire, not an end

Iran announced the closure of the strait the day the war began, February 28. Over the following 37 days, nations have scrambled to try to find alternate supplies or workarounds to avoid the bottleneck of the Strait of Hormuz. Even if the ceasefire holds, it won't magically resolve the oil crisis. Tightness of supply will persist for months. The war has effectively removed about 11 million barrels a day from the market roughly halving the flow of oil through the strait, according to shipping data. Even if the Strait of Hormuz reopens as Iran has promised, it won't mean shipping can instantly return to pre-war levels. Damage to oil refineries and pipelines in many countries will limit supply, while insurance rates and shipping costs may remain prohibitively high for some time. Iran's missiles have done significant damage to infrastructure in major oil and gas exporters such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates



and Kuwait. The crisis has driven prices of refined fuels such as diesel and jet fuel to record heights well over US\$200 a barrel.

How is Australia getting supplies?

Australia imports about 90% of its liquid fuels, largely as petrol and diesel. Some come as crude oil to be processed at our two remaining refineries. When Albanese goes to Singapore, he goes not only as a customer but as a major seller of the LNG and coal many regional trading partners rely on. Australia imports most of its fuels from Singaporean and South Korean refineries, but it also exports LNG to Singapore and LNG and thermal coal to Korea. What Albanese will be focused on is not so much petrol as diesel. Surprisingly, Australia is the world's single largest importer of diesel, though not the largest consumer. The fuel is a mainstay for trucks and heavy equipment, due to the combination of high power output and efficiency offered by diesel engines. Farmers also rely heavily on diesel for their machinery and transport. The mining sector accounts for around 35% of Australia's diesel use through trucks and back-up generators at remote mines. Compared to petrol users, most diesel users have no alternative. Petrol is mainly used in cars in cities. If petrol prices are too high, car owners could switch to public transport. But truckies and farmers don't have other options. The supply crunch isn't just affecting oil it's fertilisers and other oil-derived products as well. For Australian farmers, this is unwelcome, as most fertilisers are imported and local production is low.

Calls for more drilling are misguided

Australia uses about one million barrels of oil a day. Even during its heyday in the 1970s, the local oil industry never came close to that. Australia has huge gas reserves, which is why so many gas companies are active, but very little conven-

tional oil. The Gippsland Basin, one of the richest sources of oil, is now running dry. Is there more? Yes, but not much. Geoscience Australia estimates our proven commercial reserves are around 229 million barrels of oil. That sounds like a lot, but given how much we burn, that's about seven months. After that it would all be gone. This is why calls to drill more oil are misguided. If Australia had commercially viable oil, the oil companies would be here trying to extract it. It's significant that they're not. Unconventional oil reserves are likely to be much larger, but the controversial technique of fracking has to be used to access these. Queensland is spruiking its Taroom Trough oil reserves, but these are unproven and would require fracking.

Wilder calls to look at coal to liquids and gas to liquids don't stack up. Other alternate fuels such as hydrogen and bio-fuels haven't panned out commercially on a large scale. There's only one realistic alternative to oil: avoiding it altogether. Battery and electric vehicle costs have fallen very sharply in just a few years and get getting cheaper. That's why the simple, quickest solution is to go electric. As electric vehicles (EVs) surge in popularity, they're likely to reduce demand for petrol at first, not diesel. That's because passenger cars tend to run on petrol, and EVs are most viable at this size. But change is coming for diesel machinery too. Iron ore magnate Twiggy Forrest has invested heavily in heavy duty electric mining machinery, replacing large volumes of diesel. Many miners in China have gone down this route too.

From oversupply to undersupply

It's easy to forget that before the attacks on Iran, the world was facing a perceived oversupply of oil. China's demand for refined fuels is falling as it electrifies, while the US has become the world's top producer. These concerns about oversupply have gone out the window because so much capacity has been knocked offline. We could be well into the southern winter before we see supplies returning to more comfortable levels. For many people in Australia and around the world, that likely means more months of fuel price pain.

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A pause in war, a test for peace

Negotiations must bridge mistrust, sanctions and security concerns

AMIN SAIKAL

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's acceptance of a Pakistani proposal for a two-week ceasefire in the war with Iran brings a sigh of relief to the international community. Just hours before, many had been alarmed by Trump's threats to bomb Iran back to "the stone age" and destroy its "civilisation". The ceasefire provides a breathing space for hammering out a "definitive agreement concerning long-term peace with Iran, and peace in the Middle East", according to Trump. However, the road to a final settlement will be complex and bumpy, though not insurmountable.

Underestimating the enemy

After six weeks of escalating war and rhetoric, starting with joint US-Israel attacks on Iran and the latter's robust response, the three combatants have not only inflicted serious blows on each other. The region and the world have also suffered from a massive oil, liquefied gas and inflationary crisis as Tehran closed the Strait of Hormuz. This was not something Trump had expected. He initially anticipated the combined US and Israeli military power would rapidly prevail. This would force Tehran, which had suppressed widespread public protests early in the year, to capitulate and thus open the way for favourable regime change. But the Iranian government proved to be more resilient, entrenched and resourceful than anticipated. The government was also strategic in fighting back by hitting US assets across the Persian Gulf and Israel, as well as closing the strait. Meanwhile, Trump could not solicit active support from US allies for his joint war endeavours with Israeli Prime Minister



The ten points include a secession of hostilities on all fronts, including Lebanon, though Israel has since claimed Lebanon is not included in the ceasefire. Some of the other key elements are: the US must fundamentally commit to guaranteeing non-aggression the continuation of Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz removal of primary and secondary sanctions on Iran and acceptance of Iran's right that it can enrich uranium for its nuclear program (for peaceful purposes)

Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu is under indictment by the International Criminal Court for war crimes in Gaza. The allies had not been consulted. They didn't consider it to be in their individual national interests to participate in a war contrary to international law and the United Nations Charter.

Costing billions

Further, the United States' global adversaries, Russia and China both having strategic cooperation agreements with Iran vehemently opposed the war. They joined scores of other countries around the world in calling for de-escalation and measures to avoid more economic repercussions. The conflict widened. Israel unleashed a campaign to occupy southern Lebanon in response to attacks from Iran-aligned Lebanese paramilitary group Hezbollah. The costs of the war then soared for all sides. For the US alone, the price tag amounted to at least US\$1 billion (A\$1.4 billion) a day. This added substantially to the federal debt of close to \$40 trillion (A\$56.6 trillion).

The situation evolved into a race between missiles and interceptors; it would just be a matter of who ran out first. It was recently reported that Israel was getting low in

interceptors and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) faced a shortage of manpower.

Unpopular in the US

On the other hand, despite the US and Israeli decapitation of its leadership, air supremacy and bombardment of thousands of military and non-military targets, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) maintained a sustained retaliatory capability. It managed to fire dozens of advanced missiles and drones on a daily basis against targets in the Gulf and Israel. More importantly, the war proved increasingly unpopular in the United States. As the public felt the effects of it on the rising cost of living and at the petrol stations, some 61% of citizens opposed the war. Trump's ratings plummeted in the opinion polls. In view of these variables, Trump could not possibly stand by his promise of escalating Operation Epic Fury to the level of erasing such a sizeable country as Iran. Iranian cultural and patriotic features, as well as the devotion of the country's many citizens to Shia Islam, mitigated against outside aggression, as in previous occasions in its history.

Long road ahead

This is not to claim that negotiating and concluding

a comprehensive agreement for an enduring peace between the US and Iran will be easy. But a crucial section of Trump's acceptance of the ceasefire, which gives us an insight into his thinking, is as follows: we received a 10 point proposal from Iran (in response to the US 15-point proposal), and believe it is a workable basis on which to negotiate. Almost all of the various points of past contention have been agreed to between the United States and Iran, but a two week period will allow the Agreement to be finalized and consummated.

The ten points include a secession of hostilities on all fronts, including Lebanon, though Israel has since claimed Lebanon is not included in the ceasefire. Some of the other key elements are: the US must fundamentally commit to guaranteeing non-aggression the continuation of Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz removal of primary and secondary sanctions on Iran and acceptance of Iran's right that it can enrich uranium for its nuclear program (for peaceful purposes). It is now incumbent on Trump to pull into line Netanyahu, who has toiled for a long time not only to destroy the Iranian government, but also to reduce the Iranian state as a regional actor. If this happens and all the parties negotiate in good faith, there is room for optimism. We could potentially see the dawn of a post-war regional order based more on a localised collective security arrangement than on a regional supremacy of one actor over another.

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