

GREAT *for the* STATE

BUSINESSNEWS

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SERIES 2 – EDITION 8
12-PAGE LIFTOUT

THE FUTURE OF WORK

New ways of working

Graham Budd (left) with
Jonty Thomas and John Phan
at Hofmann Engineering
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

Partners



COVID
prompts a
rethink
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SERIES 2 – EDITION 8

The future of work

The way in which workplaces operate, and even where they are located, is being reshaped by everything from COVID-19 to long-term technology and industry trends.

OUR PARTNERS – HELPING US SHAPE GREAT FOR THE STATE



Gillian McKay

Partner,
Enterprise Transformation
KPMG

The restrictions imposed to combat COVID-19 meant that much of the workforce was quickly required to work in a different way, including remote working, split teams and flexible hours to juggle other personal demands.

These new ways of working have had both positive and negative impacts for employers and employees, and while many have returned to the office, it is unlikely that remote and flexible working will dissipate quickly. Rather, it will become part of the new normal.

Much has been learned about the ways we can work differently and now is the time to identify and capitalise on the positive experiences from the past six months. Shaping the workplace of the future will require a balance between productivity, social connectivity and flexibility.

(See page 7) ■



Dr Lisette Kanse

Lecturer, School of
Psychological Science
The University of
Western Australia

Researchers and students in business psychology at The University of Western Australia are working with industry partners to deliver practical strategies to improve outcomes in performance, safety and employee wellbeing.

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Future issues

A Creative WA

Disruption



PRECISION Hofmann Engineering has one of Perth's largest and most sophisticated steel fabrication workshops. See page 10 for more.
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira



COVID work culture sits well with business

WA has so far been spared the worst of COVID-19 but the experience has nonetheless triggered big changes in workplace management and planning.

Matthew Tonts (left)
and Matt Woods.

BUSINESSNEWS

Story by Mark Beyer Photos by Gabriel Oliveira

When Perth business leaders reflect on the impact of COVID-19, it's the shift in mindset that many believe will be most significant.

"We've always had flexible work arrangements, it's always been fine to work from home, we've encouraged it," KPMG chairman of partners WA Matt Woods said.

"But when you get three years of change in three months, it forces people to rethink the subconscious stigma against it.

"That's been the big change."

Tania Cecconi, who heads CEOs for Gender Equity, is another person who has seen big shifts in mindset.

"I've seen men who were really lukewarm about flexibility, working from home, time with family," she said.

"They have been completely transformed, a real shift in thinking."

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COVID work culture sits well with business

Mature organisations are focused on the outcomes, they already know what's important to the business

-Tania Cecconi

Tania Cecconi
and Nigel Court.

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Like Mr Woods, Ms Cecconi believes the enforced changes to work arrangements have helped achieve a real cut-through.

"It's helped overcome enormous amounts of inertia," she told a recent *Business News* boardroom forum on the future of work.

Ms Cecconi said the recent experience would help many women who had effectively been locked out of senior leadership roles and decision-making.

"Recognising travel as a core criteria, or long hours at the desk as a core criteria, is now obsolete," she said.

Matthew Tonts, who is executive dean of arts, business, law and education at The University of Western Australia, said the pace of change after COVID restrictions were introduced was unprecedented.

"Our organisation has transformed at the speed of light," Professor Tonts said.

"Within five or six weeks we took all of our teaching from face-to-face to online.

"We had virtually all of our staff at home and we think productivity increased over that period."

However, not all staff or students embraced the change.

"One of the interesting things to observe was how different staff adapted," Professor Tonts said.

"Some were very comfortable with that online environment, some loved working from home and some were just yearning for that face-to-face contact."

He noted that many students hankered for personal contact

"It was amazing the number of students who said they loved being back on campus, and the sense of community and identity that generates," Professor Tonts said.

UWA guild president Bre Shanahan agreed.

"The feedback we got was that the technology may be very efficient but people really value the human element, coming in and seeing a human face," Ms Shanahan said.

Three-hub model

Mr Woods said KPMG was planning to give its staff greater flexibility.

The firm has moved toward a three-hub model, with staff spending time either at the office, at their home, or at their clients' premises.

"I am sure we will see people rotating back to the office to some degree," Mr Woods said.

"I'm not sure where we will settle.

"I think there is still a bit of a sugar hit from change."

He said he expected people would transition through the hubs over the course of each week, or even during a single day.

"When it settles, I think we will have a roughly equal number of people going through those hubs," Mr Woods told the forum.

"And what I like about it is the choice.

"What we think doesn't work for anyone is to be 100 per cent in one hub."

Mr Woods said he anticipated a large CBD office would still be critical.

"If you look at our office footprint in the CBD, I don't concur with the popular view that we will be letting go of floors, necessarily," he said.

"We will need the flexibility."

Mr Woods said the CBD office was important for building company culture.

"You need connectivity to feel the culture of the place, which you don't get over a screen," he said.

The CBD office was also important for younger staff still learning and building their professional networks. This covered everything from formal training and mentoring through to informal learning.

"[For example] the subconscious learning you get when you hear the person next to you on the phone," Mr Woods said.

"We need to strike a balance so they get the richness of experience."

He said there were two areas where he saw long-term benefits from the COVID restrictions.

One was the increasing volume and quality of communication from leaders. The check-ins, the Zoom calls, the amount of conversations that were happening.

"It's counterintuitive to the water cooler conversations but they were richer conversations," Mr Woods said.

He said a second benefit was more personal engagement, citing the example of taking Zoom calls at home while he was cradling his two dogs.

"People would see me in a different light, and there would genuinely be a conversation about how we're going," Mr Woods said.

"And I really hope that we can continue that, that we engage with our people and our clients at a personal level, that we don't go straight to business."

Ms Cecconi said she was concerned about the public sector's response.

"I've heard very few public sector



Gillian McKay.

leaders work flexibly during this time," Ms Cecconi told the forum.

This was disappointing, she said, especially when the state's most senior private sector executives were able to work from home.

"If [they] can do it, what's stopping the public sector? I suspect there is still a lack of maturity around measuring outcomes and what the real value is," Ms Cecconi said.

"Mature organisations are focused on the outcomes, they already know what's important to the business."

Productivity focus

Speakers at the boardroom forum agreed that productivity in each of their organisations had

been sustained, if not improved, during the COVID restrictions.

"I don't think there is any doubt in our world that our people are productive," Churchill Consulting director Nigel Court said

"They've got lots to do, they are engaged and they are doing it."

He said the most appropriate work arrangement often depended on the type of work; for instance, creative tasks were best pursued collectively in the office.

Mr Court said it also depended on the personal needs of each individual.

"It's what suits the person, not what suits the role," he said.

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COVID work culture sits well with business



Ashley Brown and Bre Shanahan.

Continued from page 5

Professor Tonts said one concern was that people were working longer hours while based at home.

He observed that he normally received work emails from about 7am through to 6pm, with a few in the evening.

"I was getting emails from four in the morning to midnight and it was consistent through the day," Professor Tonts said.

"The flexibility was great, but do we switch over?

"Does work become an intrusion into every aspect of life?

"That is one thing we will need to manage carefully.

"The expectation was already that people were always available, and I think that has gone further."

RAC general manager corporate affairs Will Golsby said location was just one factor in staff productivity.

"Just because somebody is sitting at their desk doesn't mean they are as productive as they could be," he said.

"You need clarity around what your teams are looking to achieve."

While noting that constant Zoom calls were exhausting, the forum participants generally agreed that most people quickly adapted.

KPMG director of management consulting and digital delta Ashley Brown said he had been working from home two to three days per month prior to COVID and often found communications to be difficult.

"We've managed to dramatically improve our use of communications technology and that made it better for everyone," he said.

Mr Court said his recent experience was a big change from previous times, when he worked on multi-year technology projects.

"What resonates with me is that change can be quick," he said.

Mr Court said there should be a greater focus on tech deployments that became operational faster and helped people to achieve their goals.

"Maybe just fix the broken bits; don't try to change everything," Mr Court told the forum.

"Be willing to commit and fail, like a startup."

In a similar vein, Professor Tonts suggested a new approach to change management as a discipline.

Rather than spending months or years in planning and then implementing, he said a better approach might be rapid implementation followed by working with people to get the best outcomes.

Automation

The embrace of communication technology during COVID restrictions was just a taste of what might come in future, the forum heard.

Mr Brown said WA had already achieved a lot in areas such as data science, supercomputing, automation and robotics.

"WA is a world leader in autonomy," he said.

"There are a lot of opportunities and we are embracing these jobs of the future."

Mr Brown encouraged companies to be strategic in their approach and build a workforce that could work alongside new technology.

"We can automate certain tasks but really it's about augmenting the role of people in those systems," he said.

"The more you automate tasks, the residual tasks left for people are more valuable.

"To make decisions, to be creative, to analyse and interpret data from those platforms means the roles of people are much more important."

Professor Tonts took a different tack, highlighting the need to manage the downside of technological change.

"There is no question jobs will

disappear and that will affect real individuals, real families, real communities," he said.

"We need to be very attuned to the uneven consequences of what is going on."

Professor Tonts noted there had been a major decline in manufacturing in WA in recent decades.

He recalled that Perth had been home to several big manufacturing and assembly plants that collectively employed thousands of people.

These included the Chamberlain tractor factory in Welshpool, the railway workshops in Midland, the State Engineering Works in North Fremantle, the Ford car assembly factory in North Fremantle, and the Holden factory at Mosman Park.

"In the past, we just let the market deal with it," Professor Tonts said.

He said new jobs would be created but they would be in different industries and require different skills.

"Brand new, shiny jobs will be created but they won't necessarily be for the same people," Professor Tonts said.

"This mismatch is a real question." KPMG partner, transformation program management, Gillian McKay said a notable example was aged care and personal services,



Rachel Cardell-Oliver.

which had become one of the biggest employers in Australia.

"Ageing is often spoken about as a drain on the economy but it's going to be an enormous opportunity in terms of new forms of work, new forms of housing, new forms of leisure," Ms McKay said.

With rapid changes in technology and employment, one of the challenges facing universities was ensuring they stayed in touch with the needs of industry.

UWA's head of computer

science and software engineering, Rachel Cardell-Oliver, said the university was well set up to tackle this challenge.

"We not only design courses and teach the students, but we work with industry and work on commercial problems and that's what feeds back, and that's the wonderful model where the research teaching nexus really works," she said.

Associate Professor Cardell-Oliver said her recent experience included working on smart metering, the internet of things, and with startups.

She suggested there were two fundamentals that students needed.

One was the deep knowledge, or foundations, of each discipline, which would enable them to work through change.

The second was communication skills, so they could talk with people across a range of disciplines and professions.

Associate Professor Cardell-Oliver said UWA also sought to broaden each student's education.

For instance, she said the artificial intelligence degree had a minor in ethics, while cyber security students also studied international politics. ■

The expectation was already that people were always available, and I think that has gone further -Matthew Tonts

Will Golsby.



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Finding the balance: workplaces of the future

COVID-19 created rapid change, and the lasting impacts of the pandemic on offices and ways of working suggest that few "white collar" workers will return to a daily, 9-to-5 stint at the office anytime soon. The concept that being in the office is somehow a proxy for productivity clearly does not hold true; the pandemic has demonstrated that employees can adopt different ways of working flexibility with many organisations reporting that productivity over the past few months has been maintained, if not increased. Work is being reframed as a thing you do, rather than a place you go, and measurement of 'work' will increasingly become about the outcome rather than the input, regardless of when and where it is done.

Whilst some of us experienced the downsides of reduced connectivity and the challenges of separating work and home life, others embraced the benefits of avoiding a daily commute to the office and being able to more easily balance family commitments and time at home. However, the new reality is that for many at

least, a choice of where work is done will be defined by nature of the work and not a set location, so organisations are using this opportunity to embrace virtual work and rethink their real estate footprint.

Designing and creating future places for work along with the tools and skills to support this new reality will be critical, and organisations will need to consider several different aspects. The natural collaboration and interaction that happens in an office environment will still be important and needs to be factored in but may require organisations to look at the quantity and nature of space provided, with some spaces scheduled for specific uses and some repurposed or even disposed. The quality and reliability of technology to allow for working from anywhere at any time, the supporting processes and mechanisms to facilitate collaboration, engage employees and connect with customers also needs to be considered and balanced with the security and protection of information.

In addition to infrastructure

related considerations, consciously addressing the culture, wellbeing and leadership dimension of these new ways of working is as important. The development of a culture that embeds the flexibility and positive aspects of the learnings from working through COVID-19 will take effort and trust will be central to this. Leaders will need to continue creating a safe environment where employees feel supported, especially around mental health. Underpinning all of this is building the skills of leaders and managers – different capabilities are required to lead and manage workforces that you can't physically see as often and who are working at different times and different places.

As we move through the phases from recovery to a new reality, taking the opportunity to design where and how we work will help us manage the changes from the impact of COVID-19.

Gillian McKay
Partner, Enterprise
Transformation, KPMG





Gig economy a growing phenomenon

Interviews with ridesharing and food delivery workers have found their experience is more nuanced than both critics and advocates have made out.

Story by Mark Beyer

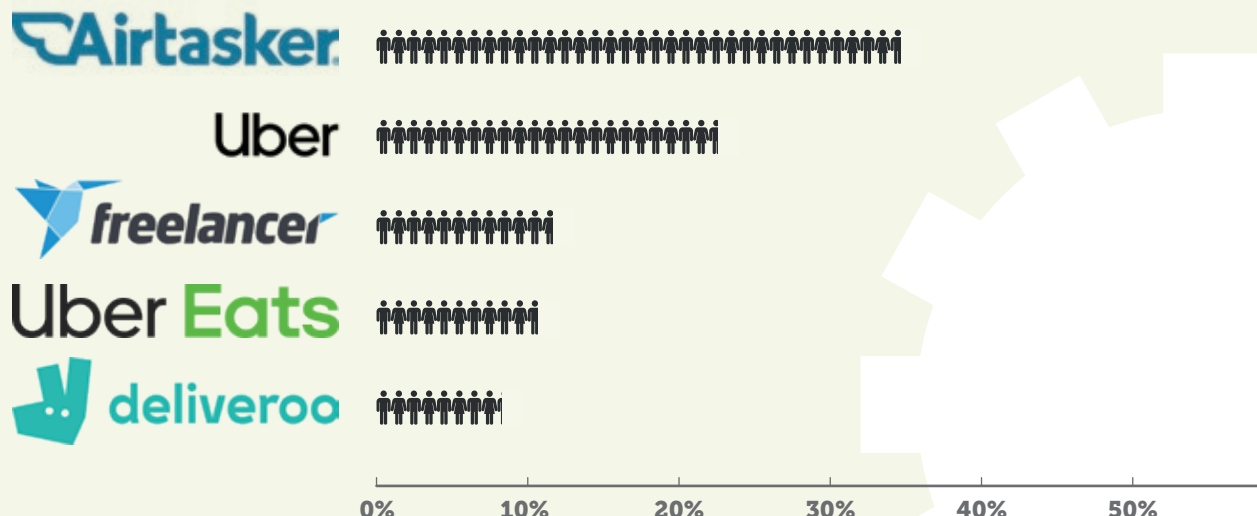
Photo by Gabriel Oliveira

13.1%
People who had undertaken digital platform work

DECISIVE Tom Barratt says the regulatory system is not designed for the gig economy.

Five most common platforms used by people in Australia currently working on digital platforms

Source: Queensland University of Technology survey.



One of the most significant labour market trends over the past decade has been the growth of what are referred to as 'non-standard work arrangements'.

This covers people working as independent contractors, through labour hire firms, or as casual employees.

It's a trend with many implications.

It creates more flexibility for the business sector and is changing the office market, for example with the growth of co-working spaces such as WeWork and Spacecubed.

For many individuals this shift has fuelled concerns about security of employment and surety of income.

This was manifest recently when casual employees did not qualify for JobKeeper.

A longer-term issue for many casual employees has been the difficulty they face qualifying for housing loans.

The trend has also raised recurring issues around the definition of independent contractors and casual employees.

This uncertainty has been highlighted by the widely debated WorkPac case, which found that a long-term casual employee was able to claim entitlements such as annual leave and sick leave on top of their casual loading.

This ruling is subject to appeal, with business groups concerned about how much it widens eligibility for those entitlements.

The trend toward people working as independent contractors has been fuelled by the rapid emergence of web-based platforms such as Uber and Airtasker.

Recent research on the use of

digital work platforms revealed their significant penetration into the labour market.

Of the 14,000 people who responded to a national survey, 13.1 per cent had undertaken digital platform work at some time.

This included 7.1 per cent who had worked through a digital platform during the past 12 months.

The survey, led by Queensland University of Technology, found more than 100 different platforms were being used.

The most common was Airtasker, which was used by 34.8 per cent of platform workers.

Uber, Freelancer, Uber Eats, and Deliveroo were next in line (see table).

The survey found that temporary residents, such as international students, were three times more likely to be a platform worker than Australian citizens.

While Uber drivers and Deliveroo riders are the most public manifestation, only 13.9 per cent of platform workers used their car or their bicycle for work.

The reality was that more than half of all platform workers (55.3 per cent) worked from their home.

Another surprising result was that nearly half (47.2 per cent)

spent less than five hours per week doing this work.

This likely includes people using platforms such as Airtasker and Freelancer to pick up a small amount of extra work, typically in areas such as writing and translation, data entry, multimedia and software development.

In contrast, transport and food delivery workers spend more hours per week doing this work than other platform workers.

They are likely to be among the 19.2 per cent of platform workers who said they derived more than half their income from platform work.

Edith Cowan University business lecturer Tom Barratt and University of Western Australia lecturer Caleb Goods teamed with some east coast colleagues to research 'gig' work: work that is paid on a 'per task' basis.

Dr Barratt said he was attracted to the research because this type of work was a new phenomenon.

They interviewed 60 ridesharing and food delivery workers and found the reality of their experiences was far more nuanced than others have made out.

A key finding was that gig workers arbitrated between the costs and benefits of their gig work.

"The workers had real and thought-out reasons for doing this type of work," Dr Barratt said.

"They also had really diverse reasons and experiences."

Many interviewees chose their gig work over other forms of low-paid work such as cleaning, hospitality and retail.

They talked about abusive bosses and underpayment as being much bigger issues in those sectors.

In comparison, gig work was

seen as a more appealing work environment.

The gig work often involved long hours but it was also seen as more flexible, enjoyable, and so-cialable than the alternatives.

Gig workers spoke about having no boss and no set hours.

However, this sense of flexibility was diminished by the reality that these workers had to fit their day around certain hours when they were busy, such as dinner time.

The sense of control was also diminished by what the interviewees saw as unilateral changes to the terms and conditions of engagement.

The survey included some workers who felt marginalised and had few choices, often because of visa restrictions.

"These workers were very aware of their position in the labour market," Dr Barratt said.

They saw gig work as a last resort, while others saw it as a stop-gap measure while they looked for 'real' jobs.

Dr Barratt acknowledged that the survey was restricted to people still doing gig work and did not cover those who had ceased this type of work.

He also noted that perceptions were coloured by the countries that many ridesharing and food delivery workers came from.

One source of frustration for gig workers was the reliance on algorithms to allocate jobs via an app.

They knew the app collected data on their performance but they didn't know how the data was used to award them work.

Another concern was the lack of control and lack of certainty about their income.

This aligned with the findings of the national survey.

Compared to professional ser-

vices workers and those doing odd jobs and maintenance work, transport and food delivery workers were significantly less satisfied with their ability to set the price for their services and with gaining new skills or improving existing skills.

Dr Barratt expressed concern that the regulatory system was not equipped to handle gig workers properly.

He noted the Fair Work Commission had consistently ruled that gig workers were independent contractors, rather than employees.

"You've got a regulatory system designed for 20th century work and a really novel form of work arrangement," he said.

"There is a really big disjoint between how regulations are written and applied and how the work is actually designed."

"It was only when we spoke to the workers and understood how this was occurring in reality that we discovered how big that disjoint was."

The national survey shed light on regulatory grey areas surrounding gig workers.

Most notably, more than a quarter of the survey participants said their current platform treated them as employees.

Nearly half the survey respondents said their main platform did not cover them for any type of work-related insurance, such as work-related injuries.

Nearly the same proportion (40 per cent) said their main platform required them to take out their own insurance.

More than 20 per cent of survey respondents did not know if their platform provided insurance cover or if they were meant to take out their own. ■

The workers had real and thought-out reasons for doing this type of work

-Tom Barratt

**Bassendean
business Hofmann
Engineering
illustrates both the
opportunities and
challenges facing WA
as the government
seeks to expand
manufacturing.**

Debt-free diversity keeps Hofmann on track



OPPORTUNITY

Operations engineer Karl Hofmann is among the third generation of family members working for the Bassendean business.
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira

Story by **Mark Beyer**

Hofmann Engineering's Bassendean workshop is the kind of place politicians like to use as a backdrop for policy announcements.

The family company has hosted prime ministers and premiers over the years, all of them keen to share in Hofmann's success as a high-tech, export-focused manufacturer.

Transport Minister Rita Saffioti was among the recent visitors after Hofmann won a contract to manufacture the bogie frames for Perth's new railcars.

That was a small but notable step in the state government's plan to rebuild manufacturing in Western Australia.

The contract was awarded by French multinational Alstom, which has been contracted to supply and maintain 246 new railcars.

As part of the contract, Alstom needs to meet a 50 per cent local content target.

Hofmann plans to invest about \$11 million installing a robotic welding machine at its Bassendean factory to manufacture the bogie frames, which support the railcar body and house the wheels and braking equipment.

It already has a similar machine at its Bendigo factory, at which it manufactures bogie frames for Victoria's new trains.

Victoria has a 60 per cent local content requirement.

The Alstom contract was a significant strategic win for Hofmann but, on its own, will not be enough to fully utilise the new equipment's potential.

It will manufacture only two bogie frames per month in Bassendean compared to 50 per month in Bendigo.

Managing director Erich Hofmann said the business needed to ensure it could utilise the equipment on a range of other jobs.

It's an approach Hofmann has been utilising for the better part of 50 years since it was established by Mr Hofmann's father and uncle.

"We invest in technology to stay at the forefront," Mr Hofmann said.

"We need new equipment and the latest technology so we can compete internationally."

The business has developed

precision engineering skills applicable across multiple industries.

It produces specialist equipment, such as gears and bearings for use in industries as diverse as mining, energy, aerospace, and defence.

The edge it adds is extra precision and strength through its machining and heat-treatment equipment.

Mr Hofmann said the company spent between \$15 million and \$20 million each year on research and development to ensure it kept up to speed.

"We are world leaders in large, forged steel gears," he said.

Wind farm equipment is another sector in which Hofmann has enjoyed success.

It has been manufacturing parts for wind turbines for more than 30 years, including gearboxes, the main shaft, tower, and slew bearings.

"Bottom line, the whole wind turbine can be 100 per cent manufactured in WA," Mr Hofmann said.

That experience has encouraged the state government to explore further opportunities in that sector.

Last month, Premier Mark McGowan announced the government was undertaking a feasibility study into producing wind turbine components locally.

A taskforce that includes Hofmann, Civmec, Austal, Pacific Industrial Company, and Fremantle Steel, along with BlueScope Steel, has been working on this initiative.

"The fact that full wind towers are being imported into the country has restricted job opportunities in manufacturing and fabricating by WA businesses," Mr McGowan said.

This is one of several initiatives the state government is pursuing to boost manufacturing.

The premier also announced last month the government planned to invest \$40 million building a diesel railcar maintenance facility at Bellevue.

This will be adjacent to the \$46 million assembly hall where Alstom will build and maintain the passenger railcars.

In addition, the government is investigating the viability of manufacturing and maintaining iron ore railcar wagons in WA.



SCALE Hofmann plans to install a robotic welding machine at Bassendean similar to this machine at its Bendigo factory.

That's being pitched as an opportunity for the big iron ore miners, led by Rio Tinto, BHP, and Fortescue Metals Group, to reinvest some of their profits into sustainable jobs in WA.

Hofmann is well placed to pursue new opportunities.

It has just completed its most successful year, with sales revenue increasing to \$160 million for the 12 months to June 2020.

It remains 100 per cent family owned and totally debt free, with Mr Hofmann saying profits were reinvested into the business.

It has also diversified, with the latest move being the acquisition of a factory in Canada.

That's in addition to facilities in Bendigo, Melbourne, and Newcastle, as well as Chile and Peru.

The business has just less than 600 staff, two-thirds of whom are in WA.

It is a big investor in training, with about 50 apprentices on its payroll.

Operations engineer Karl Hofmann said the company was in the process of establishing its own apprentice workshop on the factory floor.

This will include computerised lathes and other specialist equipment purely for training.

"We would like to do more dedicated training," Karl Hofmann said.

"They do some programming at TAFE, but not at the level we require."

The company selects year 12 students for work experience so it could recruit those with an aptitude for mechanical work.

Hofmann's diverse workforce is illustrated by a group of workers spoken to by *Business News* on the factory floor.

Its oldest employee is 83-year-old Graham Budd, who has been with the company 42 years.

"I do the big stuff," Mr Budd said with a grin when asked to describe his work.

"I'm still capable of doing the

big work, otherwise I wouldn't be here."

He completed a five-year boilermaker apprenticeship at the old Humes pipe factory in Subiaco, and still utilises the traditional welding skills he learned years ago.

"It's the same work, but each job is a challenge, I want to do it to the best of my ability," Mr Budd said.

He works four days a week, starting at 5am.

"Age is only a number," said Mr Budd, who still competes in water-skiing competitions.

Like many people working in steel fabrication, he laments the amount of work done offshore.

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We would like to do more dedicated training

-Karl Hofmann

Diversity keeps Hofmann on track

Continued from page 11

"The trouble these days is that people go for the cheapest price and a lot of times it backfires," Mr Budd said.

"The quality in Australia is a lot better."

He works alongside John Phan, who also trained as a boilermaker.

Mr Phan has moved into a welding coordinator role after completing extra courses at TAFE.

Hofmann allowed him to take on extra weekend work so he could attend training during the week.

Mr Phan's main role is to ensure the correct procedures and consumables are used.

"There is a lot of planning, it's all worked out before," Mr Phan said.

"That's where I have a different thought process to 'Buddy'.

"I believe you shouldn't be working harder, you should be working smarter."

Both men see potential to improve training.

"I had a lot of lecturers who were old-school and were not progressing with the technology," Mr Phan said.

"Some of them couldn't operate the newer machines they had at TAFE."

Jonty Thomas illustrates the trend towards computer-based work on the factory floor.

He is a fitter machinist by trade who now works as a gear inspector.

That essentially involves entering calculations into a computer that drives a highly sophisticated scanner, which checks the shape and quality of gears machined at Hofmann. ■

TECH Most of the machines at Hofmann are computer controlled.
Photo: Gabriel Oliveira



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Taking account of the human factor in the virtual workplace



Working remotely and connecting 'virtually' with workplace colleagues was already becoming more popular before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has now been taken up in an unprecedented manner. Many people have welcomed the flexibility virtual work has offered them, and we are likely to see a continuation of the use of virtual work in the future.

One of the key things we have learnt about virtual work so far is that it is im-

portant to prioritise remote workers' mental health, by ensuring everyone is able to connect regularly with their co-workers and by spending some time on social interactions through virtual forums.

The team of work psychology researchers and practitioners in UWA's School of Psychological Science works in this space, with a wide range of industry partners, including government, national and multinational cor-

porations, and not-for-profit partner organisations.

Our work psychology students are trained in evidence-based organisational psychology approaches and gain workplace experience through our collaboration with industry partners. Our focus is on delivering practical outcomes in performance, safety and employee wellbeing.

To provide a recent example of how we do this, a mining company was concerned that frontline supervisors were overloaded, but other than for anecdotal evidence the organisation didn't have a clear picture of how much of the supervisors' time was spent on which tasks. One of our placement students collected the relevant data through many days of structured observations and interviews.

We were able to provide objective insights in the supervisors' workloads and then provided targeted improvement recommendations to help free up more of the supervisors' time for essential interactions with their teams.

While we can't see the future with full clarity, we can be certain that along with virtual work, there will be further changes to how work is done today. Another

expectation for future workplaces is that the use of automation will continue to increase. This is most likely to occur successfully if workers are given opportunities to take on meaningful new roles that co-exist and interact with these automated processes.

When we're designing the workplaces of the future, it is essential to take into account what we know from both research on human factors (designing work to suit human physical and mental capabilities and limitations) and research on job design and motivation (what makes jobs meaningful and engaging for workers).

People spend a large proportion of their lives at work. Anything we can do to make their workplaces better will make their lives better.

Dr Lisette Kanse

Lecturer, School of Psychological Science
The University of Western Australia



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