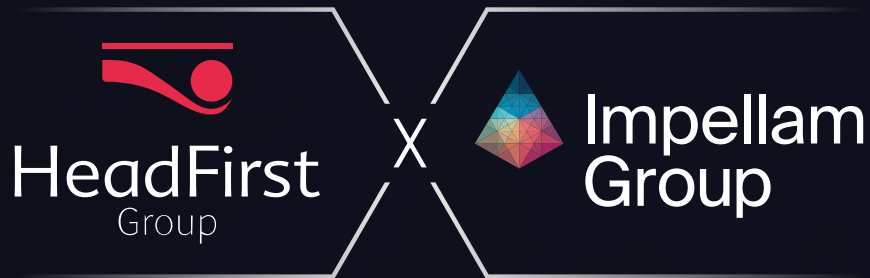


HeadFirst Global



GETTING TO GRIPS WITH WORKFORCE CHANGE

Five practical steps for
Australian organisations

Powering the next world of work, **together**

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SUMMARY

This is the guide clients and prospects have asked us to create: a practical starting point for Australian procurement, HR, and C-suite leaders trying to make sense of workforce change. It sets out five steps: understand the work, build a real picture of the workforce, make smarter choices about flexibility, bring governance into the picture early, and turn that into a realistic roadmap.

It uses examples from mining, infrastructure, healthcare, government, and other workforce-heavy sectors to show what that looks like in practice. Alongside the five steps, you will find AI prompts to build your own tools and templates, immediate actions, leadership questions, and a resource list for deeper reading.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- **Use each step as a standalone module:**
Bring one section (work, workforce, flexibility, governance, roadmap) to a leadership or project meeting and work through the questions together.
- **Start where the pain is most visible:**
If your biggest challenge is cost and compliance, begin with governance; if it is delivery risk or skills, start with work and workforce visibility.
- **Turn the AI prompts into working tools:**
Copy the prompts into your AI platform to generate templates, workshop ideas, and decision matrices tailored to your organisation or business unit.
- **Treat “Start today” as your action list:**
Pick one action from each step and assign an owner and timeframe, rather than trying to tackle the whole guide at once.



THE PRESSURES RESHAPING WORKFORCE DECISIONS

Australia is entering a more complex phase of workforce decision-making. The operating environment is being reshaped not just by technology and talent shortages, but by a tighter regulatory landscape, more active enforcement, and growing scrutiny of how work is sourced, structured, and governed.

Recent reforms, including “[same job, same pay](#)” provisions for labour hire, increased penalties for wage underpayment, and expanded powers for regulators, are changing the economics and risk profile of flexible workforce models. The [Fair Work Ombudsman and Fair Work Commission](#) are taking a more visible role, and high-profile cases are reinforcing that workforce decisions are no longer just operational or financial; they are legal and reputational.

Long-standing structural pressures have not eased either. Skills shortages remain acute across mining, infrastructure, healthcare, and government. Organisations are also managing increasingly complex workforce mixes spanning permanent employees, contractors, labour hire, service providers, and offshore support.

AI is adding another layer of complexity, and not always in ways that are fully visible to leadership teams. Tasks are being automated, augmented, or redistributed, but governance, accountability, and workforce strategy are not keeping pace.

This is exposing the limits of traditional workforce planning. Many organisations still manage the workforce as if the core question is, “How many people do we need, and what will they cost?” In today’s environment, that is no longer sufficient.

A more useful framing is to begin with what the organisation is trying to deliver, then decide what mix of skills, services, technology, and workers will do it safely, compliantly, and effectively. That is a meaningful change, but it does not need to feel abstract. Most leaders can already see the direction of travel; the harder part is knowing where to begin.

In practical terms, it comes down to five steps.



1. GET CLEAR ON WHAT WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE

For a long time, roles were a reasonable proxy for the work. In more stable environments, leaders could plan around headcount and job families and still get close to what the business needed. That is harder now because work is less neatly contained inside roles and increasingly spread across teams, suppliers, and technology. AI has weakened the link further.

In practice, similar work is often delivered in different ways across the same organisation. A mining operator might have one site hiring contractors for shutdown planning, another using an engineering services firm for similar work, and a central team trying to build the capability in-house. A healthcare provider might rely on agency staff to manage peaks while another part of the organisation invests in process improvement or digital tools to ease pressure on the same workflows.

These decisions are not wrong in isolation, but taken together they can lead to duplication, fragmented delivery, inconsistent cost structures, and hidden risk. Work becomes tied to legacy job structures or local decisions rather than being designed deliberately around what the business is trying to deliver.

The task is to look beyond headcount and map the work itself: the critical tasks involved and what should be done by people, technology, or partners.

DEFINITION

In practical terms, outcomes are the results the business needs to achieve, not the job titles or number of people used to get there.

- **In mining:** Completing a maintenance shutdown safely, on time, and with minimal production loss.
- **In infrastructure:** Reopening a rail section by a fixed deadline.
- **In healthcare:** Reducing patient discharge delays.
- **In government:** Processing a backlog of applications accurately and within service targets.

Once you define the outcome, you can make better decisions about the mix of internal capability, flexible labour, specialist services, process redesign, or AI support needed to deliver it.

A simple way to test this is to reframe a current workforce request. A request for “20 additional contractors” often translates into something more specific: clearing a maintenance backlog before the next shutdown cycle, reducing patient wait times ahead of winter demand, or accelerating a permitting process tied to a major project.

Once the outcome is clear, the options widen. It becomes easier to decide what should sit with internal teams, flexible labour, specialist services, process redesign, or AI support. If the work is not clear, the delivery model will not be either.





START TODAY

- Pick one business unit or project area and map the work it needs to deliver over the next 12 months.
- Identify which tasks require human judgement, which could be redesigned, and which may be suitable for automation or a service model.
- Turn that work map into a simple list of capabilities and outcomes rather than a list of job titles.



AI PROMPT

Act as a workforce strategy facilitator. Create a one-page work-mapping template for [organisation/business unit]. Start with three priority business outcomes for the next 12 months, then break each one into critical tasks, tasks needing human judgement, tasks that could be simplified or automated, key capability gaps, and immediate decisions required. Include a short workshop agenda and the exact questions leaders should answer in the room.



THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT LEADERSHIP MEETING

1. Which outcomes matter most to the business over the next 12 months, and do we understand the work behind them?
2. Where are we still defaulting to headcount requests when the real need is a capability or an outcome?
3. Which areas of work look ripe for redesign, simplification, or automation?



2. BUILD A REAL PICTURE OF YOUR WHOLE WORKFORCE

This is the point many organisations miss. They can usually see permanent employees, but not the wider workforce around them: contractors, labour hire, statement-of-work engagements (agreements for a defined piece of work, rather than individual hires), outsourced services, offshore resources, and increasingly, AI tools shaping work in the background.

Most organisations already operate a blended workforce. The problem is that procurement, HR, and finance each see only part of it, so few have a single picture of cost, risk, and delivery.

The consequences are practical. A mining company may be using multiple labour hire firms across sites for similar roles at different rates and terms, with no consolidated view of cost or compliance. A government department may find that statement-of-work contracts are functioning as staff augmentation, creating cost opacity and classification risk.

There is also a quieter layer: teams are adopting AI for reporting, scheduling, analysis, or customer interactions without formal oversight. That affects productivity and risk, but rarely appears in workforce plans or governance.

Without a joined-up view, blind spots grow. Costs rise, supplier dependency deepens, skills gaps are harder to spot, and chances to redesign work or improve delivery are easier to miss.

In Australia, this is a resilience issue as much as an efficiency one. Scrutiny of labour hire, worker classification, and wage compliance is rising, and organisations are expected to show control over how work is sourced and managed across the extended workforce. That expectation is visible across sectors. In government, for example, the [Australian Public Service Commission's](#) Workforce Strategy frames strategic workforce planning as a capability issue to be addressed proactively, not reactively.

In plain terms, you need to know who is doing work for your organisation, under what arrangement, at what cost, under what controls, and for what purpose. That visibility is the starting point for everything else.





START TODAY

- Pull together a first-cut view of your total workforce, including employees, contractors, labour hire, statement of work engagements, outsourced services, and offshore resources.
- Identify where your workforce data sits today and where major blind spots remain.
- Agree one owner for building a joined-up baseline view across HR, procurement, and finance.



AI PROMPT

Act as an enterprise workforce analyst. Build a baseline workforce register for [organisation] that captures employees, contractors, labour hire, SOW engagements, outsourced services, offshore resources, and AI-supported work. Show the columns needed for business unit, work performed, supplier, contract type, cost visibility, risk level, compliance owner, and known data gaps. Then add a short executive summary explaining what blind spots this register is designed to reveal.



THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT LEADERSHIP MEETING

1. Do we have a single picture of who is doing work for us across all workforce channels?
2. Where are our biggest gaps in workforce visibility, cost control, or supplier dependency?
3. Who is accountable for building and maintaining this view?



3. DECIDE WHERE FLEXIBILITY MATTERS

Once you can see the whole workforce, the next question is how different work should be delivered: what stays core, what flexes, what is better bought as a service, and where AI or process redesign can remove routine effort.

Many organisations have arrived at their current mix by accumulation rather than design: contractors filling long-term gaps, services being used like staff augmentation, and permanent employees covering work that could be simplified or delivered differently.

Flexibility is not a synonym for contractors or labour hire. It is a choice about how work gets done: build adaptable internal capability, use project-based hiring for defined needs, bring in specialist partners for episodic work, or use AI to remove routine tasks so scarce expertise is used where it matters most.

The risk comes when those choices are made reactively. An infrastructure organisation under delivery pressure may default to more contractors to speed up timelines. That may solve the immediate problem, but over time it can raise costs, deepen supplier dependency, and leave core capability underbuilt.

A better approach is to separate the work more deliberately: keep programme leadership, safety, and critical decisions in-house; use flexible labour for predictable peaks; shift specialist work to service partners; and use automation where tasks are fully routine, rules-based, and low judgement. Where judgement still sits with people, augmentation is often the more useful framing: use AI to support the work by reducing admin, coordination, or reporting, while leaving people responsible for expertise, decisions, and accountability.

[Rob Kopel of PwC Australia](#) has made the same distinction: automation works best when the task can largely be handed over to technology. Augmentation is different. It uses AI to take routine effort out of work that still depends on human judgement.

In a labour-heavy mining business, that might mean keeping safety-critical site leadership and operational decision-making close to the business, using flexible shutdown crews for peak demand, moving specialist technical analysis to service partners, and using AI to support scheduling, asset diagnostics, and maintenance planning.

A similar pattern is emerging in healthcare. Some organisations are moving beyond agency staffing as the default form of flexibility by combining internal workforce pools, smarter rostering, and digital triage tools, while reserving agency use for genuinely unpredictable surges.

If you are not explicitly deciding how different types of work should be delivered, your organisation is still making those decisions; just indirectly, and often by default.





START TODAY

- Choose three critical capability areas and decide which work should remain core, which genuinely benefits from flexibility, and which could shift to a service or outcome based model.
- Review where contractors and labour hire are being used out of habit rather than design, and challenge at least one area to move to a clearer strategic rationale.
- Identify one area where AI or process redesign could strip out routine work and free up scarce expertise and commit to a small pilot rather than a large transformation.



AI PROMPT

Act as a workforce design adviser. Create a decision matrix for [organisation] that helps leaders choose the best delivery model for different types of work: core employee capability, flexible labour, specialist services, offshore support, or AI-enabled redesign. Include the decision criteria, trade-offs, red flags, and an example of how to score one piece of work from start to finish.



THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT LEADERSHIP MEETING

1. Where does flexibility genuinely create value for us, and where does it create noise or risk?
2. Which parts of our workforce model are built for yesterday's demand profile?
3. Are we making deliberate choices about workforce composition, or simply repeating old patterns?



4. TREAT GOVERNANCE AS PART OF STRATEGY, NOT ADMIN

This is where many workforce transformation programmes stall. Leaders talk about agility and innovation, but governance is treated as a separate workstream. In reality, it determines whether a modern workforce model can scale safely and consistently.

Here, governance means the rules, controls, decision rights, and accountabilities that shape how work is sourced, managed, paid for, and overseen. That includes worker classification, supplier controls, contractor onboarding, payroll integrity, safety, data handling, and AI oversight.

Australian employers are already seeing this in practice. Labour hire reform, including same job, same pay changes, has altered the economics of some workforce models and forced companies to rethink how work is sourced and managed. Guidance from the Fair Work Ombudsman, along with recent same job, same pay cases, shows how quickly compliance has become a strategic issue for host employers, not just providers.

Where governance is weak, the impact shows up quickly. Contractor onboarding slows critical projects,

supplier terms drift, classification decisions are made locally, payroll issues surface late, and AI tools are adopted without clear accountability.

None of these issues sit neatly in one function. HR, procurement, legal, finance, risk, and operations each own part of the picture, but without alignment governance becomes reactive and uneven.

The point is to bring governance in early, while workforce decisions are being shaped rather than after they are in place. When labour models, suppliers, payroll, safety, and AI are considered together from the start, organisations can move faster with fewer surprises.

Done well, governance does not slow the business down. It reduces friction, improves supplier performance, and gives leaders more confidence to use a broader mix of workforce options.





START TODAY

- Review your current governance points across labour engagement, onboarding, supplier controls, payroll, and AI use.
- Identify one or two areas where weak governance is already creating delay, rework, or risk.
- Set a short cross-functional review between HR, procurement, legal, and risk to agree priority fixes.



AI PROMPT

Act as a governance and risk lead. Create a workforce control review pack for [organisation] covering labour engagement, onboarding, worker classification, payroll assurance, supplier controls, safety, data handling, and AI oversight. Include a risk-rating table, a list of minimum controls, typical failure points, and a short action plan for the top five issues that should be escalated first.



THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT LEADERSHIP MEETING

1. Where is weak governance slowing down workforce decisions or creating unnecessary risk?
2. Do we have the right controls for both human and AI-enabled work?
3. Which compliance issues are operationally manageable today but strategically dangerous tomorrow?



5. START WITH ONE REALISTIC ROADMAP

The final step is to make the picture actionable. Start with a simple “you are here” map: what your workforce looks like now across employees, contractors, services, and AI-enabled work; where the biggest risks sit; and where the clearest opportunities are.

From there, turn that into a practical plan with priorities, owners, and decisions. In many organisations, that means improving workforce visibility, identifying critical skills gaps, reviewing supplier dependency, deciding which work could be delivered differently, and setting basic governance rules for AI and new workforce models.

A realistic roadmap has owners, timeframes, and decision points, not just themes. It makes clear what should change in the next 90 days and which trade-offs leaders need to resolve.



START TODAY

- Create a one-page ‘you are here’ map covering workforce mix, major risks, major gaps, and near-term decisions.
- Pick three actions for the next quarter rather than trying to design the full end-state now.
- Assign executive ownership for the roadmap and agree how progress will be reviewed.



AI PROMPT

Act as a transformation programme manager. Build a 90-day workforce action roadmap for [organisation] based on five inputs: current workforce mix, biggest risks, critical capability gaps, supplier dependencies, and immediate business pressures. Present it as a sequenced plan with workstreams, owners, milestones, dependencies, and the top three decisions leaders need to make in the next quarter.



THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT LEADERSHIP MEETING

1. If we are honest, where are we today on workforce maturity and readiness?
2. What are the next three decisions we need to make in the next 90 days?
3. Who owns the roadmap, and how will we know whether we are making progress?

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

The mix of regulation, cost pressure, workforce complexity, and new technology can make it hard to know where to begin, let alone what the right model looks like.

The first step is to create enough clarity to act. It needs to help leaders see the work, the workforce, and the trade-offs more clearly. From there, better decisions become possible: where flexibility helps, where stability matters, where services make more sense, and where AI can support delivery without weakening judgement or governance.

The organisations that make progress will not be the ones with all the answers first. They will be the ones willing to get clearer on where they are, ask better questions, and take the next sensible step.



USEFUL RESOURCES: TOP 10

What we're reading, writing about, listening to, and discussing right now.



01

PROCUREMENT LEADERS SURVEY REPORT

240+ procurement leaders on AI, tech adoption and recruitment models shaping 2026.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



06

FAIR WORK OMBUDSMAN

Labour hire changes (formal guidance).

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



02

AI AND THE WORKFORCE: WHY AUGMENTATION IS WINNING OVER AUTOMATION

TBR Talks podcast. Rob Kopel, Partner, AI Leader at PwC Australia, joins host Patrick Heffernan and TBR analysts to discuss practical delivery of AI solutions.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



07

CLOSING THE PROCUREMENT VALUE GAP

World Commerce and Contracting.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



03

CO-INTELLIGENCE BY ETHAN MOLLICK

A Wharton professor who spent two years using AI. His core idea: the 'jagged frontier' — AI is brilliant at some tasks and surprisingly useless at others, and the line between the two is rarely where you'd expect.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



08

GADENS

Market commentary on same job, same pay cases.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



04

HOW APAC ENTERPRISES ARE UNIFYING GOVERNANCE ACROSS NON-PERMANENT LABOUR

How leading APAC businesses are pulling visibility, cost control and compliance under one roof across their contingent workforce.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



09

BRUCE DAISLEY WEBINAR

Why the shift from roles to outcomes is already happening.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



05

PAYDAY SUPER: WHAT'S CHANGING FOR EMPLOYERS

What employers need to know from 1 July 2026.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



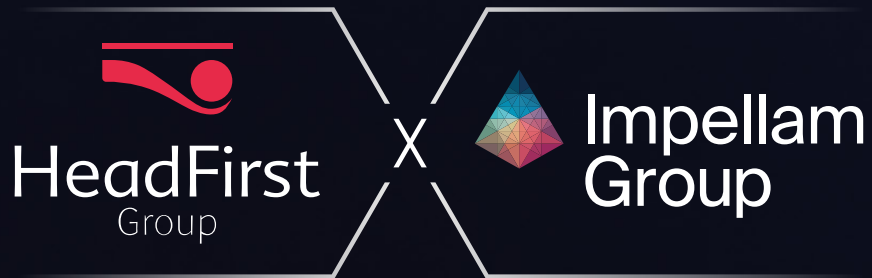
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