CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

BUSINESS & FINANCE

and

MARKETING, SALES, & SERVICES

UNIVERSAL TRENDS

FINAL

Project Overview

In February 2024, the California Department of Education and MBA Research and Curriculum Center collaborated to convene a futuring panels with California business executives. The business executives provided their perspectives on:

- The trends shaping the workforce development needs in the California business environment and some of the skill sets needed to address those trends
- Evaluation of ethical leadership traits and ethics scenarios in the workplace and their industries
- Evaluation of core skills needed in Business and Finance as well as Marketing, Sales, and Services
- Credentials and certifications needed in business

The following information focuses on the trends portion of the work and the universal trends that came up during discussions on business, finance, marketing, sales, and services.

Universal Trends Across California Business Pathways

Trend: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Leading the Charge

Artificial intelligence (AI) is at the forefront of the business world, helping maximize productivity while minimizing costs. Despite some businesses being reticent to adopt AI, the consensus of futuring panel participants is that AI can lead to increased efficiencies and, in turn, greater profits. AI applications look different depending on the workplace, yet AI helps with day-to-day work, regardless of industry. While generally effective, AI requires meaningful human oversight to ensure accuracy and appropriateness, given that error and bias can occur if left unchecked. AI skills and tools highlighted by panel participants include:

Prompt Engineering
Prompt engineering—the ability to write effective AI prompts to yield the results that businesses want—is used by companies to write proposals, press releases, and other materials. A thoughtful approach to creating prompts is necessary to bridge the gap between raw queries and meaningful AI-generated responses.

Chatbots

Chatbots are computer programs that simulate and process human conversation (either written or spoken), allowing humans to interact with digital devices as if they were communicating with a real person. Chatbots can be as simple as rudimentary programs that answer a simple query with a single-line response, or as sophisticated as digital assistants that learn and evolve to deliver increasing levels of personalization as they gather and process information.

Trend: Evolution of Tech

Today's marketers must be comfortable using a stack (variety) of marketing technology, or MarTech for short. Given the wide range of MarTech available to run a business, professionals must select the right technology depending on the client, campaign, or purpose. Evaluating and vetting new software are imperative, as are an understanding of privacy, cybersecurity, compliance, and other regulations impacting use of MarTech.

Trend: Integration/Compatibility of Tech

The increased integration of specific technologies and applications can come with other challenges. Certain programs/systems may be incompatible, making it difficult for them to "talk" to each other well—often resulting in excessive manual entry of data from one system into another. In such instances, integration of the technologies may result in greater problems versus benefits for the organization.

Trend: Basic Skills Needed in the Workplace

The essential skills and knowledge that employees need to get and hold a job in marketing are changing. Basic communication and tech skills are no longer enough. Certainly, to be successful, employees must still be able to create and manipulate Excel spreadsheets, develop PowerPoint slideshows and give oral presentations, and use Zoom or other virtual meeting software. Unfortunately, in the shift to remote work in recent years, a greater reliance on technology has displaced the application of soft skills in the workplace (virtual or otherwise).

Interpersonal Skills

Employees don't seem to know how to interact with each other or with customers anymore, nor do they show empathy and respect for others. Their customer service skills are lacking.

They struggle to follow tasks through to completion and are unsure how and when to ask questions of colleagues and higher-ups.

Writing for Business Versus the Humanities
Businesses are also finding that even if employees come to them with written communication and research skills, these skills are more appropriate for the humanities, rather than for business. They need training in writing professional emails, speaking professionally on the phone, holding business meetings, and finding and interpreting data for decision-making.

Trend: Shifting Perceptions & Expectations Around Remote Work

Workers' expectations for remote versus in-person work have impacted hiring practices. Many people are unwilling to work in the office all the time. Instead, they expect fully remote or hybrid schedules—and may turn down a job if they are expected to be in the office five days a week. Panel participants reported that a remote workforce can be challenging for managers who like to look over the shoulders of their employees. Managers must trust their staff to do their jobs correctly. However, it's also important to have occasional in-person interactions to maintain comradery and keep employees connected.