The Voice of Talent 2019

Insights on Attracting and Retaining Australian Tech Talent

CONTINO

Contents

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Gerhard is the Head of Talent APAC for Contino and a leader in Tech Recruitment, HR and Workforce Management. He specialises in running a regional team, utilising candidate attraction, engagement and retention strategies.

He has run more than 100 technology events and recruited over 300 technologists across a variety of organisations. Gerhard invests a great deal of time learning and understanding the latest tech trends, which allows him to engage with tech talent at a deeper level.

Gerhard runs his own events, leveraging every opportunity to do things better. He gives back to the tech community, as a strong believer that positive actions will come back to you.

"Flexible working has changed my life"
Chris Van Dal, Senior Systems Engineer (DevOps)

"The value of being surrounded by like-minded people cannot be overstated"
Will Robinson, Senior DevOps Consultant

"Exciting projects with the chance to implement modern tech is most important to me"
Samantha Raines, Data Engineer

"If your employer is supportive of your learning and development journey, this for me would be a good reason to stay loyal to them as it shows that they care about my progression"
Zainab Sanaa, Cloud Engineer

Introduction

Companies across Australia are in a battle to hire and retain the best IT talent in the market.

It is imperative that Senior Managers and HR professionals adopt a talent strategy that is tailored for high performing IT professionals. A generic, one-size-fits-all talent strategy is an outdated approach of the past.

Contino invited around 300 IT professionals across Australia to answer 15 questions that were designed to help industry leaders understand tech talent at a deeper level. Some key areas within the survey include: reasons for joining or leaving an organisation and key drivers that make top tech talent happy or unhappy in their roles.

The survey respondents came from a range of industries, age groups and career levels, from Graduates to Lead Engineers all the way through to Heads-of and C-Levels.
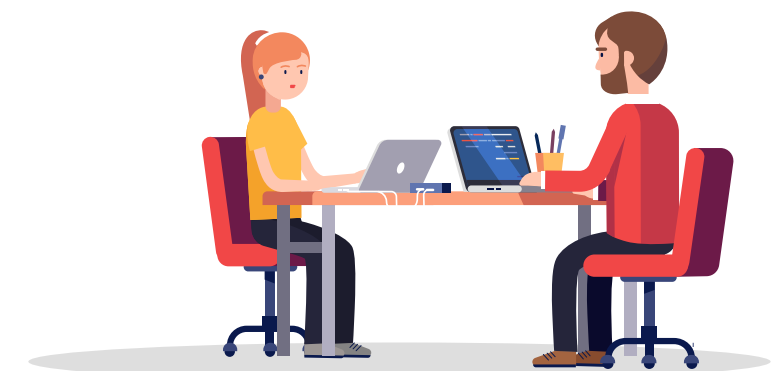
Respondent Profile

60%

of respondents aged 18 to 24 were **female**

Whilst the percentage of female technologists was 14% overall, in the 18-24 age category, 60% of the respondents were female, indicating that **the industry is now attracting more female tech talent than ever before.**

Company size

Most of the survey respondents work for large businesses.

46%
< 500 employees

20%
500 - 5000 employees

34%
> 5,000 employees

Industry

The majority of respondents were working in

Financial Services (26%) and Technology (57%) organisations.

Technology	57%	Healthcare	2%
Financial Services	26%	Public Sector	2%
Media	5%	Energy	2%
Telco	4%	Retail	2%

Roles

Respondents came from a variety of roles from graduates, junior level, managerial positions and senior roles.

Survey Results

Key Learnings from the Survey

The results of this survey clearly show that today's tech talent want the following:

- Modern tech

- Modern delivery models

- To work in smaller teams of highly skilled colleagues

- Collaborative local teams

- Flexible conditions

- Great company culture, free from internal politics

- Companies that invest in upskilling their staff and who encourage learning on the job

- Exciting projects

Q1. How Difficult Is It for Your Organisation to Attract Great Talent?

35%

28%

26%

7%

4%

Extremely difficult

Very difficult

Difficult

Somewhat difficult

Not Difficult

Business Leaders are well aware of how important it is to attract talent that have the right skills, attitude and culture fit. After hearing again and again that finding great talent is becoming more difficult, we asked the question to determine the extent of this difficulty with the overwhelming response showing that it is tricky to get the right talent on board.
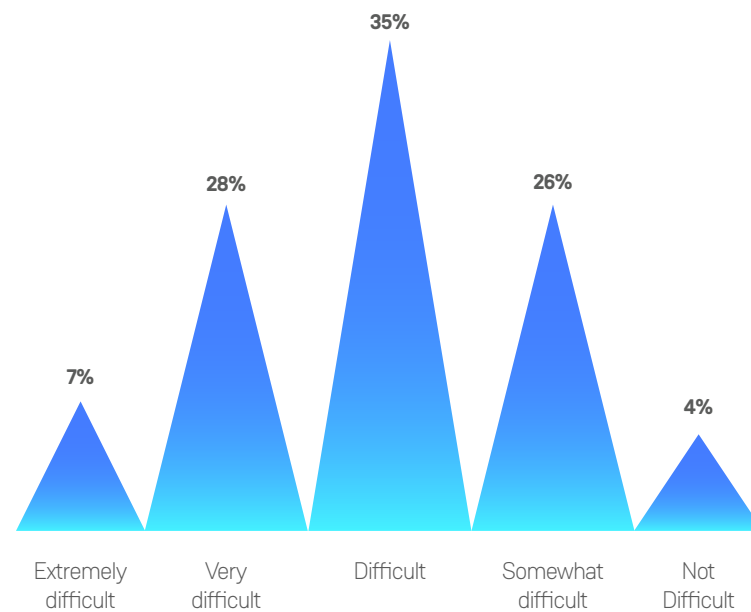
Approximately 70% of respondents said that it was either difficult, very difficult or extremely difficult to attract great talent, so if your organisation is struggling with talent attraction, you can take some comfort knowing that you are not alone.

Martin Baillie
Solution Architect • Core Platform Engineering Tyro

"Finding the right tech talent is difficult on so many levels. Top tech talent is passive; they're not coming through your traditional recruitment channels.

I've had some success reaching these people through hosting industry meetups, tech blogging, and more recently, an alternative 'capture the flag' container challenge.

These are all subtle ways to highlight the great things happening at your organisation to technologists that would otherwise be unaware."

Q2. What Is the Most Important Factor for an Organisation to Retain You as an Employee?

Once you have secured the ideal candidate and convinced them to join your business, the next challenge is to ensure that the new team member is happy working at the business, and that their workplace needs are met.

This question gets to the heart of what really matters on the ground, day-to-day, as a tech employee.

The results were evenly spread, indicating that all factors mentioned were important in retaining tech talent. Having a good culture was high on the importance list; however, the most important factor for retaining tech talent was having exciting projects with modern tech strategies for the team to work on.

With this in mind, if your organisation is not implementing modern tech strategies and you are experiencing high attrition rates, this could be one of the factors. When your organisation is defining it's tech strategy moving forward, please consider that a lack of modernisation may be looked upon unfavourably by your existing teams, which could cause them to look elsewhere.

Regular salary reviews	Exciting projects with modern tech strategies	Having a good culture	Working flexibility	Career progression
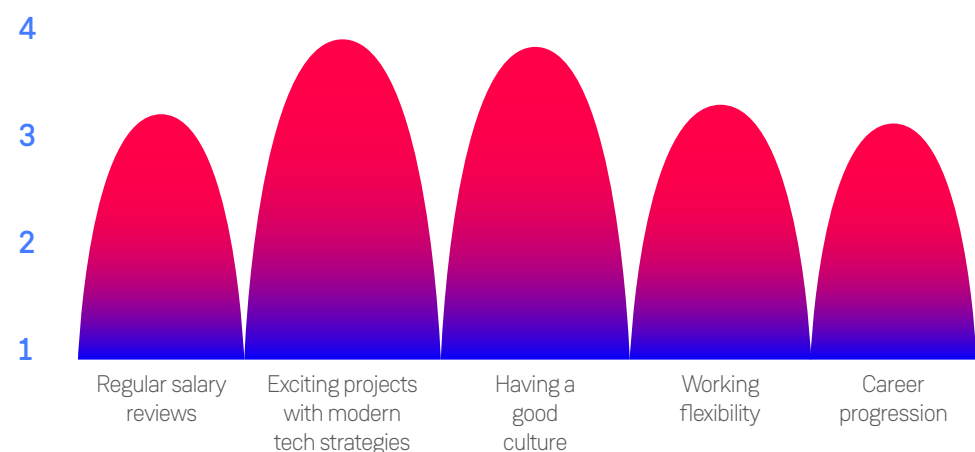
Samantha Raines
Data Engineer • Contino

"I completely agree with this – having the ability to work on exciting projects **with the chance to implement modern tech is most important to me** when working within an organisation.

In addition to this, **having the confidence in your organisation to implement new modern tech** (within reason) and continuously grow with the tech is a huge bonus, as there is so much out there to keep up-to-date with."

Q3. How Important Are Flexible Working Arrangements When Considering a New Position?

We are living in a technologically-advanced time, with multiple devices, project management and collaboration software tools, wide-spread wifi and data accessibility, and affordable travel possibilities. Alongside trying to find the right work-life balance and juggle competing life priorities, the increasing feasibility of flexible working is becoming a requirement for many engineers and developers.

Of course, full flexibility is not always possible, especially when your organisation demands face to face collaboration. However, adding flexibility where possible will go down very well with your tech talent.

If you are looking to attract and retain the best candidates, re-evaluating how your team can work together from multiple, flexible locations is becoming a necessity. Especially with 76% of respondents indicating flexible working arrangements are either very important or extremely important.

Chart:
- Not important at all: 0%
- Not so important: 3%
- Somewhat important: 21%
- Very important: 41%
- Extremely important: 35%
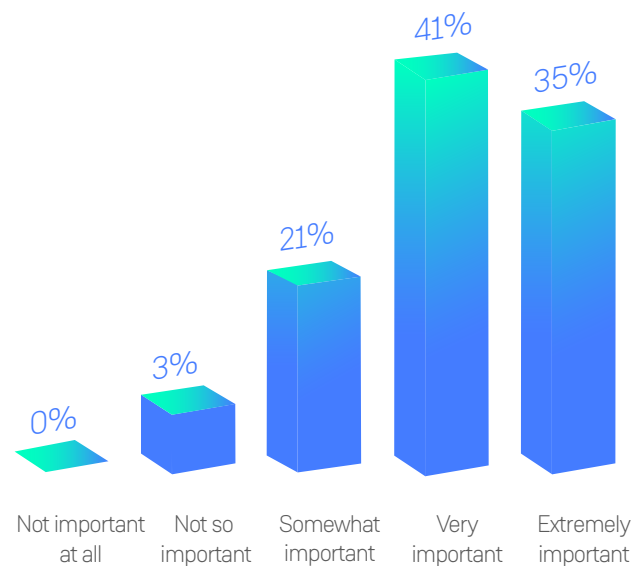
Chris Van Dal
Senior Systems Engineer (DevOps) · Octopus Deploy

"**Flexible working has changed my life.** I work for Octopus Deploy, an Australian based deployment automation company, where **every team member can work remotely and flexibly.**

This has allowed me to spend more time with my family, **improved my productivity, and improved my own well-being.**

As someone who lives almost two hours from the CBD, having the option to work remotely or flexibly is a considerable factor when deciding to join an organisation."
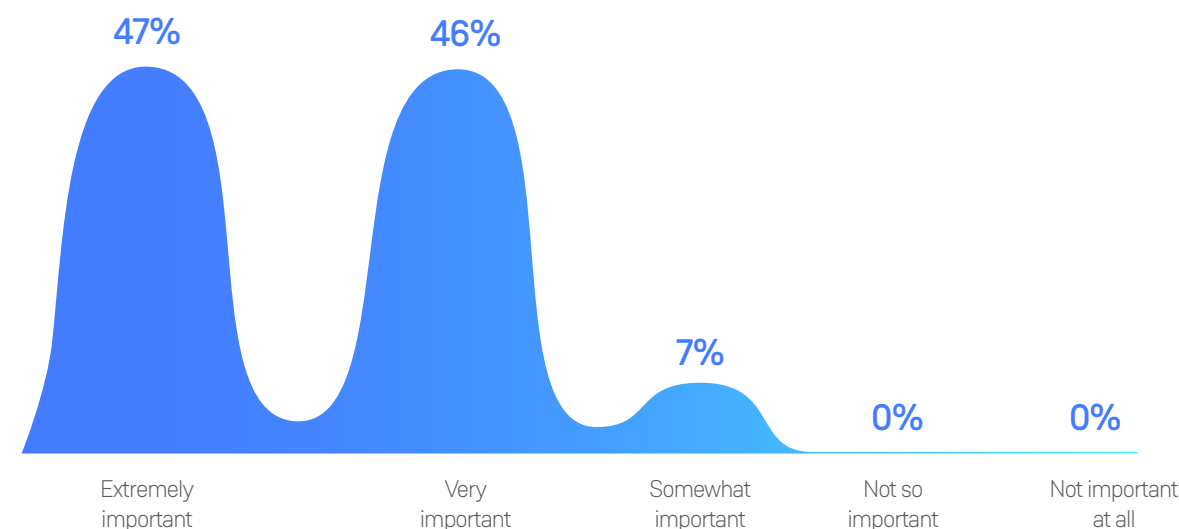
Q4. How Important Is It to Work with a Highly Talented Team When Looking for a New Position?

John Calipari, the famous American basketball coach said in his book 'Success is the Only Option':

> **"Talent attracts talent. The best want to be among their peers."**

When a basketball team has a star player, other players aspire to play alongside them. This is true in sport, and also true in the workplace. Talented developers who are performing well in their career, tend to spend time with other developers who are also talented. And developers who have a yearning to improve their skills will want to work with the best so that they can continue to grow.

If your organisation keeps the bar high in terms of the quality of the skills of your key developers, these talented professionals will bring similar professionals with them.

47% **46%** **7%** **0%** **0%**

Extremely important | Very important | Somewhat important | Not so important | Not important at all

Will Robinson
Senior DevOps Consultant · Contino

> "I agree that working **with talented colleagues is an extremely important factor** when looking for a new position.
>
> I wouldn't consider a position unless the current employees are passionate about what they do and have a burning desire to be the best.
>
> **The value of being surrounded by like-minded people cannot be overstated -** both for the employees as well as their company."

Q5. How Important is a Modern Tech Stack When Looking for Your Next Role? (i.e. Public Cloud, Microservices Architecture, CI/CD, Container Orchestration, Serverless)

With the speed of change in technology, developers have become impatient when it comes to their careers. Top tier, experienced developers want to work with the latest technologies because they have options and can be picky. This does put pressure on businesses to provide cutting-edge tech opportunities to their developers, in order to keep them happy.

With 89% of respondents saying that working with a modern tech stack is either very important or extremely important, you have to keep in mind exactly what your talented developers will do once they are on board. If your organisation is using outdated tech, you could be at a huge disadvantage in your quest to attract talent.

Extremely important — 53%
Very important — 37%
Somewhat important — 7%
Not so important — 2%
Not important at all — 1%
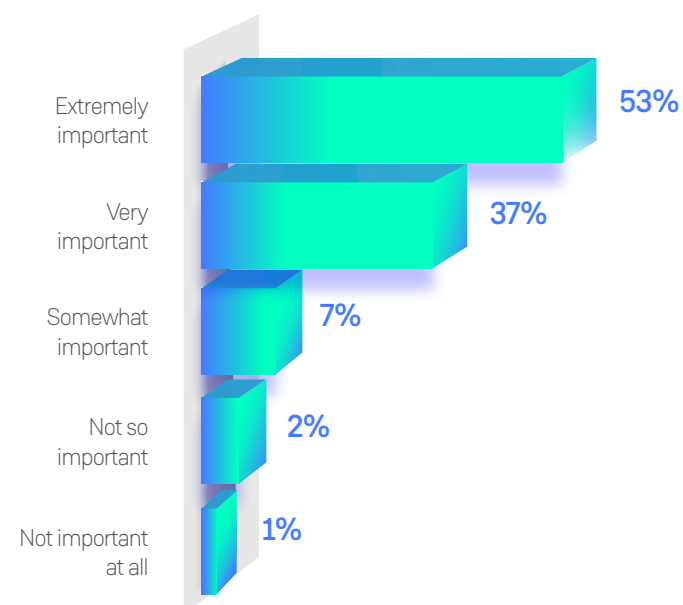
Vincent Brouillet
DevOps and Continuous Delivery Lead · NBN

"**Modern technology stacks attract talent.** In a candidate-driven market, engineers can pick and choose the organisation that they work for.

Talented engineers recognise that technology is changing fast and that most of the learning happens at work, **therefore it is crucial to offer this opportunity at your organisation,** otherwise they will look elsewhere."

## Q6. What Would Most Compel You to Leave an Organisation?

Rank 1 most, 5 least

Employees don't leave the business, they leave their manager. All the research points to this from Gallup's 2017 research to a 2018 report by TINYpulse.

Australia is notorious for having a disengaged workforce, and this is a major financial burden due to the ongoing churn of workers. If your organisation not only wants to attract talent, but also retain and grow your talent, key workplace culture and operational factors need to be urgently addressed by your leadership team.

Even though company politics came out ahead in terms of the number one reason for leaving, the other reasons were not far behind. This information can help you deal with what is important to developers when you want to retain them.

It is imperative that your organisation creates an environment of trust, where everyone is comfortable working together as a team, otherwise you stand to have high attrition rates.
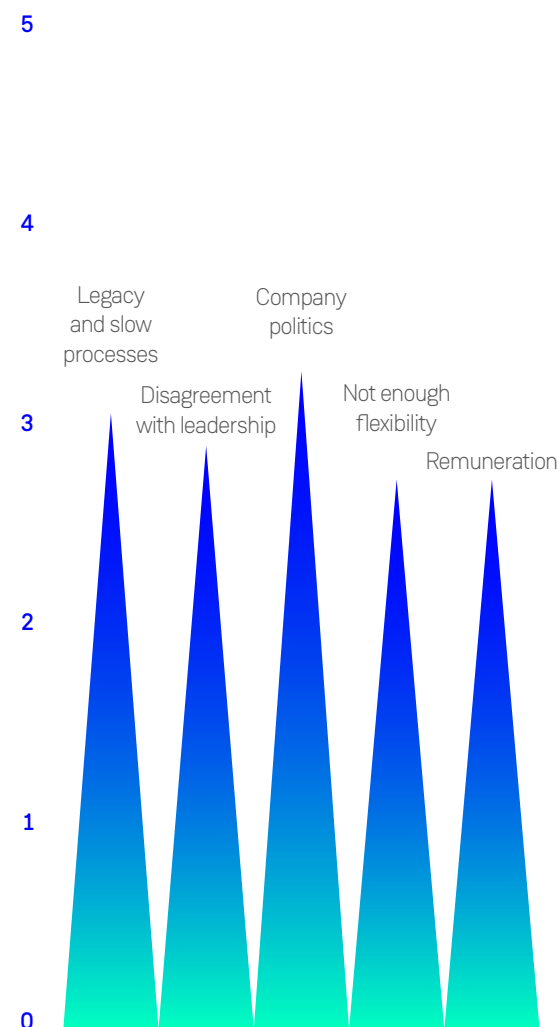
Spela Adamic
Head of PMO · amaysim

"I've seen some of the most talented employees leave their roles due to company politics, internal game playing and lack of overall leadership – there's nothing worse. I've found amaysim to be completely different; the company holds its values highly.

**Empathy and agility are both very important to our culture.** We encourage open and honest conversation and promote an environment where you are free to express yourself and be heard, which in return reduces company politics and puts everyone on an equal playing field."

Chart categories: Legacy and slow processes, Disagreement with leadership, Company politics, Not enough flexibility, Remuneration

Q7. Do You Believe Your Role Will Significantly Change in the Next Five Years?

IT professionals tend to live and work at the front of the innovation curve, and therefore have a better understanding of the rate of change and what it means to their career. Whether it's globalisation, distributed working, internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning (ML) talented developers know and understand that their careers are tied to the constant onslaught of technological change.

Your business then has to be prepared to deal with these changes, and pivot if necessary, as the best developers will continue to gravitate towards opportunity that exists in these changes.

Unsure 7%

No 7%

Yes 86%
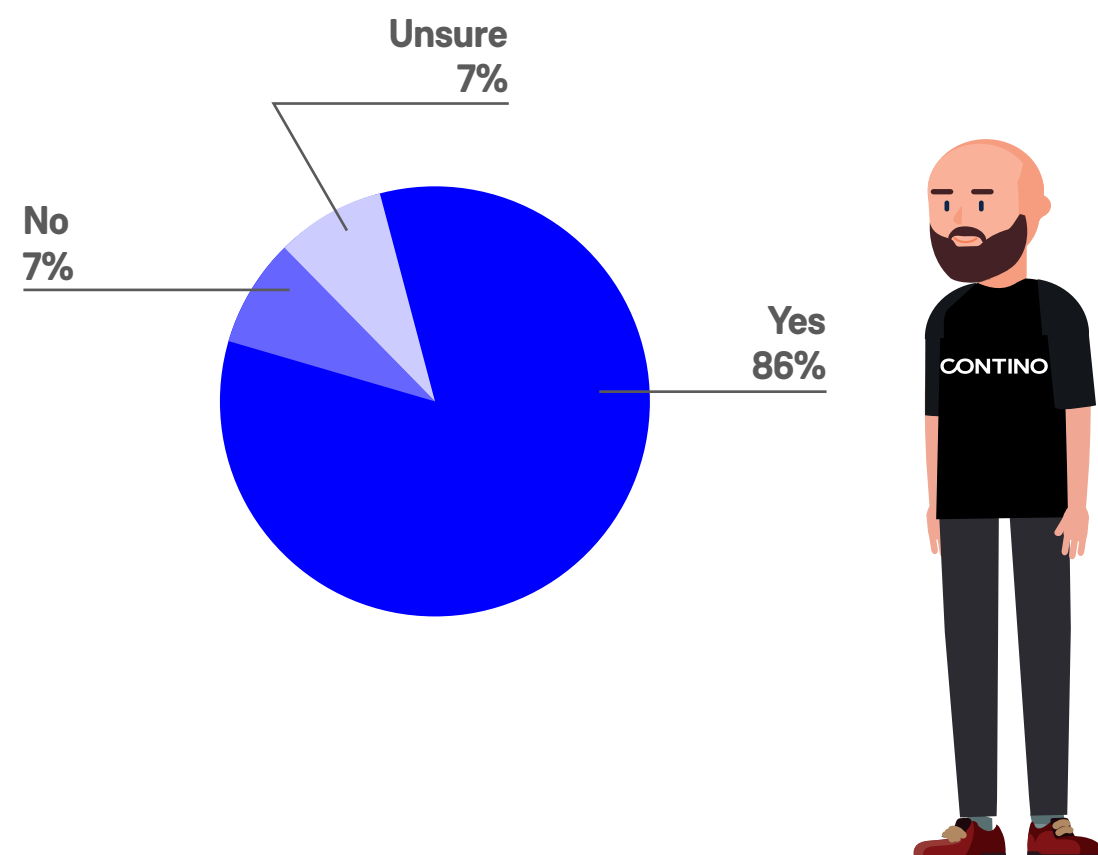
Scott Van Kalken
System Engineer · F5

"**Organisations are reinventing every aspect of their business processes,** from delivery through to customer engagement.

A lot of these changes have large technology components. My role will change by the virtue of the disruption that has been occurring and will continue to occur in every industry.
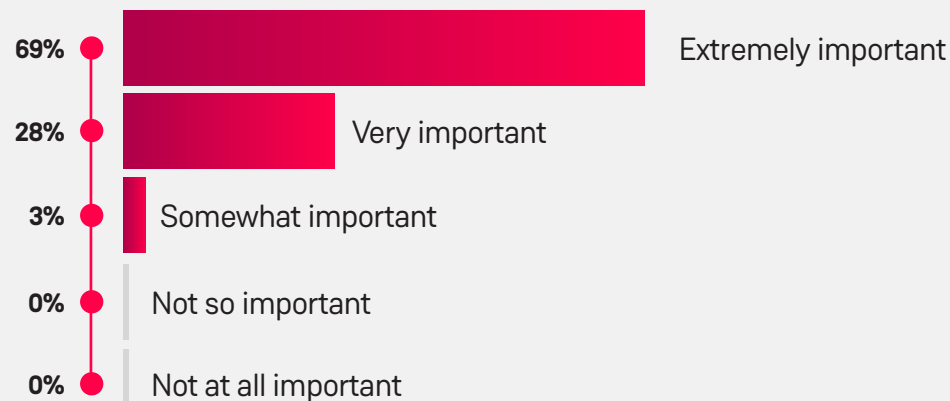
It's more than simply learning new technologies, **it's about becoming more focused on end outcomes and not sweating the small stuff.** If I look back five years, I was doing something completely different, so I'm excited to think what the next five years will bring."

Q8. How Important Is It that You Upskill Yourself So that You Are Prepared for the Future of Technology?

As per Q7, talented IT professionals expect their roles to change significantly in the next five years, and therefore understand that regular upskilling is key to staying at the top of their game. With this in mind, the company's leadership need to provide opportunities for their talent to upskill.

Having a "learning and development budget" is a great start, but you can also integrate regular "lunch-and-learns" and even group trips to meetups, summits and conferences. Promoting and rewarding certifications and accreditations will also show your team that they have multiple and ongoing opportunities to upskill.

69%	Extremely important
28%	Very important
3%	Somewhat important
0%	Not so important
0%	Not at all important

Will Robinson
Senior DevOps Consultant · Contino

"**I agree, upskilling yourself is extremely important.** While it is great that companies send their employees on training sessions during business hours, the reality is that this training alone will do little.

To get the most out of it, we must devote a portion of our personal time to studying, labbing and collaborating (Slack, forums, etc.). **As the saying goes, you only get out what you put in.**"

Q9. What Do You Find to Be the Most Effective Way of Learning?

3%
Other (please specify)

3%
University

16%
Private study

12%
Doing a certification

66%
On the job upskilling with an experienced co-worker
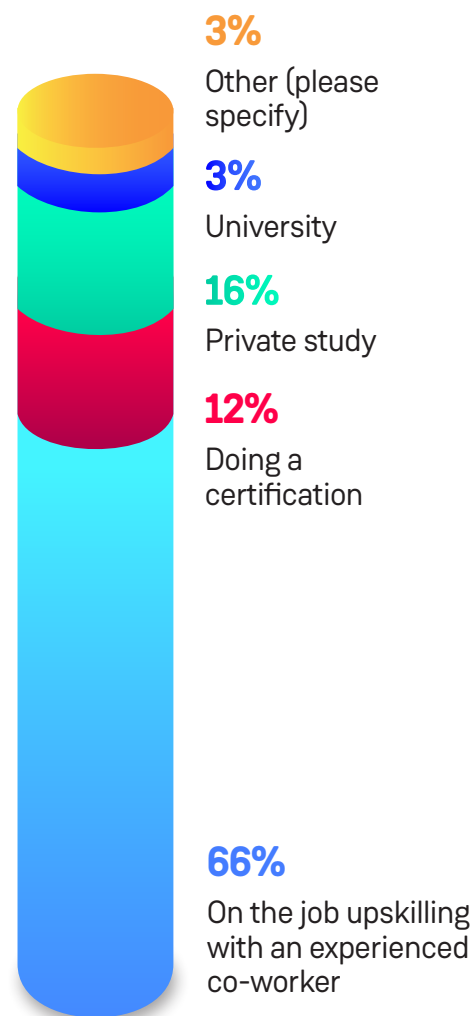
We all learn differently, and understanding how your developers prefer to learn can make all the difference when it comes to differentiating your organisation and attracting talent.

As you build out your workforce, you do need to consider the evolution of your team and how their skills will grow. With this in mind, arranging for your team to attend training courses may not be the best solution. With 66% of respondents saying that they prefer to learn by being shown by an experienced co-worker, pairing engineers up where their gaps are covered by their team members can be quite effective. If the skills are not present inhouse, perhaps hiring a consultant that can pair up with your engineers could also be an option rather than sending them on courses.

Andrew Ritchie
DevOps · Lead : 86 400 Bank

"Why waste training budgets on learning based on theoretical problems, when you could be cutting your teeth resolving your specific business needs?

Reading and watching material online offers an initial appreciation of new technologies, however it's only through actual hands-on experience with real-life problems that you gain deeper understanding of the applications and limitations of said technology.

In my experience, pairing with experienced DevOps practitioners extends the knowledge shared via peer-reviewed pull requests, as you are actually writing and implementing the solution yourself, thereby reinforcing the learnings. In addition, having people from outside your organisation provides an invaluable industry perspective."

Q10. Are You More Likely to Stay with a Company that Invests in Upskilling You?

Clearly, developers are keen to commit to regular upskilling. If your company does not have an adequate learning and development budget and/or programs, this will not look favourable when trying to retain your best people. Your competitors are offering this as part of their package, therefore if you want to stay competitive you need to do the same.

Yes
95%

Doesn't make a difference
5%
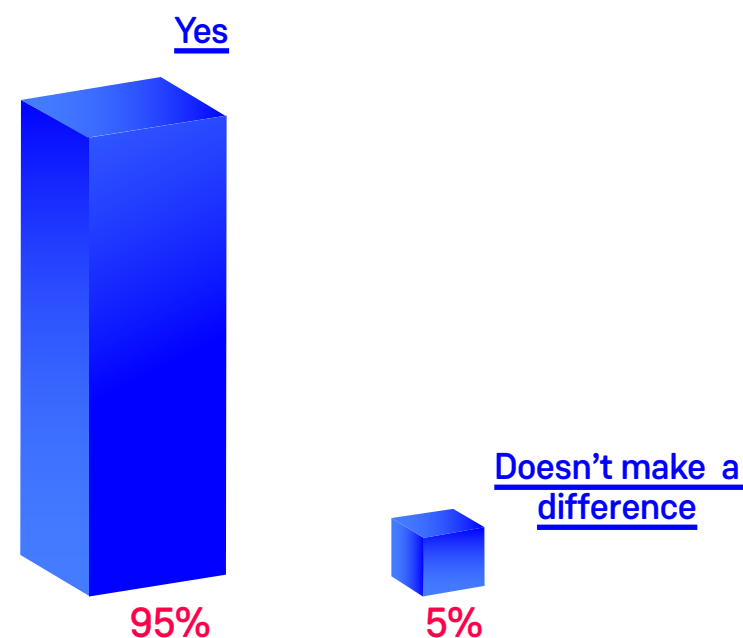
Zainab Sanaa
Cloud Engineer · Contino

"I completely agree with this. IT professionals work in an industry that is very dynamic and changing rapidly. I can speak from my experience in this industry, the work I do currently has very little to do with what I was doing four years ago.

There's been a major shift towards OSS over enterprise solutions, the service offerings of all major cloud providers have increased exponentially and we have seen a growing increase in the adoption of cloud native software development.

You have to keep yourself up-to-date on the latest trends and upskill as required. If your employer is supportive of your learning and development journey, this for me would be a good reason to stay loyal to them as it shows that they care about my progression."

Q11. How Important Is It that your Company Tries New Technologies and New Methodologies?

Very important
42%

Extremely important
49%

Important
8%

Not important
1%
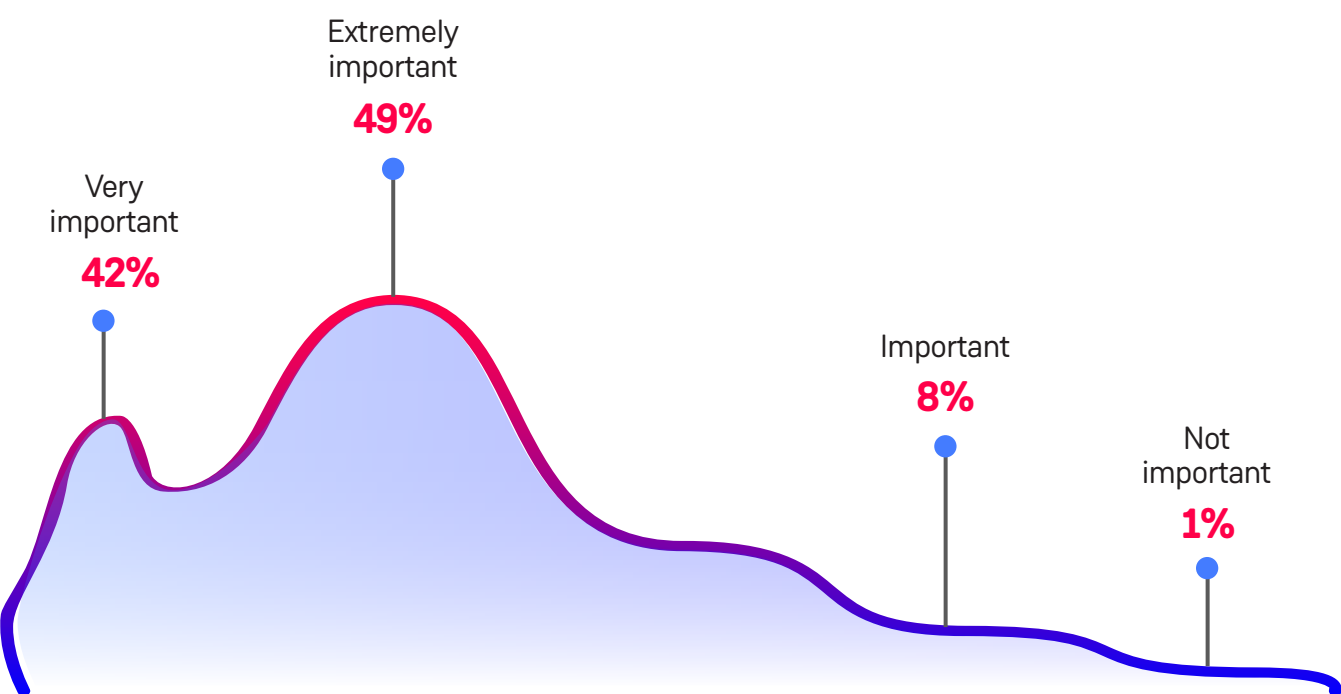
Tech talent want to innovate at speed without being hindered by slow processes. By implementing new technologies and methodologies your engineers can cut through the red tape and deliver value faster. For larger organisations updating ways of working is often the biggest challenge to digital transformation, but can be done with the right expert advice and framework.

At Contino we have developed the "Momentum" framework, which is a repeatable and proven methodology for transforming large regulated enterprises across people, process and technology.
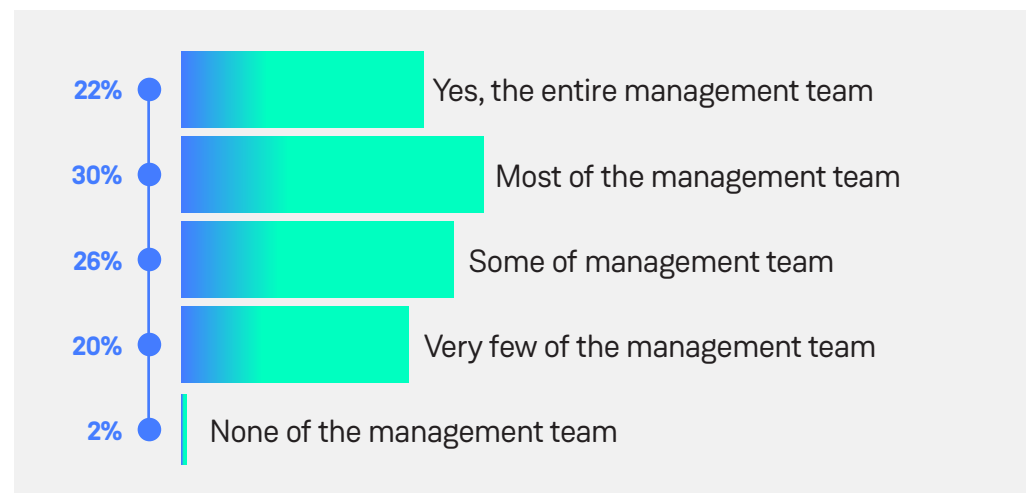
Yun Zhi Lin
Head of Engineering · Contino

It is extremely important that your company tries new technologies and new methodologies. Engineers want to innovate and be productive. I can speak from my experience at a past employer, let's call them Company X. They were building monoliths in an ancient language which meant attracting talent was impossible, also shipping products to customers was extremely slow and fragile.

As soon as I implemented modern tech and practices (micro-frontends using React.js and Go backends running on AWS Lambda) **the talent started flying through the door** and we were able to hire 137 Engineers. With such a motivated and skilled engineering workforce, **we were able to ship 100+ releases per month and deliver four new business verticals in 12 months.**

Q12. Do You Trust that your Management Team Is Qualified to Set the Right Tech Strategy and Make the Right Technical Hires?

22% — Yes, the entire management team
30% — Most of the management team
26% — Some of management team
20% — Very few of the management team
2% — None of the management team

For your business to be successful, you need to have leaders that can set the right strategy and make the right hires. This also means understanding the technical aspects of each role and the latest development trends.

If your leaders cannot manage this, then they also need to upskill or should seek external strategic support. They can then assess the types of people your organisation needs moving forward to achieve the overall strategy.

Samantha Raines
Data Engineer · Contino

"When engaged on client site, I see a mix of well-thought-out tech strategies that are built to perform a specific task and strategies that just use tech for tech's sake.

It's imperative that leaders have an understanding of the technologies available, what they involve, and if they're best-suited to the task at hand.

Otherwise those who have that understanding need to be involved."

Q13. Which Best Describes Your Organisation?

116	Too many silos, causing lots of delays
86	Highly collaborative teams enabling multiple releases per day
69	Too many project managers and "hands off" managers, not enough engineers
27	Not enough managers, we need more order
96	Collaborative teams, however management operating in silos
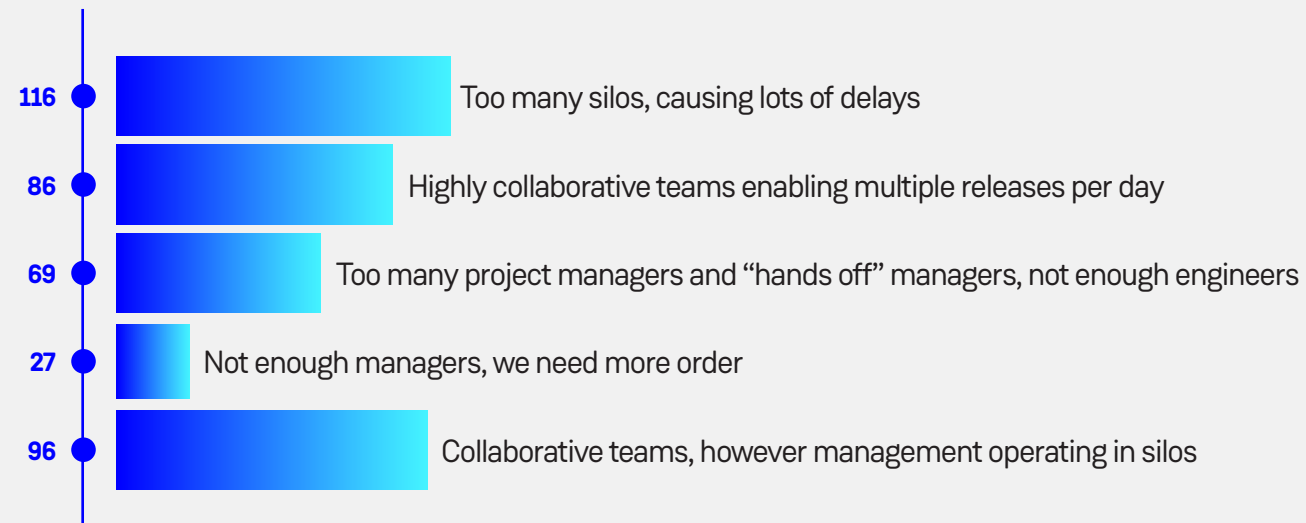
Reducing the "time to deliver" is extremely important for tech talent. The faster you can deliver, the faster you can tweak, improve and achieve overall outcomes.

Silos and slow processes are known for being a deterrent to tech talent. There is a big opportunity here to stand out as an employer of choice. If your organisation can create a collaborative environment, ensuring frequent multiple releases, you will be in at the front of the pack when it comes to securing talent.

Denis Khoshaba
DevOps Lead · CSIRO's Data61

"Collaboration and transparency across different teams is important to develop and maintain in an organisation.

Effective cross-communication helps talent share knowledge across different domains to solve problems that may overlap, which ensures high velocity in delivery and cohesion with security and technology stacks.

At CSIRO's Data61 it's not uncommon for me to reach out and communicate to work with other DevOps engineers, data scientists, developers and research engineers across different teams when approaching new problems."

Q14. Would You Rather Work with a Larger Team of Moderately Skilled People or a Smaller Team of Highly Skilled People?

94%

A smaller team of highly skilled people

6%

A larger team of moderately skilled people
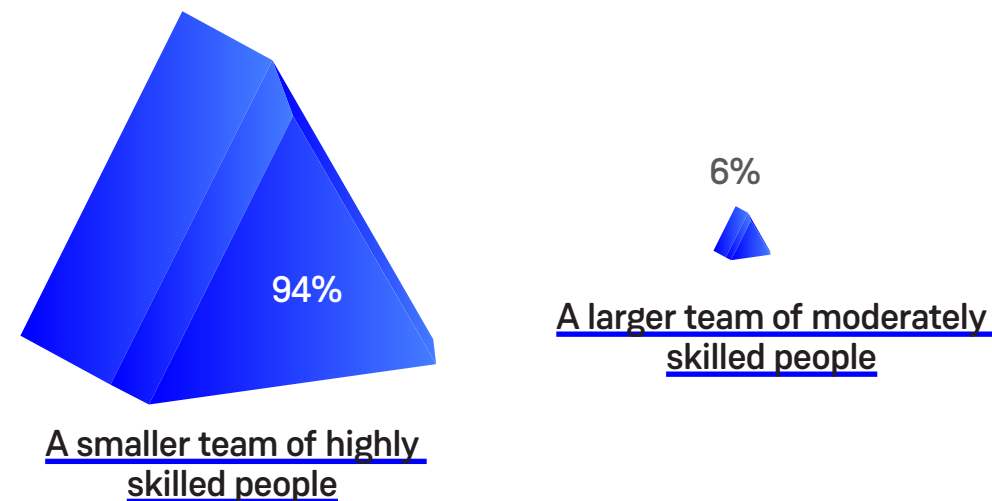
Solving your organisation's problems by focusing on quantity of talent doesn't always work, sometimes it is better to invest more and get the right people in.

You still need diversity and a balance of skills to create an effective team, but if you map out the services that need to be delivered, and you get talented, highly skilled and efficient team members you can achieve more.

Respondents to this question were very clear that they prefer **a smaller team of highly skilled people.**

Venus Nautiyal
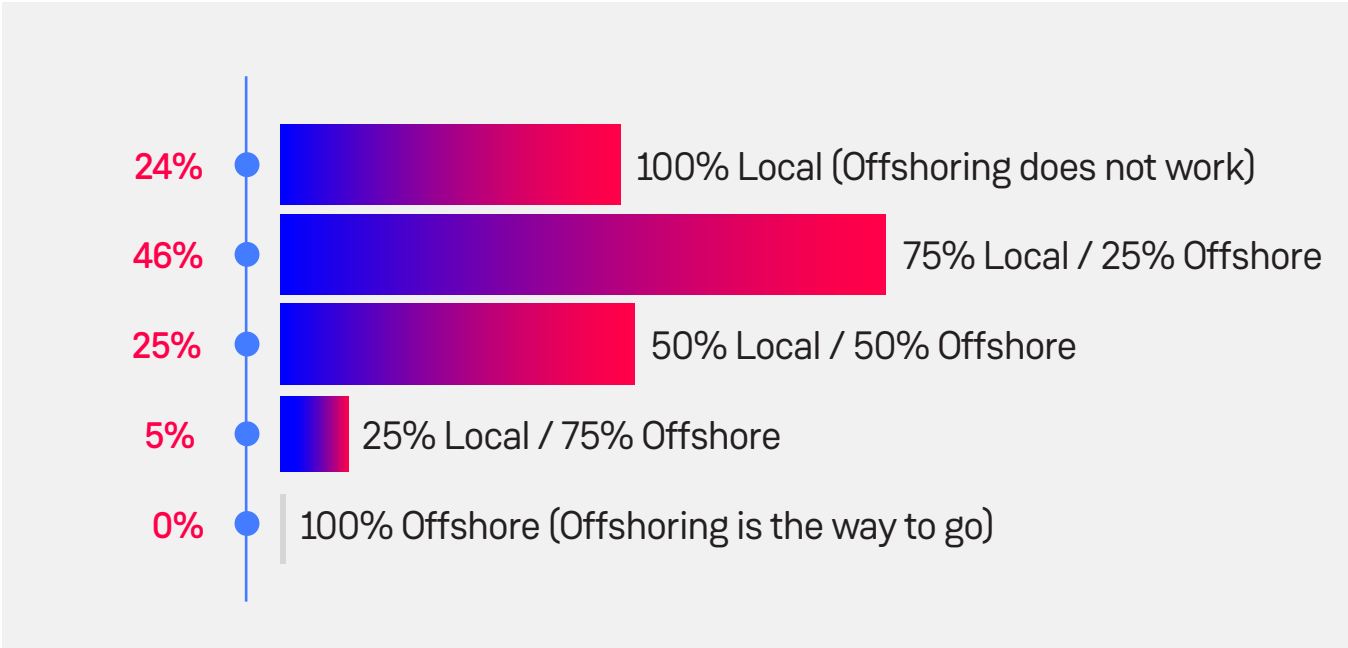Senior QA Automation Engineer • amaysim

"**Hands down, I would prefer a smaller team of highly-skilled people any day.** Larger teams, especially with moderately-skilled people, is a recipe for disaster.

Larger teams generally mean poor communication which is the one skill that needs to be addressed and taught, especially to techies, more religiously.

Surrounding myself with moderately-skilled people means there is no room or scope of improvement for me, which is what leads me to think about moving on."

Q15. What Do You Think the Right Balance of Local vs. Offshore Engineering Talent Should Be?

- 24% — 100% Local (Offshoring does not work)
- 46% — 75% Local / 25% Offshore
- 25% — 50% Local / 50% Offshore
- 5% — 25% Local / 75% Offshore
- 0% — 100% Offshore (Offshoring is the way to go)

The primary reason why organisations choose to offshore engineering teams is to save on staffing costs. Whilst saving on staffing cost adds commercial benefit, providing your customers with better user experiences could prove to be of greater commercial benefit. High performing local engineering teams who are in constant communication with local UX professionals, product and marketing professionals often have the advantage when it comes to enhancing customer facing features.

There are many elements to consider when working with offshore teams. Some of these include timezone differences for connecting, language and communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, issues with speed of getting things done, as well as risks associated with giving access to your data and IP.

There are certain circumstances where it makes sense that a percentage of your engineering team is offshored, but this is very different to complete offshoring. Enhancing customer experience should be factored into the cost calculation when it comes to comparing local and offshore teams.

Rory Chatterton
Cloud Lead · Contino

"It makes sense to offshore capabilities that are expensive to automate, don't sit in the direct value stream of the customer and aren't core to the business.

An example of this is the maintenance of a legacy platform which is seeing no new feature releases, but does not have valid business case for uplift or re-architecture. Be wary of building enterprise strategies around the mandatory offshoring of certain percentage of business units.

Instead, build your offshoring strategy on a per-service basis. Ensure that offshore teams have the accountability to operate without too much cross-region intervention, and don't offshore core design and architecture practices.

I would not recommend offshoring more than 25% of the business, but there is no one-size-fits-all."

What's Next for Australian Tech Talent?

The digital landscape is growing at a furious pace. Organisations across Australia are in a battle to attract the best tech talent in the market. Companies must not rely on traditional talent strategies if they are to win now and in the future. In fact, it is far beyond talent strategy, the tech strategy also needs to inspire the best people to join. Technologists need more than a good company culture and benefits package, they also need to be working on innovative and exciting projects that use modern tech and practices.

Ultimately, when CTOs and CIOs are formulating tech strategies, their decisions not only help shape the technical direction of the business, but also have an impact on the business's ability to attract and retain talent. If your organisation is stifled by legacy, you will likely lose the talent war.

Yet if your organisation is on the front foot, and implementing the right strategy, then you will be in the best position to continue to build a great team.

About Contino

Contino is a global Enterprise DevOps, Data and Cloud Transformation Consultancy.

We help enterprises transform by modernising ways of working and delivering high quality, secure software change. Our core offerings are Cloud Platform Build & Migration, DevOps Transformation, Cloud Security, Cloud Native Software Development and Data Platforms & Analytics.

Join us

We are on the search for top talent in Australia, the UK and the US. If you are a talented engineer or business professional looking for your next adventure, get in touch with our talent team at talent.au@contino.io.

Let's start the conversation

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