



right, not left side of our brain. In Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs it encompasses the characteristics at the top of the pyramid (see Figure 1). Usually applied to individuals, it can also apply to groups, even societies.

When large numbers of individuals are all looking for meaning in their lives it will change how their society looks and what its goals are. It affects every area of society. Some examples might be adding aesthetics to a product, crafting a narrative that resonates with a buyer, or most importantly, as we struggle with learning how to live carefully on this planet, offer a sustainable and ethical option that sets a business apart from its competitors. Research shows (perhaps surprisingly) that following ethical and sustainable paths and being socially responsible does not negatively impact the profit margins of a business but usually increases it.<sup>6</sup>

This search for meaning is high on many people's priorities, perhaps even more so after the global credit crunch has encouraged people to think about what is truly of value. Businesses and consumers alike are looking for a new paradigm that emphasizes right-brain attributes – empathy, ethics, narrative, relationship.

## THE CREATIVE CLASSES

An important trend related to the rise of the Imagination Age is that of the 'creative class'. A term coined by Richard Florida, it describes the fastest growing group in America comprising some 38.3 million Americans, roughly 30% of the entire US workforce – up from just 10% at the turn of the twentieth century and less than 20% as recently as 1980.<sup>7</sup> Who are these people? Florida describes a super-creative core – scientists, engineers, novelists, designers, actors, architects, think tank researchers, analysts, entertainers. Members of this super-creative core are producers of new forms or designs. Then there is a group of creative, highly-qualified professionals working in knowledge intensive industries – hi-tech, finance, legal, health, business management. People who do this kind of work may sometimes come up with methods or products that turn out to be widely useful, but this is not the most important part of how they function. What they are required to do regularly is think on their own. It is important to note that these are all occupations which require a mix of left and right-brained thinking. These are the people who will thrive and add value in the Imagination Age.

The main advantage of a strong creative class is that it can create outcomes in new ideas, high-tech industry and regional growth. One of the challenges New Zealand will face (and to a large extent already does) is how to keep our own creative class heading off to the lure of overseas opportunity. We need to have a community that appeals to them and their values if we want to retain their talent (and also encourage creatives from other countries to move here). In *Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida points out the fact that members of the creative class value meritocracy, diversity and individuality and look for these characteristics when they relocate.<sup>8</sup> New Zealand is already well suited to appeal to these values. In a more recent book Florida explores the growing fight for talent, starting in the very first chapter with the success of Peter Jackson in creating an enticing creative environment in Wellington, attracting some of the world's best to work there, many of whom have relocated permanently.<sup>9</sup> Other earlier research has also seen the importance of cities in attracting skilled and creative people.<sup>10</sup>

A look at both the Immigration Department's immediate skill shortage report and long-term skill shortage reports show that we still have shortages in many of the occupations that fall into Florida's creative class.<sup>11</sup> Any strategy for New Zealand going forward needs to address these skill gaps.

There will be increased demand for more highly skilled occupations (e.g. managers and professional occupations) and associated skill sets. These include skills such as abstract reasoning, problem solving, communication and collaboration. The first two types of skill involve use of the left side of the brain; the second two, the right. Personal traits such as communication skills and attitude will become increasingly important as jobs become less physically demanding and repetitive but more knowledge-intensive (in the sense of applying and synthesizing it). From 1994 to 2004 the jobs that increased most dramatically in America were those that had high levels of inter-personal skills.<sup>12</sup> It would be useful to analyse employment data for New Zealand to see if we are seeing the same trends.

The rise of the Imagination Age presents challenges for New Zealand. Here are a few:

- We need to be aware of the global fight for talent and take positive steps to make sure that New Zealand is competitive. We already have a head start with the lifestyle and natural environment that we offer.
- Innovation will become increasingly important. On a number of innovation indicators such as business R&D spending, rates of information and communications technologies (ICT) investment, broadband uptake and international patenting rates, New Zealand is below the OECD average (although improving).<sup>13</sup> One challenge will be to find ways to increase innovative practices in New Zealand, both in terms of providing funding and support.
- Our current schooling system tends to focus on developing left brain skills in content, delivery method and assessment styles. Creativity needs to be encouraged across the curriculum. Young New Zealanders need to be taught the skills that enable them to become independent thinkers rather than passive consumers of information.

While there are challenges, the opportunities are immense. We are no longer an isolated island at the bottom of the world. Technological advances have lessened the tyranny of distance as ideas can now travel almost instantaneously around the planet. Add to this the fact that we have always been a resourceful and inventive nation, and this new Age should suit us. The idea of our society full of people who are utilising both sides of their brain is exciting. Any national strategy needs to take into account these trends and look at how best to harness them to our advantage to create a New Zealand that provides its citizens with ample opportunity for meaningful lives.

For complete references and to find out more, visit our website: [www.mcguinnessinstitute.org](http://www.mcguinnessinstitute.org).

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