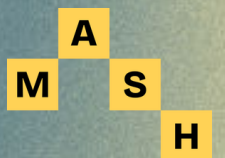




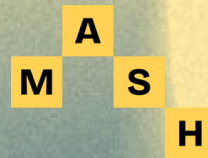
THE FUTURE OF EMBEDDED WORK

Dianne Hummal
Head of Talent & Growth
MASH 2026

Building Embedded Capability Ecosystems
That Move With Momentum, Precision and
Accountability



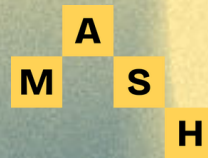
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THE MOMENT MARKETING CHANGED



Marketing no longer functions as a campaign machine. It behaves like a living operating system. Always on, always interconnected, always evolving across teams, stakeholders and global markets simultaneously.

The organisations who are navigating this shift most effectively are not necessarily the largest or the most resourced. They are the ones that have moved fastest toward a fundamentally different way of structuring capability: not through headcount, but through embedded talent ecosystems that integrate directly into the business itself.

**63%**

of CMOs say they are missing opportunities because they cannot make decisions fast enough.

PWC PULSE SURVEY, MAY 2025

This shift is accelerating. Yet most businesses are still navigating a critical tension: how do you integrate external talent deeply enough to generate real trust, momentum and accountability — without creating the very complexity, onboarding fatigue and operational drag you were trying to escape?

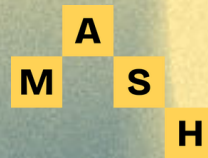
**65%**

of global company leaders intend to expand their use of contingent and embedded workers within the next two years. The contingent workforce management market is growing at 10.5% CAGR, projected to reach \$465 billion by 2031.

CONTINGENT WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT MARKET REPORT, 2024

This report explores that question through the lens of The MASH Embedded Talent Operating System (OS)[™]. It is written for CMOs, Marketing Directors, Marketing Operations leaders and Marketing Managers responsible for building high-performing ecosystems in environments where speed, adaptability and sustainable momentum have become business-critical — particularly across AI and human-layered production, influencer marketing, creative, communications, strategy and operations.

A STRUCTURAL MISMATCH



The traditional model was built for a different era. Internal teams on one side. External agencies and vendors on the other. Clear separation of systems, relationships and ways of working. That structure made sense when marketing moved in campaign cycles and outputs were predictable.

It no longer does.

Today's marketing organisations are expected to execute cross-functionally, respond to culture in real time and move at a pace that outstrips what most internal teams can sustain alone. Yet the default response — adding more agency partners, more vendors, more tools — often compounds the problem rather than solving it.

**81%**

of global enterprise marketers operate a model of multiple agencies managed individually by their Marketing team — yet they rate their current roster only 5.7 out of 10 for fitness for purpose. 74% are currently reviewing their roster structure.

WFA / OBSERVATORY INTERNATIONAL, GLOBAL AGENCY ROSTER SURVEY

The result is a set of structural failures most marketing leaders will recognise immediately:

- Knowledge disappears when agency teams rotate, and context has to be rebuilt from scratch every time.
- New partners require repeated onboarding, briefing and trust-building — time the business cannot afford to spend.
- Approval lines stretch across stakeholders who are not sufficiently integrated into the work to make fast decisions.
- Execution fragments across disconnected partners who do not share context, culture or operational rhythm.
- Internal teams absorb the emotional and operational weight of holding everything together — quietly, invisibly, continuously.

This is not simply inefficiency. It is organisational exhaustion — a slow drain on the confidence, clarity and capacity of the people carrying the work.

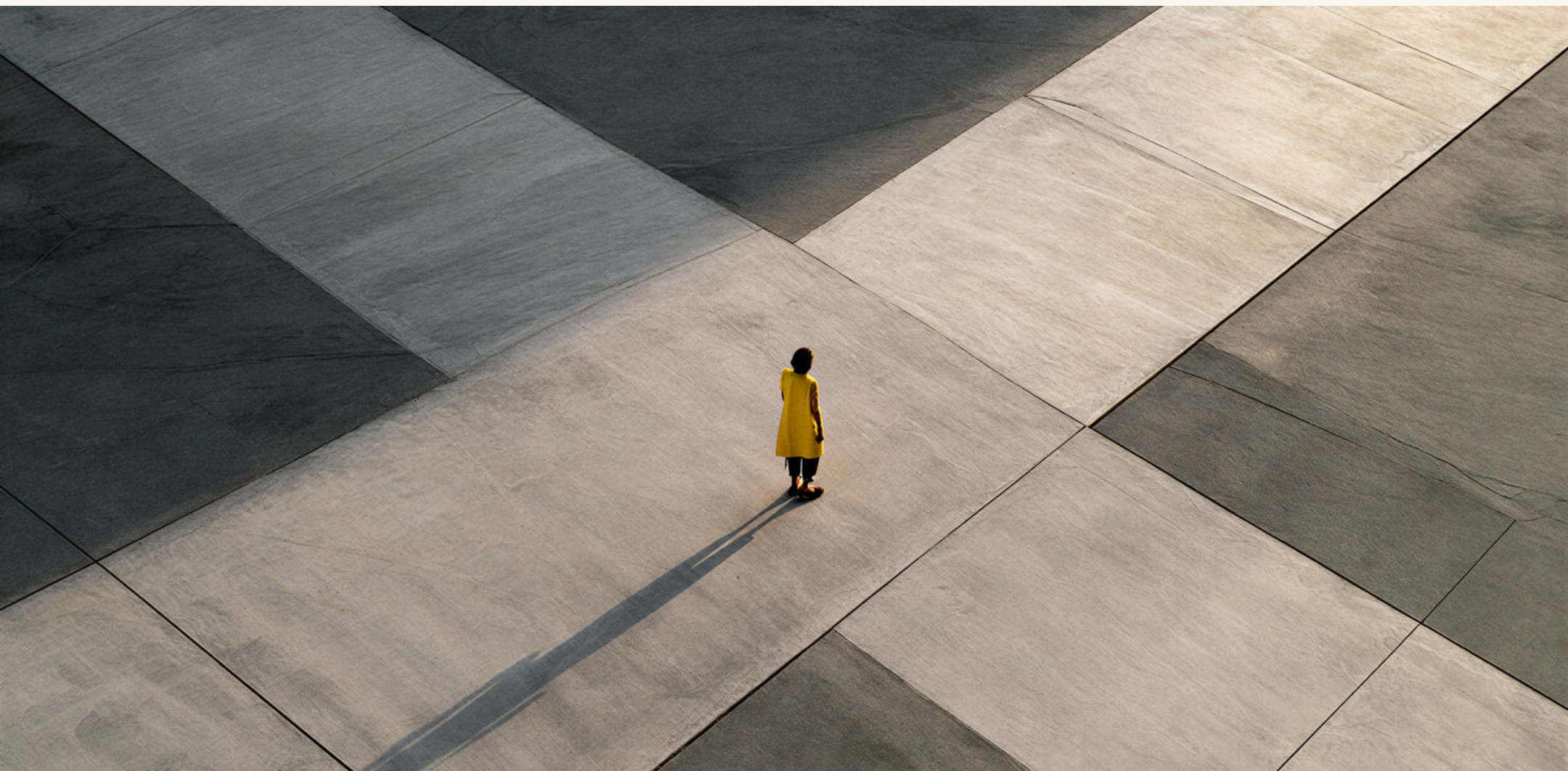


65%

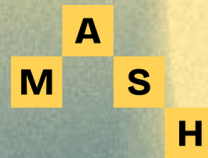
of marketers felt overwhelmed in the past year. 51% experienced emotional exhaustion. 56% said they feared burning out in their current role.

MARKETING WEEK CAREER & SALARY SURVEY (3,500+ RESPONDENTS), 2025 · CIM, 2024

The trust gap this creates is real. Many organisations want the speed and specialist capability that embedded talent can deliver. But they hesitate because they have experienced — often more than once — how badly fragmented integration can go. The future of embedded work will be won or lost on this question.

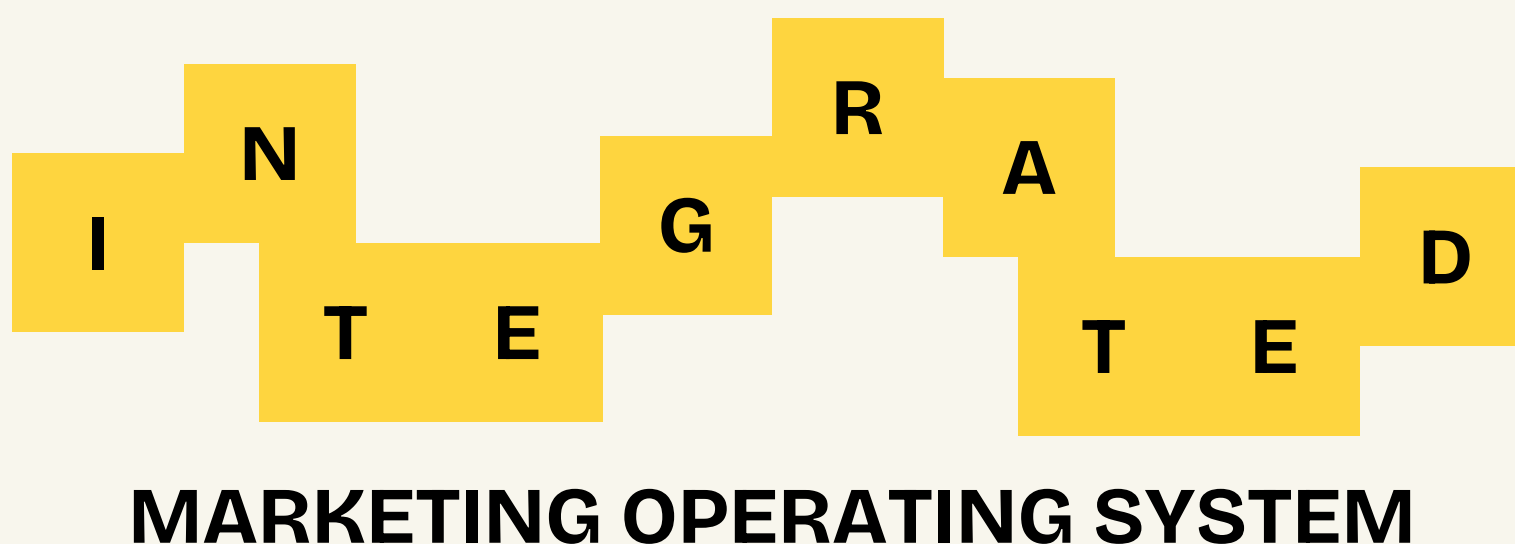
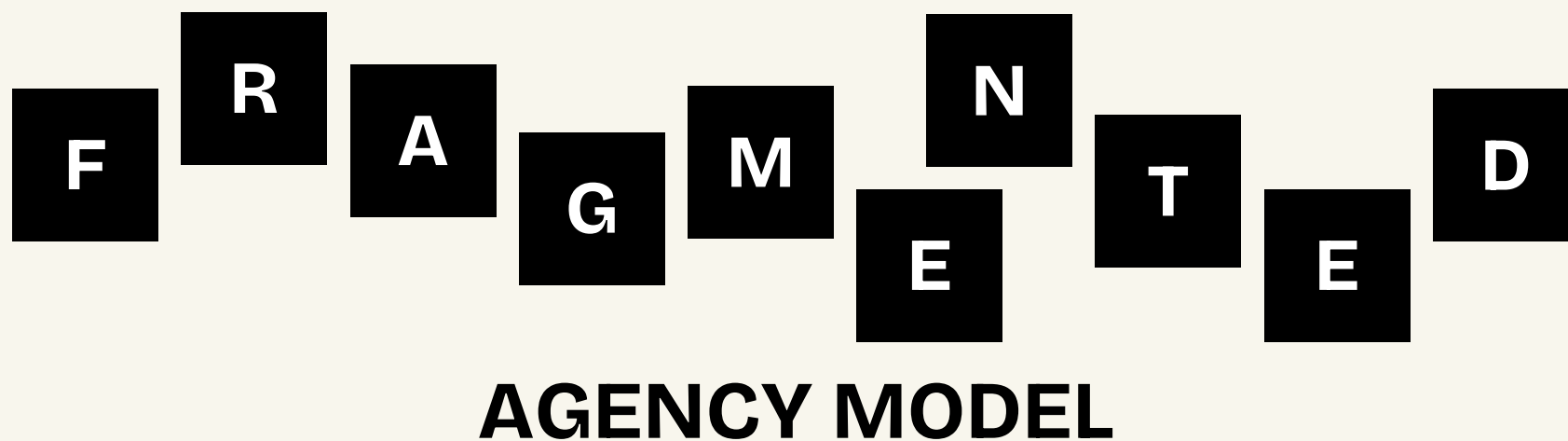


FROM AGENCY MODEL TO MARKETING OPERATING SYSTEM



The businesses gaining momentum are not waiting for the traditional agency model to evolve. They are replacing it.

What they are building instead is a **Marketing Operating System (OS)**: an integrated capability ecosystem where internal teams, embedded specialists, agency partners and technology operate inside a single, connected rhythm – sharing context, stakeholder knowledge, operational systems and decision-making environments.



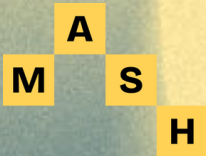
This is the defining workforce shift in modern marketing: from reactive outsourcing to embedded capability infrastructure. And it is especially visible in sectors where speed, cultural fluency and cross-functional execution are non-negotiable:

- Creator ecosystems and influencer marketing: where cultural relevance has a shelf-life of hours, not weeks
- Platform and technology businesses: where product, marketing and commercial teams must move as one
- Entertainment and social-first brands: where audience relationships are built in real time, not campaign cycles
- Luxury, lifestyle and global consumer organisations: where brand consistency must hold across markets, channels and cultures

In each of these environments, the operational demands are too high, the cultural context too nuanced, and the pace too fast for disconnected agency relationships to hold. What is needed instead is embedded talent that understands the business from the inside — its stakeholder dynamics, its decision-making environment, its workflows and its ways of working.



THE MASH EMBEDDED TALENT OPERATING SYSTEM™



At MASH, we do not simply embed people into organisations. We build Embedded Capability Infrastructure.

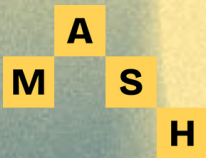
The MASH Embedded Talent Operating System is a comprehensive approach to integrating external talent into internal ecosystems with the trust, accountability and operational precision required to create real momentum. It is built on five integrated components that work together – not sequentially, but simultaneously, as a connected system.

This is far more than an onboarding programme. It is about integrating working systems and making them run. We help organisations move from fragmented execution and constant re-briefing toward connected ecosystems where communication flows naturally, momentum builds consistently, and embedded operators become trusted extensions of the business itself.

01	Strategic Capability Design	Matching the right MASHER profile to the specific operational demands, culture and pace of each organisation – not a generic placement, but a considered capability fit.
02	Dual-Culture Integration	Ensuring embedded operators understand both the MASH operating principles and the client's internal culture, stakeholder map, decision-making environment and ways of working – from day one.
03	Capability Acceleration	Continuous development investment that grows MASHERS into strategic business partners – not transactional operators. This is a long-term capability commitment, not a one-time onboarding event.
04	Stakeholder Navigation	Proactive relationship-building and communication systems that create trust across internal teams – so embedded operators are seen as partners, not resources.
05	Agile Operational Processes	Lightweight but enterprise-grade workflow structures that create momentum without bureaucracy – designed for organisations that need to move fast without losing control.

THE OPERATOR THIS MODEL REQUIRES

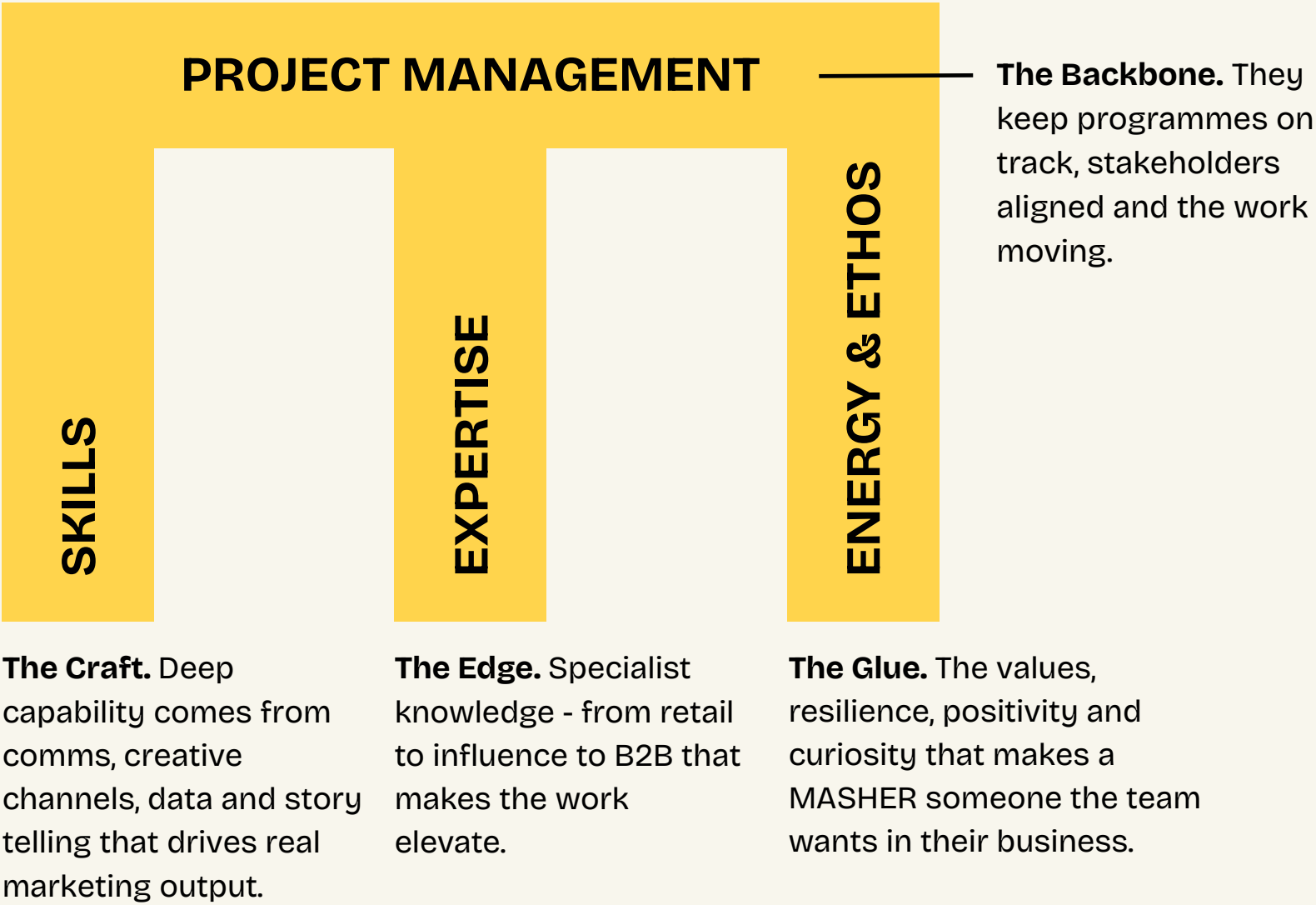
M-SHAPED OPERATORS



Modern organisations need a new kind of marketing operator – one who can think strategically, execute operationally, navigate ambiguity and communicate proactively across complex, fast-moving, cross-functional environments.

The specialist-generalist debate is over. The organisations moving fastest have stopped looking for one-dimensional experts and started building teams of people who can move fluidly across disciplines – holding the strategy conversation in the morning and driving the execution sprint by afternoon. Marketing teams now manage an average of 10 channels, up from 7 just a few years ago, with projections suggesting 15 in the near term. One-dimensional operators cannot hold that complexity.

At MASH, we call this **M-Shaped Talent**. The M-Shape represents four interconnected dimensions that, together, define what it means to be a high-performing embedded operator – not just a skilled specialist or a reliable executor, but someone who can move work forward at the intersection of craft, strategy and human intelligence.

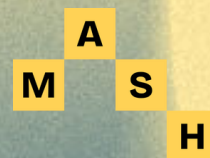


The four dimensions work as a **system**, not a hierarchy. But they are not equal in nature – the first dimension is the scaffold that holds everything else together.

Dimension		What it means in practice
01	Project Management The Backbone	The ability to keep complex programmes on track across shifting priorities, multiple stakeholders and evolving scopes. Not administrative coordination – active operational orchestration: setting communication rhythms, managing decision-making environments, identifying blockers before they become problems. This is the roof above all other dimensions.
02	Skills The Craft	Deep functional capability across either marketing, creative production, communications, influencer ecosystems, data storytelling and/or stakeholder management – honed through years of practice. MASHERS bring skills that produce real output at speed, not potential capability that requires extensive development time inside the client's environment.
03	Expertise The Edge	Specialist depth in the specific ecosystems, industries and channels that matter most to each client – whether that is creator economy, influencer marketing, entertainment, technology or social-first brand building. This keeps the work ahead of the market, not catching up to it.
04	Energy and Ethos The Glue	The human layer that shapes everything else: curiosity, emotional intelligence, cultural fluency, resilience and the ability to elevate the people around them. This is what makes a MASHER someone the team genuinely wants inside the business – not a resource to be managed, but a partner who raises the standard.

Agencies have talent. MASH has MASHERS. They embed fast, earn trust quickly and leave teams stronger than they found them.

MASH CAPABILITY ACCELERATION PROGRAM



Modern embedded work requires more than functional competence. It requires ecosystem fluency — the ability to read and navigate complex organisational environments, build trust at pace, influence without authority, and move programmes forward within systems influenced by multiple goals and priorities.

The MASH Capability Acceleration Curriculum is built for exactly this. It is a continuous learning system designed specifically for embedded operators working inside high-speed, matrixed organisations — and it is led by practitioners who have lived the environments our MASHERS operate in every day.

Many of our facilitators are former employees of the brands we work with, including Google and YouTube, alongside strategic business operators, PMOs, strategists and coaches who understand organisational complexity from the inside. This is transferred operational intelligence, not theoretical learning.

FIVE AREAS OF CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT

- AI and Applied Intelligence in Production
- Relationship Building and Stakeholder Management
- Project Management and Operational Orchestration
- Presentation, Executive Presence and Positive Influencing
- Ecosystem Coaching and Behavioural Calibration

Imagine if every embedded partner working inside your organisation had been continuously trained and developed across all five of these areas — not once at onboarding, but consistently, throughout their engagement. That is what MASH delivers.



45%

faster time-to-hire with embedded talent models versus external agencies. Offer acceptance rates increase by up to 34%. Embedded models deliver 40–60% cost-per-hire reductions versus 20–35% placement fees charged by traditional agencies.

CIPD, 2024 · EVEREST GROUP RESEARCH

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE HUMANS, NOT JUST HIGH PERFORMERS

High performance without sustainability is just burnout at pace. That is why our investment in MASHERS extends beyond professional capability into the fundamentals that affect how people actually show up.

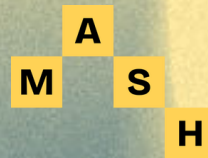
Based on 2026 MASHER surveys, our people's priorities span professional development, financial stability, wellbeing and human connection. Our support infrastructure reflects this: financial literacy and money-mindset workshops, burnout-prevention conversations, emotional regulation support and safe-space learning environments designed to sustain long-term operational capability — not short-term output.

We also take pride in who our MASHERS are outside of work. Every new starter receives the MASH Directory — a community initiative pairing MASHERS by shared interests, hobbies and passions across teams, regions and cultures. Every MASHER has a MASH Buddy from day one.

Strong embedded ecosystems are built through human connection, not just workflows.



MASH MOMENTUM



When an embedded capability ecosystem is working properly, you feel it before you can fully articulate it.

The programme is flowing. Stakeholders are aligned. Communication is moving naturally across the organisation. Nobody is chasing updates, re-briefing partners or quietly carrying the weight of a programme that should be running itself. Internal teams have the cognitive space to think strategically rather than firefight operationally. Decision-making is faster because context is shared. Execution is tighter because the operators inside the business understand its rhythms, not just its briefs.

We call this MASH Momentum.



“They've got this!” That's the shoulder-drop moment. The exhale that happens when trusted operators are embedded deeply enough into the organisation to carry the work — even when the client is pulled in five directions at once. That moment is what we build toward.

Every component of the MASH Operating System — from M-shaped talent design to capability acceleration to dual-culture integration — exists as part of a connected system rather than a set of individual services. Because in an environment where organisations are expected to carry more complexity with fewer resources, sustainable momentum is not a luxury. It is the competitive advantage.





WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

If your team is carrying the operational burden of fragmented agency relationships — if you are rebuilding context with new partners more often than you should be, or if your internal capacity is stretched beyond what is sustainable — the answer is rarely more of the same.

The organisations moving fastest right now are investing in integrated capability ecosystems: embedded operators who understand the business from the inside, carry the work with genuine ownership, and raise the standard around them.

That is the opportunity we see at MASH: building teams that do not simply deliver the work, but strengthen the organisation around them.

Jolene Cornford
Managing Director, MASH

Ready to explore what this could look like for your organisation?
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