

**Harvard
Business
Review**



Collection

Insight Center Collection | March–April 2022

Reimagining Work

Beyond a return to “normal.”

Sponsored by:

zoom

Reimagining Work

Beyond a return to “normal.”

Two years into the global Covid-19 pandemic, many are anxious for a return to normalcy. But others, wisely, are using this moment to recalibrate, reset, and reinvent. It's time for companies and individuals alike to seize this moment — this unique inflection point in history — to take a deep breath, step back, and rethink how we've always done things. In this Insight Center, we'll speak to experts on topics that include: reinventing how, where, and when we work; finding more passion, purpose, and meaning in our work; developing personal and organizational resilience; creating the right conditions for successful team dynamics in a hybrid work world; and much more. The past two years have tested and transformed us all, and it's time for a collective fresh start. Let's explore how to make it a good one — for our companies, our employees, and our society as a whole.

- 1 **5 Challenges of Hybrid Work — and How to Overcome Them**
Martine Haas
- 10 **Fulfilling the Promise of AI Requires Rethinking the Nature of Work Itself**
Cathy Engelbert and John Hagel III
- 15 **Redefining Your Purpose in the Wake of the Pandemic**
John Coleman
- 20 **Remote Work Has Opened the Door to a New Approach to Hiring**
Adam Ozimek and Christopher Stanton
- 31 **What Stops People on Your Team from Leaving?**
Sabina Nawaz
- 35 **How to Ease Back into Traveling for Work**
Elizabeth Grace Saunders

- 40 **What Great Hybrid Cultures Do Differently**
James Stanier, Michael Li, and Jesse Anderson
- 46 **Unifying Your Company’s Old Guard and New Arrivals**
Ron Carucci
- 53 **Using Technology to Make Work More Human**
Allison Fine and Beth Kanter
- 59 **How to Vet a Remote Workplace**
Robert Glazer
- 66 **How to Mentor in a Remote Workplace**
Ellen A. Ensher, W. Brad Johnson, and David G. Smith
- 73 **Workers Don’t Feel Like a 9-to-5 Job Is a Safe Bet Anymore**
Carolyn Ockels, Steve King, and Gene Zaino
- 82 **How to Make Progress on Your Long-Term Career Goals**
Dorie Clark
- 87 **To Better Support Working Parents, Talk to Them**
Daisy Dowling
- 93 **The Great Resignation or the Great Rethink?**
Ranjay Gulati
- 99 **It’s Time to Take a Fresh Look at Your Company’s Values**
John Coleman
- 104 **The Future Is Uncertain. Here’s How to Ensure Your Team Can Adapt.**
Keith Ferrazzi and Kian Gohar
- 110 **The Rise of the “Corporate Nomad”**
Claudio Fernández-Aráoz
- 118 **We Need Trauma-Informed Workplaces**
Katharine Manning

- 124 How Teams Are Retaining Employees Right Now
Cannon Thomas and Laura Delizonna
- 129 How the Metaverse Could Change Work
Mark Purdy
- 141 The “Great Resignation” Is a Misnomer
Whitney Johnson
- 147 Where We Go Wrong with Collaboration
Rob Cross
- 154 How DAOs Could Change the Way We Work
Steve Glaveski

5 Challenges of Hybrid Work — and How to Overcome Them

by Martine Haas

Published on HBR.org / February 15, 2022 / Reprint [H06V3U](#)



Enrique Ramos Lopez/Getty Images

One thing is clear about the future of work: At least in the near term — and possibly for much longer — hybrid work arrangements are going to be the norm for many organizations, in industries ranging from tech to pharmaceuticals to academia. There are good reasons why many companies and employees are excited about this mix of in-person and remote work — and equally good reasons why many feel trepidation about the shift.

I've studied global teams and virtual teamwork for close to 25 years. In my recent executive education teaching and conversations with senior leaders and middle managers, I've heard the same concerns about hybrid work come up frequently, and my MBA and undergraduate students who are thinking about their post-graduation employment options echo them. The most important concerns they're raising fall under what I call the "5C challenges": communication, coordination, connection, creativity, and culture.

Some companies, managers, and employees have been familiar with the five Cs for a long time because they've worked with geographically distributed, virtual teams for many years — even decades. There's a lot we can learn from their experience, as well as from research done by management scholars well before the pandemic.

If you're struggling to manage a hybrid team or workforce, start by understanding the five challenges, then use the 5Cs checklist to assess where you're at and where to go from there.

Communication

It's obvious that reliance on technology creates basic communication challenges. Many of us had to overcome technological difficulties when we first transitioned to fully remote work back in March 2020, but the transition to hybrid working can be rocky, too. One executive recently told me that when their employees started returning to the office, they realized that their video conferencing systems weren't fully up to the needs of hybrid working — if they could even remember how to operate them. Then there are the other practical difficulties hybrid work presents. For example, should everyone in the office log in from separate computers if some people are remote in order to level the playing field? Or does that create more problems than it solves?

In addition to the technological challenges, communication in remote and hybrid teams can be complicated by the fact that some people are more comfortable speaking up over screens than others — and that’s in addition to the power, status, and language differences that already create barriers to communication in work settings.

Coordination

All collaborative work involves coordination, but working in hybrid teams presents significantly more coordination challenges than working face to face. The risk is that what researchers have called “faultlines” can easily emerge between those who work together in person and those who work remotely. Because of the extra effort required to coordinate with remote teammates, they get left out of small exchanges and minor decisions made by those who are working together in the office. Over time, as people get accustomed to who’s looped in and who’s not, they can get left out of bigger conversations and more important decisions.

Connection

The challenges of connection are not limited to problems with technological communication and logistical coordination. There’s also the even bigger problem of social connections, and how they can be endangered or lost entirely when working remotely. We know that professional networks and mentoring relationships are important for advancing in the workplace, and that building and sustaining these is particularly challenging already for women and minorities. We also know from research that personal connections are socially sustaining and important for our psychological well-being. Hybrid working risks creating a “dominant class” of those who feel like they’re central to the organization and strongly committed to it and an “underclass” of those who feel peripheral and disconnected not only from the work, but also

from the social life that creates meaning and bonds employees more closely to the organization. The consequences can be less happy and less committed employees who are more likely to search for opportunities elsewhere.

Creativity

Two types of creativity are endangered by hybrid work. Perhaps the most obvious one is collective creativity: people can brainstorm via zoom, but programmed times and formats for generating ideas may well not prove as fruitful as the more fluid conversations, sidebars, and unexpected things that can happen when we kick ideas around with others or work intensively on solving a problem together.

But individual creativity can be endangered, too. We know that quiet time alone can help people generate novel ideas and insights. Yet it isn't clear that working alone over many days or weeks will prove generative for employees who must be constantly creative or innovative. On the contrary, there is reason to think that at least some social interactions and spontaneous conversations with colleagues, seeing random artifacts in each other's cubicles, and even the changes of scenery involved in going from home to work may be important for creativity.

Culture

Like creativity, this is a challenge that senior leaders are becoming more and more concerned about as the pandemic drags on and the prospects of bringing everyone back to the office look increasingly dim. In the initial days and months of working remotely, companies were relieved at how productive and engaged their workers seemed to still be. But this probably owed a lot to the fact that these employees had all worked together closely before the pandemic and knew plenty about how to do so effectively, in addition to their understanding of the company's

norms, values, and expectations. Now, as existing employees leave and new ones join, an increasingly pressing challenge is how to socialize these newcomers and integrate them into the company's culture, whether they're interns, entry-level hires, or seasoned executives.

In addition, corporate culture can be critical for signaling the organization's distinctiveness to potential new recruits, especially in industries where firms compete heavily for talent, such as tech, consulting, or banking. If employees never or rarely come to the office or spend time together, how can a company's distinctive "feel" be maintained — and then, how can companies differentiate themselves from each other in the war for talent?

While recognizing the importance of culture for newcomers, we shouldn't overlook the reality that sustaining a positive culture and strong organizational commitment is at least as important for the many employees who are not new to the company. Too often over the past two years, employees have found themselves ground down by a combination of all the demands and stresses they're under and a corporate culture that doesn't sufficiently recognize their struggles or support their needs. But even those who are doing OK managing their daily tasks may well find themselves feeling increasingly distant and disconnected from their companies, amplifying the risks of reduced motivation, lower organizational commitment, and higher turnover.

The 5Cs Checklist

There's no reason to think the 5C challenges will go away anytime soon. In fact, if they're not proactively recognized and managed, they're likely to get worse rather than better. So, what is a leader to do?

Recently in my executive education teaching with companies and managers in the U.S., Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia, I've been

having energetic and generative conversations by asking executives to work their way through a checklist of the 5Cs. There are four simple steps in this process:

Evaluate

For each of the five Cs, give yourself a grade on how you think your remote or hybrid workplace, unit, or team is doing. You can use a simple letter-grading scheme or a rating between 1 and 10. The goal here is to use these grades to summarize whether you think you're in good shape or have room for improvement on each C.

Analyze

Identify the C you gave the lowest grade. This is where you can benefit most from focusing your attention — it's your maximum leverage point for making high-impact changes. Then, analyze the underlying issues. Why is your grade weak here? For example, if you scored lowest on communication, are you observing some people speaking up too much while others aren't speaking up enough? If you scored lowest on creativity, is it collective creativity or individual creativity that seems to be suffering most? Then, move on to the C you gave the next-lowest grade and repeat until you've considered each C that didn't get a perfect score.

Plan

Starting with the C you gave the lowest grade, consider what can you do to make improvements in this area. Aim to develop three action steps you can take to begin addressing the problems you've identified. For example, if your weakest C is coordination, you might come up with more efficient ways to ensure everyone is looped into all important decisions, or a new schedule for ensuring more regular, structured information-sharing sessions with remote team members. Identify potential barriers to the implementation of your action steps and ways to overcome them. Repeat for the other Cs.

Implement

Set a clear schedule for implementing the changes you plan to make and a communication plan for them. Will they be rolled out over several weeks or months? And in what sequence? Who will need to be consulted and informed at each stage, and how should this be done? Establish key metrics for measuring the effectiveness of the changes — for example, by using surveys to track progress on culture or holding regular check-ins with junior employees to ask about their mentors and networks as part of improving connection. Finally, ensure that you set a timeframe for reviewing how well the changes you’ve been making are working, perhaps six months down the line and again another six months after that.

How to Work Through the Checklist

You can work through the four steps by yourself or with your team.

Just clearing some time in your busy schedule to focus on each of the five Cs can lead to some unexpected insights and a renewed sense of energy for making changes. For example, one senior manager who analyzed his team using the 5Cs checklist told me he had a real “lightbulb moment” when he thought hard about connection and realized that the higher turnover he’d been seeing on his team wasn’t just due to pandemic burnout or the prospect of higher pay elsewhere, but to the reality that team members’ social connections to each other had frayed over the last two years, diminishing their sense of commitment to the team and belonging to the company.

You can also do this same exercise with the members of your team, and it can be even more impactful. Rather than going through the 5Cs checklist by yourself, schedule a lunch session or a solid time block (maybe even as part of a full-fledged workshop) with your team. Ideally,

this would be in person, but remotely can work, too. Your aim is to work through each of the steps of the exercise together.

Start by having each person independently give your team a grade on how they think the team is doing on each C. Next, have everyone share their grades for each C with each other and discuss their reasons. You may be surprised to find that others have quite a different diagnosis than you. For example, one leadership team I worked with discovered that there was considerable variation among them when it came to evaluating company culture. Team members who had been around long before the pandemic sent the company remote gave their company an “A” or “A-“ and said they thought the company’s culture was in decent shape — they could articulate its central values fairly easily and assumed everyone else could do the same. Members who hadn’t been at the company as long, however, gave it much lower grades on culture and expressed confusion and uncertainty about the company’s core values and norms, which they’d hesitated to bring up before. Understanding the reasons for such discrepancies can be very illuminating, and the act of simply discussing them can help to build trust and firmer foundations for making improvements going forward.

Finally, make sure you reserve enough time to brainstorm together about possible ways to address the problems you’ve identified, and develop a joint plan for implementing them. Doing this together will result in better ideas and greater buy-in that will stand you in good stead as you move forward together.

Hybrid working arrangements can be daunting for those about to adopt them and challenging for those who already have. But the good news is that we’re learning quickly where the biggest obstacles lie and how to minimize them in advance and manage them as they come up. Using

the 5Cs checklist can help leaders tackle — and prioritize — the most common challenges of hybrid working.



Martine Haas is the Lauder Chair Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Lauder Institute for Management & International Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research focuses on collaboration and teamwork in global organizations.

Fulfilling the Promise of AI Requires Rethinking the Nature of Work Itself

by Cathy Engelbert and John Hagel III

Published on HBR.org / December 18, 2017 / Reprint [H042WD](#)



Paul Taylor/Getty Images

Everywhere today the news confronts us with deeply held fears of AI and automation. Coverage often focuses on the job loss and social unrest that are viewed as likely to follow.

These fears aren't unfounded: managers across industries have cost targets and technology enables lower-value tasks to move from people to machines. Last year's movie *Hidden Figures* vividly illustrates the

shift from another era, as NASA's human computers faced displacement.

But we believe an obsession mainly on technology's potential for cost-cutting is misguided. Not because of the social implications, but because we think it's bad business.

In fact, the interests of companies and workers are more aligned. The promise of today's breakthroughs is not just efficiency – it's unleashing value creation and capture in a time of mounting performance pressure. But this will require driving a fundamental shift in the nature of work.

As machines do more of what was once human, companies and people who thrive will not be those who guess correctly at the next narrow skillsets, but who cultivate the capacity of their workers to learn faster. This is true both for “on balance sheet” workers and the gig economy. As the half-life of specific skills diminishes, and machines become proficient at tasks including even decision-making, then fundamentally human capabilities become more important: empathy, curiosity, creativity, imagination, emotional and social intelligence, leadership, and the development of other people.

As we rethink work, the focus of *all* workers will shift from routine tasks. Before, it was typically the preserve of a subset to innovate and constantly increase value for customers over time. In the future, organizations that thrive will be filled with curious life-long learners who bring purpose to work, discover new knowledge by confronting unexpected challenges, and are empowered (and expected) to do much more than execute.

And so leaders focused on optimizing and automating tasks see only half the picture. The more compelling question is, how can we invent fundamentally more valuable ways of working?

Without rethinking work, companies will face a discovery and creativity gap. Optimized for efficiency rather than discovery and experimentation, their innovation and growth will stall. Closing this gap is not simply a matter of training programs for existing knowledge. The real need is for learning that creates new knowledge in the workplace itself, as workers increasingly confront situations that have never surfaced before. How could we redesign our work environments to accelerate this kind of on-the-job learning?

There is a genuine tension here. Executives today must make smart choices as automation and AI create massive efficiencies. Our own organization uses Robotic Process Automation and assists clients with it, and we are very aware of the options to substitute capital (currently cheap) for labor.

Companies that navigate this tension will be the ones that focus *everyone* on how to create more value for customers and for the business. Machines can design exquisitely to specifications, but for the foreseeable future, the best way to differentiate and grow revenue is by combining technology with human ingenuity, empathy, and creativity.

As we face the work of the future, how do we get from “here” to “there”? Small moves, smartly made, can set big things in motion:

Engage workers as essential collaborators as you explore how and where work gets done. Millions today are already freely committing billions of hours, across distant locations, to co-creating products and services they care about. Why wouldn't they do the same for their own

future? For this to succeed, leaders have to really believe in it. Successfully reimagining the work of the future— the who, where, and how of what gets done – can only happen if you truly view talent as an essential ingredient in competitive advantage, not just as a cost.

Create an entire worker experience that accelerates performance improvement. This goes way beyond asking workers for their ideas. Pick a single front line work environment that is pivotal to performance, and charge workers there with a purposeful goal or question. Using a systematic approach, create the space for them to experiment. Track key performance metrics, particularly those related to value delivered rather than just cost of delivering, and iterate as you learn.

Rethink your efficiency conversations. It goes without saying that companies need to be smart with their money; we are decidedly *not* advocating waste or imprudent financial decisions. As [Tom Friedman has said](#), if a machine can do it, a machine will do it, and there's no sense in fighting that. But focusing too much on cost reduction is unsustainable. How many companies have cut themselves to growth without sustaining at least an equal dose of innovation? So, use conversations about efficiency to drive strategic discussion about quality, reputation, and customer value. Any CFO will look at multiple ways to reinvest financial capital. Why would we not do the same with human capital?

Capturing the massive opportunity of today's breakthroughs won't be simple. But we'll make it harder on ourselves if we keep obsessing over [scalable efficiency](#).

The biggest business, economic, and public policy issue is that we must rethink work *and* help people cultivate the capabilities required to succeed in this new kind of work. Until employers are able to help

people strengthen agility and passion, we will continue to have a discovery gap and fall prey to the efficiency trap.

To return to *Hidden Figures*, if you've seen the movie, you know that the real challenge was not computational, but one of imagination. That's why we are optimistic about the future. Companies and workers need the same thing: environments where humans engage in more fulfilling and inventive work that draws out more of their potential, augmented by technology to perform routine tasks. In that future, the rewards will be significant for both companies *and* their workers.



Cathy Engelbert is CEO of Deloitte US.



John Hagel III recently retired from Deloitte, where he founded and led the [Center for the Edge](#), a research center based in Silicon Valley. A long-time resident of Silicon Valley, he is also a compulsive writer, having published eight books, including his most recent one, *[The Journey Beyond Fear](#)*. He will be establishing a new Center to offer programs based on the book.

Redefining Your Purpose in the Wake of the Pandemic

by John Coleman

Published on HBR.org / March 10, 2022 / Reprint [H06WGR](#)



Noel Hendrickson/Getty Images

What happened to you these last two years? Did you lose a job, or [quit one](#)? Did you relocate, opting to work remotely from a new place or to be closer to family? Did you see what life would be like spending more time (or less) with friends and family? Did you get seriously ill or lose a loved one?

Life is full of major transitions. People graduate high school. They leave home. They enter the workforce, get married, have kids, and eventually retire. And these pivotal life events often lead us to reflect and alter

our lives in major ways. In my book, *[The HBR Guide to Crafting Your Purpose](#)*, I argue that purpose isn't singular (one big thing) but plural — the myriad sources of meaning that surround us each day. And over the course of a life our purposes are rarely stable. Instead, they shift over time. The most dramatic of these shifts come during periods of major transition, like those listed above, when we fundamentally reevaluate the structure and focus of our lives.

What's unique about this remarkable moment in history, however, is that we all just experienced a major life transition at the same time during the Covid-19 pandemic. For some it was brutal. For others, beautiful. But almost no one in the world lived through 2020 and 2021 without experiencing major change. And, consequently, for perhaps the first time since at least World War II, almost everyone in the world is processing major shifts in their sources of purpose simultaneously.

This is seismic and tumultuous. It's a primary driver of the Great Resignation. It's [altering the geography](#) of major countries like the U.S. It's led to [political instability](#), mass crises of [mental](#) and physical health, and [cultural turmoil](#). It's causing all of us to wonder [how we will measure our lives](#), at home and at work.

The pandemic changed your purpose. The only question now is if you will consciously embrace this transition and use it to craft an intentional, meaningful future in its aftermath.

This will be hard. Everyone's process of reflection and action will look different. But I'd encourage a few basic principles for each of us as we embrace this period of transition together and reimagine both our personal lives and our work.

Identify what's permanent.

While many sources of purpose are transitory — working as an intern, living abroad, or searching for a romantic partner — some are core to our identities. These permanent sources of purpose are the anchors in life that keep us stable and help us weather life's most difficult storm. For me, these include my religious faith, my role as a father, my commitment to my spouse, and my love of writing. For you, they may be different.

There are sources of meaning at your very core that will never change and that help to define who you are. Identifying those, leaning into them, and learning to build around them is the foundation upon which you build a fruitful life transition. Sometimes these are professional — a deep and abiding calling to be a physician, for example, or to work with children. Other times, those core identities (e.g., father) may impact the way in which we structure how we want to work (e.g., more flex time at home).

Reject stagnation.

Your pre-pandemic life is gone, and it's unlikely your pandemic era habits can persist unchanged. If you've been quietly confined for much of this period, you're now (or soon will be) reentering the world, whether that means visiting restaurants or the office. If you've worked remotely for two years, chances are you're going to shift habits again and find a balance between virtual and physical community. If you've been clinging to a job that makes you feel stuck, now's the time to reinvent it or move on.

What areas of your life were stagnant two years ago, particularly in your work? What pandemic habits have you fallen into that you need to pull

yourself out of? Don't go back to who you were in 2019, but also don't hold too tightly to who you were in quarantine.

There's rarely been as universal an opportunity for reinvention as this moment, and it requires each of us to reject stagnation. Was the daily commute unhealthy? What might that look like moving forward? Were you in a professional rut with your learning stalled? How might you craft your work to reinvigorate it?

Learn to let go.

A necessary part of rejecting stagnation is letting go. Perhaps you learned over the last two years that you no longer love your job, but you clung to it out of fear. Now is the time to reinvent it or leave it. Perhaps you've experienced great grief — the loss of a loved one, isolation and loneliness, fear and anxiety — that you now need to slowly move beyond. Maybe you developed habits of isolation or distance that you need to ditch to feel part of a community again. And maybe after two years of relocating, you need to decide whether you'll actually return to the apartment in the city you once loved. What is it in your life you need to leave behind to be happier and more fulfilled in the years ahead?

If you're beginning to think it's time to switch jobs (or even careers), now, during the flux of the Great Resignation, could be a good time. You should always think carefully about a big change, but if the signs are there that you should leave, begin thinking through how to leave *for* something and not just *from* something. Reflect now on what a flourishing work future could look like. And embark on a structured set of next steps to get there.

Embrace others.

The best part of us all experiencing this shift in life and purpose together is that none of us are alone. As you navigate one of the most important transitions in your life, you're surrounded by scores of people experiencing the exact same change.

Reach out to them. Offer your support in their journey and seek their advice on yours. There's never been a better time for a peer mentoring group, a book club, or a job transition group (even virtually). That empathy you feel for everyone else's transition? They feel it for you, too.

Embrace others as you navigate this new phase of life and experience these shifts in purpose together. This is particularly true of professional transition. Start or join a "work transitions" group of friends or acquaintances considering a similar move. Join a professional association or conference for the field in which you'd like to work. Surround yourself with others who can help to think through the transition, demystify it, and make it more rewarding.

Any major inflection point in life can feel terrifying. Finding new sources of meaning is hard. And like many life transitions, the pandemic was not a welcome or pleasant one. The biggest question we all face now is what's next — and how can we embrace purpose in our post-pandemic future.



John Coleman is the author of the [HBR Guide to Crafting Your Purpose](#) and a coauthor of the book, *Passion & Purpose: Stories from the Best and Brightest Young Business Leaders*. Follow him on Twitter at [@johnwcoleman](#) or contact him through [his website](#).

Remote Work Has Opened the Door to a New Approach to Hiring

by Adam Ozimek and Christopher Stanton

Published on HBR.org / March 11, 2022 / Reprint [H06X4I](#)



Maciej Toporowicz, NYC/Getty Images

Imagine a consultant telling a C-level executive in 2019 that huge swaths of their company could transition to remote work with only a few days' notice, they would experience a productivity boost after an adjustment period, and many of those workers would not want to return to the office. The consultant's contract likely wouldn't be renewed. Even so, surveys [conducted independently by both authors](#) indicate this is an accurate description of the remote work evolution for many firms. The forced experiment with remote work over the past two years has shown

some organizations the upside of approaches to work they would never have otherwise considered. It also showed workers that they aren't as locked into the traditional, in-office 9-5 at one company as they might have thought. For both, there's no going back.

Hybrid and remote work aren't the end of the story, however. The new capabilities organizations have for remote work have opened up new possibilities, and now is the time for leaders to assess how other changes to the employment model could work for them.

A flexible or open talent model is particularly worth considering. Flexible and open talent are broad terms, covering scenarios from local freelancers coming on-premises to globally distributed online contractors to innovation sourcing through tournaments or contests. The defining feature is project-based or temporary work that is staffed with workers who are not permanently attached to a company. If done correctly, these ways of working can help organizations access skilled talent while providing the flexibility that many workers increasingly crave.

Just like with remote work prior to Covid, companies have been slow to adopt these models. As the chief economist of a large work marketplace, Upwork, and an academic who has studied open talent for more than a decade, we tracked a slow uptick in enterprise use of open talent in the years prior to the pandemic. But now, as remote work has become normalized, we're seeing a rapid change.

To help companies understand and take advantage of new possibilities that open talent allows, we want to highlight some trends in the flexible/open talent landscape, comment on what jobs or tasks are most amenable to this model, and outline considerations for managers to get started.

Why Use Flexible and Open Talent?

Flexible models have traditionally served three purposes.

- First, flexibility allows organizations to scale staffing up and down, accommodating labor demand variability.
- Second, flexible models allow small-task outsourcing for situations where hiring a full-time equivalent would not be justified and where the overhead requirements of traditional temporary staffing solutions would slow the project or be cost-prohibitive.
- Third, flexible talent strategies provide access to innovative or diverse skillsets beyond traditional recruiting pipelines. Industry leaders like Netflix and NASA have found that contests with external participants often beat internal innovation benchmarks for similar projects.

Still, there have been barriers to organizations adopting the open model. At Upwork, a leading online labor market, the sales team saw some common stumbling blocks from potential clients. Discomfort with remote work was one of the most significant, as flexible talent is disproportionately remote. Resistance also comes from enterprise inertia or bureaucracy, concerns about IP or security risks, and a lack of familiarity with the tools and management practices that make open talent effective. As a result, companies sought talent primarily in their local labor markets or de-facto recruiting networks, and primarily for traditional hiring arrangements.

Things are beginning to change, however. In surveys conducted by Ozimek from a representative panel of firms, more than half of hiring managers indicated that remote work has opened up their ability or willingness to utilize remote freelancers, both during the pandemic and going forward.

The supply of workers interested in these models has simultaneously swelled. Self-employment rates have surged over the past year, supporting anecdotal reports that many considering adding to the Great Resignation were seeking more flexibility and control over their lives. In a representative survey of working-age people in the U.S., one out of five respondents who could work mostly remotely during the pandemic reported considering freelancing to stay remote. Among those who would consider freelancing, a more flexible schedule was what they value most.

In a series of Upwork surveys, respondents reported both opportunities for and interest in using more freelance options. Respondents who had worked with or hired independent staff in the last year said that, without the external help, they would have done the work themselves (35%) or asked their teams to do it (28%) — options that could contribute to burnout. Twenty percent said they would have hired an outside service company; 3% would have hired a staffing firm. Just 8% said they would have made new full-time hires, and 6% said the work simply wouldn't have been done.

Respondents also reported having contracted significantly more freelancers during the pandemic (53% said they made more use of remote freelancers compared to their pre-pandemic baseline, vs. just 6% who hired fewer freelancers) and planned to make more use of it over the next two years (47% vs. 11%).

What Jobs or Tasks Are Most Amenable to the Flexible/Open Talent Model?

The flexible/open model has proven effective for a wide range of jobs and tasks. The top skill categories on Upwork are administrative support (including relatively rote tasks like data entry) and web/software development. These skills run the gamut from easy-to-find

to rare, highly specialized, and highly compensated. Other platforms, such as Topcoder, concentrate on contests — a model that has proven incredibly valuable for innovation — with typical tournaments containing high-level programming or machine learning work or more subjective design work.

Given the range of skills available on open platforms, there are a few situations where it makes particular sense to use open talent. Specifically, when:

1. Insiders cannot be redeployed easily.
2. Outsiders are less expensive than hiring a new insider or paying overtime to existing ones.
3. Highly specialized skills are needed and they are not available internally.
4. Returns on exceptional solutions are high.

In the first three situations, companies are responding to a simple need for talent, but the last underscores another important motivation: In many contexts outsiders have been found to beat insiders head-to-head. Outsiders can provide many different approaches or solutions to a given problem, allowing the organization to choose the best one.

But, perhaps even more important than the situation that brought firms to open talent, there's the nature of the task itself. There are a few important variables that companies should weigh before deciding how to utilize open/flexible talent.

For one, the level of firm-specific knowledge required for a project will typically tip the balance between insiders and outsiders. While freelancers can build complex database-driven web applications from scratch — perhaps more efficiently than the internal employees of many

firms — a project that requires interfacing effectively with existing applications that require significant firm-specific context will mean either: a) an internal employee is needed to form the bridge; b) the freelancer must learn the internal systems (potentially at higher cost than an internal employee); or c) an internal employee will serve an integration role that builds on the freelancer's work.

Then there's the question of whether a project or task is recurring. All hiring and onboarding has some costs — whether screening a freelancer, setting up a contest, or hiring a full-time role. If a project or task is going to be repeated over time, the scale tips toward making a more permanent hire to economize on these costs, especially if they involve training a new hire on firm-specific processes. On the other hand, a repeated task can be suitable for open talent if it involves common skills and requires little firm-specific context.

Finally, there are integration costs of incorporating work from an open talent solution into the larger organization. These tend to be low for projects that require little firm specific knowledge and can be very high for a project for highly firm-specific tasks.

When Open Talent Works

How firms can decide when an open model makes sense.

	Firm-specific knowledge required		
	Low	Medium	Large
TASK FREQUENCY	Low	Medium	Large
TASK FREQUENCY	Low	Medium	Large
TASK FREQUENCY ONE-OFF	Use open/flexible	Open/flexible can be used if integration costs are low enough	Use traditional employees unless tasks can be broken down to remove need for firm-specific context
TASK FREQUENCY RECURRING	Open/flexible can be used if recruiting/screening costs are low enough	Open/flexible can be used if integration costs and recruiting/screening costs are low enough	Use traditional employees

With these factors in mind, we believe that remote work is hastening a shift that reduces hiring, screening, and monitoring costs for managers and lessens burdens on workers to understand firm-specific context.

A few important changes have brought us here. First, we’ve seen a mindset shift around remote work. Hiring managers for remote positions are now more comfortable interfacing with people they have not met personally, opening the door to work from anywhere — and to open/flexible hiring. Second, companies have invested in virtual communications tools (e.g., video calls and screen sharing) that make it easier to troubleshoot problems remotely and give outside workers a way to interface and get/give feedback. Third, remote work and tools like Slack have forced companies to better define tasks, codifying processes and specifications, making it easier to write specifications

that a worker with little firm-specific knowledge can understand, which can enable opening up a company.

So, where should companies start?

What Managers Should Do

Platforms are the primary way freelancers and companies find each other for open/flexible work, and help establish trust for both workers and employers. For the freelance workers, they offer protection through payment guarantees and dispute resolution mechanisms, and the ability to establish a verified track record of feedback and reputation scores — a kind of virtual resume. For employers, this track record offers confidence when hiring from a global talent pool. They don't need to understand the specifics of a local labor market — how a college ranks, which employers signal particular ability, etc. — to find the right person for a job.

If hiring managers decide to use platforms, there are a few things to think about as you navigate them.

Platforms make hiding failure much harder, which is likely to be especially useful for those who don't have the skills to evaluate a new hire (e.g., poets who want to hire quants and quants who want to hire poets). Market signals from past buyers help with that screening process, and the platforms provide objective measures of past performance — something that's nearly impossible to come by in traditional HR. And because every transaction contributes not just to current earnings but to future earnings through public signals of on-the-job performance, the threat of poor feedback serves as a disciplining device that likely improves contract fulfillment rates.

Platforms primarily make money from successful matches, as up-front fees are minimal. As a result, clients can hire a freelancer for a short-term project without making a huge investment before deciding to hire them on a permanent basis. As remote work expands the pool of both potential employers and employees, the opportunity for better matches increases, making “try before you buy” with flexible talent more valuable than ever.

If you begin your journey outside of platforms, use the insights for why platforms exist so that you can design your own processes to circumvent the information problems platforms attempt to solve.

This likely means you need some way to screen applicants, like with employment histories, or to use a format like contests that make employment histories irrelevant. Incentive alignment in this case cannot come from the promise of a public signal of good feedback, but instead may come from a pathway to a permanent position or a substantial bonus upon project success.

Hiring managers should be aware of firm-specific context and try to minimize it, while making sure any solution you procure from outsiders can be integrated. For example, Netflix was able to get more than 2,000 submissions [in their famous prediction challenge](#) by providing an easy-to-understand database of movie ratings that didn’t force participants to understand the underlying architecture of Netflix’s backend systems.

You also can run some experiments and horserace different models. Try to measure the results of comparable tasks or projects done in different ways (internally and through open talent). This will allow you to measure productivity under different conditions. We believe the idiosyncratic nature of most production means an experiment is more valuable than broad advice. Experiments may also include

trying different formats — contests or hourly contracts — and different platforms with different mixes of contractors.

For those firms running experiments, we would be grateful if you let us know how things go. Feel free to send us an email (cstanton@hbs.edu) with your progress.

Finally, many organizations may worry about information leakage, especially around trade secrets or intellectual property. However, even before the pandemic, freelancing and contest platforms evolved to address many of these problems, and their lessons are useful for managers thinking about hiring any remote worker, not just a freelancer. Many platforms contain support for non-disclosure agreements and other legal agreements that can help to protect IP. It's also possible that the decontextualization that helps to facilitate using open talent reduces IP risk — for example, information leakage without context tends to be a less useful datapoint than seeing the big picture. In fact, many quantitative hedge funds manage IP risks in similar ways. As a result, the open model can potentially create siloes that, in some cases, protect IP better than traditional working arrangements.

What Will This Mean in the Long Run?

What will a broader move to flexible talent mean for pay? Managers who are used to leveraging an army of consultants or temps from staffing agencies might expect to pay a premium for flexible talent, whereas those who have outsourced work to low-cost areas may expect cost savings. Managers should recognize that increases in the willingness to use open talent will mean competition with the best firms for the best talent. In a globalized, online economy, Western firms won't just compete with local Indian firms for the best Indian talent, but instead with anyone willing to pay for digital work. As a result, we expect that open talent will help democratize access to opportunities, and will

potentially raise living standards in places where local opportunities are scarce.

To conclude, gaining practice with remote work seems to open up possibilities for leveraging flexible or open talent. When done well, these models can drive exceptional results, but they require purposeful management.



Adam Ozimek is the chief economist at Upwork.



Christopher Stanton is the Marvin Bower Associate Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

What Stops People on Your Team from Leaving?

by **Sabina Nawaz**

Published on HBR.org / March 14, 2022 / Reprint [H06VEP](#)



moodboard/Getty Images

Amid the Great Resignation, managers are asking themselves *why*. They conduct exit interviews, trying to understand why people are resigning and devising solutions to the problem. But narrowing in on why people leave may exact a price: neglect of loyal and engaged employees who want to stay in the organization. These employees, when ignored, might also feel disenfranchised and opt to leave, setting off a negative spiral.

Managers should spend just as much time understanding why employees choose to stay. When we know what keeps people attached to their current workplace, we can then use this information to adopt more intentional and proactive practices.

One way to gain insight into employees' motivators is to conduct stay interviews. These not only provide valuable information from the perspective of our team members, but they also make inroads into reengaging our employees and stanching the bleeding of talent from our organizations.

The key to stay interviews is asking questions that address what you'd learn from exit interviews. These four questions tackle common retention issues. Fold them into your existing one-on-one meetings with your employees, or if you don't have regular one-on-one meetings, consider conducting stay interviews monthly.

What's your frame of mind today?

In your discussion, encourage people to express a full range of emotions. No matter what's shared, don't attempt to solve the problem or negate their experience. If someone says they're feeling unmotivated, respond by saying, "Thank you for honestly sharing how you're feeling," and ask for more information. To normalize their experience, acknowledge that you have days when you feel energetic and hopeful and others where you struggle.

Our well-meaning human response when faced with another's pain is to try to immediately extinguish their anguish. But rote assurances of resilience and hyped excitement about the business, especially from those in authority, unintentionally signal it's not okay for an employee to struggle or express their authentic emotions. If not allowed to do so,

employees feel disappointed, not seen or understood, and might seek alternate venues.

Who do you feel connected to at work?

Friendships at work foster a bond that works like gravity. The toxic combination of too many meetings just to get the work done and not enough connections outside of transactional business saps us of energy. And in its [research on employee engagement](#), Gallup has found a strong link between having a best friend at work and employee performance.

In your stay interview, ask, “Who do you feel connected to at work?” Based on their response, explore what you can do to help them [deepen those connections](#), say, by assigning them to joint work or finding ways to create unexpected pairings. Perhaps people from different departments can work on a company-wide event, a cross-division initiative, or take part in virtual discussion groups. The glue that connects us to our colleagues also connects us to our companies. Finding ways for people to regularly connect socially and build relationships will extend their shelf life in the organization.

What barriers can I remove for you?

Research shows that the [single biggest motivational action](#) managers can take is to remove barriers that inhibit employees from achieving their goals. Yet we more often offer praise or rewards, like gift certificates for coffee. These remedies might make us feel better about our jobs as managers, but do they really make an impact on our employees and their work?

During your stay interviews ask, “What barriers can I remove for you?” Then communicate what action you will take and follow through or

brainstorm with your colleague how you can be most helpful. Instead of saying, “Good job,” ensure your direct report can perform their job well.

What new thing do you want to learn that will excite you and help you grow?

Instead of talking about what your employee can do for the company, ask what they might like to do for themselves. This question signals that you care not just about what this person has done for you or the company, but what you can do for them to foster their development and to help them achieve their dreams and aspirations. It also, in turn, enhances employee loyalty.

We all want stability and reassurance in a workplace where we feel seen, heard, connected, and productive. As managers, our first efforts to provide these benefits to our employees often fail. We pressure them instead of reassuring them. By spending time conducting stay interviews, we strengthen our skills as managers and the desire of our employees to continue working with us.



Sabina Nawaz is a [global CEO coach](#), leadership keynote speaker, and writer working in over 26 countries. She advises C-level executives in Fortune 500 corporations, government agencies, non-profits, and academic organizations. Sabina has spoken at hundreds of seminars, events, and conferences including [TEDx](#) and has written for [FastCompany.com](#), [Inc.com](#), and [Forbes.com](#), in addition to [HBR.org](#). Follow her on [Twitter](#).

How to Ease Back into Traveling for Work

by **Elizabeth Grace Saunders**

Published on HBR.org / March 15, 2022 / Reprint [H06PYC](#)



Richard Drury/Getty Images

In 2020, with the introduction of Covid-19 restrictions, travel dramatically dropped domestically and internationally, with [business travel down by 90%](#) at the lowest point in the year. Now, as more and more individuals are returning to the office, work travel is coming back. But it's not all clear skies. As a time management coach, I've seen that returning to business travel can be almost as disorienting after a two-year hiatus as the sudden lurch into fully remote work was. My clients are having to remember how to pack efficiently, adjust to time zone

changes, and modify their meeting schedules when they're now on the road for work.

Thankfully, there are strategies that you can use to ease this transition back into business trips, including using the wisdom you've gleaned while working remotely. Here are four ways to leverage your time and energy as you're planning business travel again.

Evaluate the Benefit

When you're reintegrating travel back into your work schedule, think carefully about where you believe it would add the greatest benefit: Where did you feel you got diminished results working remotely that could be enhanced by face-to-face interaction? Among my clients, some of the areas where they've seen benefit in returning to travel include:

- Team retreats to craft strategy
- Visits to international work sites to facilitate communication across cultural and language barriers
- Sales negotiations to land deals
- Conferences to network

Based on your particular role and responsibilities, think about where you believe travel will add the highest value. Be sure to also consider the level of restrictions in place where you're considering traveling, too. If meeting face-to-face would be beneficial, it may make more sense for your colleagues or client to come to you because of drastic differences in travel restrictions, quarantine requirements, and Covid risk levels throughout the world.

Right Size the Investment

Even as you're able to fold more business travel into your recipe for professional success, question whether all the travel you used to do before 2020 needs to be added back in. For example, maybe you historically visited clients in-person quarterly. Maybe now you could take a hybrid approach of making two visits in person and doing two virtually each year. In making this decision, think back over the past year and a half: Did you have more issues or reduced sales because of not meeting in person with certain clients? Those are ones where you might want to invest more face time. But then ask yourself, did any client relationships stay the same or even thrive with virtual interaction? In those cases, you could consider doing more of the visits as virtual.

You can also take a similar approach to evaluating the conferences or networking events to attend. If you noticed that you had reduced sales leads or missed out on other important connections from certain events being virtual or not happening at all, then prioritize attending those once they're in person once more. But if you observed that you saw no difference in your professional results from the lack of other in-person events, consider continuing to attend virtually or completely dropping them from your calendar.

Every trip you reduce from your schedule offers a massive time savings both professionally and personally.

Pace Yourself

One observation that many of my coaching clients have made is that travel tires them out much more than it used to. Similar to how individuals lost their ability to commute into the office with ease, people have also lost their conditioning when it comes to prepping for

and actually being on a trip. My clients have reported having to recall how to pack efficiently, finding jet lag harder, getting re-accustomed to sleeping in hotels, and needing to think carefully about how to fit in personal errands when they're home much less than before.

In light of that, pace yourself as much as possible. If you used to travel multiple times a month, start with just one trip every 30 days and see how you feel. If you're feeling OK in terms of time and energy, then you can add in more. I've had multiple clients who discovered that going back to their pre-covid levels of travel too quickly left them feeling burnt out. Ease back into trips gradually to avoid this issue.

Explain to your boss why it is you want to ramp up travel over time, rather than jumping in at full capacity immediately. Compare it to the hybrid approach that many companies are taking in the return to the office: Just like many organizations are beginning with two to three days back before ramping up to a fully in-person work environment, you would like to begin with a reduced travel schedule to start. Also, since many organizations still have a large part of their staff working remotely, you can share any clients or contacts that you may not be able to visit in person, even if your boss thought it would be preferable.

Leave Margin — and Double Check Everything

Given the dramatic fluctuations in travel restrictions over the past two years, the travel industry — and in particular airlines — have had issues with their staffing and operations. If you've got important business travel, give yourself more margin than you used to do. For example, schedule your flight for the night before an important meeting, rather than taking an early morning flight, in case of last-minute cancellations. Or consider alternative modes of transportation, including bus or train travel.

Finally, similar to how you need to double check what is or is not open and available to you when you returned to the office, do the same when it comes to travel. In airports, more and more restaurants and lounges are open, but some still remain shuttered. And when it comes to rideshare options, you may find it more difficult or expensive to find an Uber or other options than it was in the past. Although travel demand continues to rise, labor shortages could make these limitations an ongoing issue. The microchip shortage has also made car rental more difficult — I know a couple who arrived at an airport and not a single rental car was available on the premises. Given these changes from our expected norms, bring some food with you, make reservations in advance, and plan to be flexible. You'll also need to be aware of any Covid-specific travel requirements for your destination or with your company. Do you need to do a Covid test, show information on your vaccination status, quarantine a certain number of days, or follow any other protocols? Also reach out to HR to find out your specific organization's rules.

Business travel still has enormous benefits in terms of building new connections, negotiating deals, and creating strong teams. But as the world reopens, there are some additional items to consider as you evaluate the time and energy investment it requires. Enjoy the journey and invest your time in travel wisely.

The logo consists of the letters 'ES' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a light teal circular background.

Elizabeth Grace Saunders is a time management coach and the founder of Real Life E Time Coaching & Speaking. She is author of *How to Invest Your Time Like Money* and *Divine Time Management*. Find out more at www.RealLifeE.com.

What Great Hybrid Cultures Do Differently

by **James Stanier, Michael Li, and Jesse Anderson**

Published on HBR.org / March 16, 2022 / Reprint [H06WTA](#)



ilbusca/Getty Images

The pandemic acceleration toward work from home has ebbed, but while many workers have grown accustomed to the convenience and flexibility of remote work and are [demanding it](#), many companies are [pushing](#) for a return to the office. The compromise, increasingly, is a hybrid that blends in-person and remote teams. A recent [McKinsey study](#) of 800 corporate executives indicated that hybrid will likely be the norm going forward. Our experience, from having lead teams and companies that were hybrid pre-Covid, is that this isn't as simple as setting days to be in-office or remote.

Hybrid cultures, instead, only thrive by treating everyone as remote. This means giving everyone access to the same information, people, tools, and opportunity to succeed, regardless of whether they are sitting in an office in Berlin or whether they are doing their work from a coffee shop in Jakarta or a bedroom in Tokyo. This is simple, but not straightforward. It requires consistent action from leadership on the following five fronts.

1. Embracing asynchronous communication

Communicating with distributed employees, especially globally, requires a special attention to ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the conversation. This can typically be achieved by one or more of the following means:

- **Deliberately changing synchronous exchanges to asynchronous ones.** Teams that are on different time zones need to move to written or recorded communication. This could mean replacing your daily stand-up meeting with short written updates to a chat channel, or with written documents that facilitate discussion in the comments. At a wider scale, a CEO could solicit written questions ahead of time for the company town hall, and then record and broadcast it instead of doing it live.
- **Using technology to produce artefacts that can be shared after a synchronous exchange.** Sometimes a synchronous meeting is required to discuss a complex or urgent issue. However, we now have access to the technology that makes it simple to produce shareable artefacts, such as recorded Zoom meetings, collaboratively edited meeting minutes in Google Docs, and automatically generated transcripts of video calls.

2. Making communication boundaries clear

With remote work, it is often unclear when colleagues and managers are available to chat, focusing on a task, or relaxing with their family. This can lead to awkward or annoying interruptions. This isn't a new problem, of course; while one of the extolled virtues of working in the office was the ability to have spontaneous interactions and interruptions, it could be frustrating for staff who thrived on getting into flow and concentrating on deep work.

Remote work offers a reset. Teams should do two things:

- **Set rules of engagement per platform.** Working remotely means navigating emails, chat messages, video calls, and documentation with different levels of priority and urgency. Ideally, teams should clearly define what the expectations are for each. Is it reasonable to not answer a direct message on chat until the next day? What about emails? Is everyone expected to watch every meeting recording if they didn't make it, or are they optional? These rules of engagement can greatly reduce anxiety and employees' fear of missing out.
- **Make working hours clear.** Staff should record explicitly in their calendars when their working hours are so that others are able to see it, including recording their vacations. An expectation that someone is interruptible just because they are not in a meeting isn't at all close to reality when they are spending their free afternoon writing an important proposal. Employees should block off time that they're allocating for deep thinking.

3. Championing documentation and artefacts

By forming a culture of creating company-wide archivable, searchable documentation for important information, we are creating effective historical decision-making for individuals, teams, and departments. For

example, in software teams, designs for each new feature or change to the system can be written while consensus on the approach is forming. These design documents can then be archived as a snapshot of contemporaneous context so that future engineers can better understand why those decisions were made. These archives are a goldmine for new employees who wish to self-discover the genesis of the work that they are currently doing.

Additionally, encouraging a culture of writing proposals and designs in the open where others can collaborate and comment greatly increases the ability for others to read, understand, and contribute to the overall direction of the company, increasing employee morale and ownership.

4. Broadcasting communication

In the office, each day is filled with hundreds of one-to-one conversations in order to spread information. In small workplaces, this may be a workable way of communicating, but when workforces are distributed, it doesn't scale. Instead, leaders need to develop a culture of written or recorded messaging to convey the heartbeat of the company. Leaders can begin writing regular newsletters to their staff, or recording weekly messages to send out at the beginning of the week.

On a smaller scale, teams can experiment with broadcasting their regular achievements. Initially, this would be among themselves by summarizing what they've been working on. But eventually, they can work toward broadcasting that information further: such as with other teams in their department. A culture of sharing typically encourages further sharing.

5. Providing the tooling to succeed

Effective remote working requires that everyone uses, and has access to, the same tools. These range from collaborative software such as Google Docs, where multiple participants can edit and make comments, and drawing tools such as Miro where remote groups can sketch together and collaborate as if they were in front of a whiteboard.

Tooling can also come in the form of the physical setups that employees have access to in their homes. Many workers were asked to work from home during the pandemic with a laptop and little else. These environments were poor substitutes for pre-pandemic offices where employees would have access to suitably ergonomic office furniture, widescreen monitors, and meeting rooms with good A/V equipment. Many companies are now offering work from home stipends for workers to improve their home offices, with some companies offering thousands of dollars worth of office upgrades. For fully remote companies, this expense is easier to bear, since no money is being spent on office leases. But that doesn't mean that your employees don't need the support. If hybrid work is an option, it is the company's responsibility to ensure employees can be successful wherever they are.

Continually aiming for 1% better

These five pillars are only a starting point for building a successful hybrid culture. In reality, successfully moving to a hybrid culture is a mindset that requires changing many small habits every single day. By keeping the maxim of treating everyone as remote in mind, and then applying it daily, a workforce can incrementally improve. As hybrid workplaces become the new normal, incremental improvements across the five pillars will be key to creating a successful corporate culture in the post-pandemic world.

JS

James Stanier is Director of Engineering at [Shopify](#), a fully remote technology company. His latest book, [Effective Remote Work](#), is being published by The Pragmatic Bookshelf in 2022. Previously, he was SVP Engineering at [Brandwatch](#), and has been featured in [OneZero](#) and [Increment Magazine](#).



Michael Li is the founder and CEO of [The Data Incubator](#), a data science training and placement firm, which was acquired by Pragmatic Institute, where he is president. A data scientist, he has worked at Google, Foursquare, and Andreessen Horowitz. He is a regular contributor to VentureBeat, The Next Web, and *Harvard Business Review*. He earned a master's degree from Cambridge and a PhD from Princeton.

JA

Jesse Anderson is Managing Director of Big Data Institute and has spent the past 10 years working remotely. He mentors companies all over the world ranging from startups to Fortune 100 companies on Big Data. He has been covered in prestigious publications such as The Wall Street Journal, Harvard Business Review, CNN, BBC, NPR, Engadget, and Wired.

Unifying Your Company's Old Guard and New Arrivals

by **Ron Carucci**

Published on HBR.org / March 17, 2022 / Reprint [H06WJM](#)



Jorg Greuel/Getty Images

One of the unfortunate byproducts of the serial changes of the last two years has been [fragmentation across organizations](#). Such division is the result of things like varying beliefs about how much flexibility workers should have in terms of where and when they work, as well as abrupt shifts in business models. And that's on top of the physical isolation people are feeling due to remote work. Some [research](#) from Microsoft suggests that collaboration across the organization went down by 25% during the pandemic.

One of the most divisive factors has been the mass exodus of employees from the workplace, alongside a significant amount of hiring to bring on new ones. Relational dynamics have been torn without the opportunity to re-stitch the seams between new connections. So, companies are left with numerous camps of “we’s” and “they’s.” As one leader at an organization I’ve consulted with put it, “The proverbial ‘old guard’ and ‘new guard’ are at war with each other.”

During seasons of disruptive change, it’s natural for people to retreat into ideological enclaves that unite them. Whether they share a common enemy (“Our boss is such a jerk” or “Those people in accounting don’t get it”) or tenure (“These new people have no clue...” or “I can’t believe how old school they still do things here”), people hunker together to feel safer and saner. The problem is: They’re neither. In actuality, they’ve parsed the story they tell themselves to include only the parts they like and clung to allies who share their views. That creates one of the most dangerous organizational places to be — making decisions from a place of estrangement based on incomplete information built on partial truths.

I consulted with one company for which the pandemic was especially damaging. We had to take a very careful approach to reintegrating a disintegrated organization. Egos are fragile, people are exhausted, and deeply held biases are especially resistant to change. Restoring trust and a widened sense of unity required a sensitive, deliberate approach. As one leader in our assessment told us: “We’ve just stopped listening to each other. We’ve damaged trust by making one another the enemy. I haven’t even met half the leaders hired into my department who show up announcing new changes by the day, and I’m just expected to salute.”

If your organization has been divided over the last two years, there are ways you can start putting the pieces back together and reuniting people. Here are some places to begin.

What All Leaders Can Do

Own your biases and eliminate labels.

Fragmented organizations more readily “other” people, pigeonholing them into categories that justify ostracizing them. In the organization discussed above, the salespeople were convinced that marketing was prioritizing certain customer segments because the pandemic had slowed down agency production. This made the salespeople’s job harder. Meanwhile, marketers were certain the salespeople only wanted collaterals for prospects with the highest possible margins to elevate their commissions, given the negative impact Covid had on revenues. Of course, neither story was true. But until we got them into a room to share their biases, the labels of “lazy” and “greedy” couldn’t be removed.

Think about those in your organization whom you refer to with a contemptuous “they.” What conclusions have you drawn about “them” that may be unfounded and based on faulty data? Replace your certainty with curiosity and seek out more information. Engage them with empathy rather than scorn, and you’ll learn more about what’s behind their choices and motives you’re convinced are bad.

Restore relationships where trust has been broken.

In some cases, the strain on relationships over the last two years may have damaged trust. Missed commitments, conflicting priorities, and excessive anxiety have been standard fare, fraying nerves and patience. Finding someone to blame has become a natural default. If the stresses of the last two years have caused you to withdraw trust from critical relationships, consider reaching out and repairing those connections.

Even if there were legitimate mistakes that made things difficult, forgiveness is more productive long-term than holding a grudge. It's also likely that you bear some responsibility for things breaking down.

In another organization I've worked with, we brought leaders from across the organization into workshops aimed at restoring lost trust. In a series of round-robin conversations, leaders met in pairs to address and resolve tensions, acknowledge strained trust, and recommit to strengthening relationships between their teams. While it's easy to assume that things will "work themselves out" over time, that's rarely the case. Relational dynamics like trust need to be addressed apart from the work so that leaders can't hide behind the work during the conversation.

What Tenured Leaders Can Do

Be welcoming instead of threatened.

The arrival of new faces can be unsettling, especially if those people are in positions of authority or replacing longtime colleagues. And it's worsened by remote work that makes getting to know them challenging. Isolation makes it easier to be suspicious of new leaders as they try to get traction in an unfamiliar culture. Rather than seeing their arrival as a threat, reach out and welcome them and offer to help them through the confusion of onboarding. If your organization's [onboarding](#) process is weak to begin with, redouble your efforts to create a robust process that spans at least six to nine months.

In my client organization, one leader privately confided her fear: "We've always promoted from within, so when they filled my old boss's job with an external candidate, I was certain they were going to replace me. I was bitter, so I wasn't interested in helping her be successful." As it turns out, the organization had hired her new boss with the express purpose of helping to mentor her and prepare her for a broader assignment. Had

she been more hospitable, she wouldn't have wasted energy trying to stymie her new boss.

Minimize resistance to new ideas.

One of the greatest frustrations of newly arriving leaders is opposition to their ideas. The proverbial “not invented here” mentality causes people to instinctively reject ideas new leaders believe they were hired to bring. Those rejections are often met with the common refrains of “We’ve tried that before, and it didn’t work” or “You don’t really understand how we do things here.”

But rather than interpreting new thinking as a critique of how you’ve done things, view it as an opportunity to learn and stretch. This becomes especially important if you’re in a role for which new technologies and approaches have rendered your legacy approaches obsolete. While your equipment, processes, or technologies may be outmoded, that doesn’t mean *you* are outmoded. Show your enthusiasm and support for new ways of doing things, especially those that can help your company be more competitive. When new leaders are struggling to contextualize their ideas in an unknown environment, offer suggestions to help them succeed rather than standing by while they flounder.

What New Leaders Can Do

Ensure your diagnosis doesn't turn into an indictment.

You may believe you were hired with an unspoken (or expressed) mandate to change things. And your ideas may well be exactly what the organization needs. But until you build sufficient credibility, you need to pace how you introduce new thinking. You’ll inevitably uncover harsher realities than you were aware of prior to being hired. And when you do, your frustrations over how bad things are can signal an indictment of those around you. Before pointing out how things can be improved, you must honor the successes that came before you.

In my client organization, new leaders were introducing massive changes each week while harshly criticizing a culture of otherwise very proud employees. One leader was heard mocking, “The ‘90s called, and they want their technology back.” The leader who’d introduced the technology he was chiding overheard him and was demoralized. The company had planned a major technology upgrade, but the pandemic simply made that investment impossible.

Rather than taking a condescending tone about what you’re discovering, honor the good work of tenured leaders and invite them to help make your ideas successful by sharing their insights. (And please stop talking about how you did things at your last company.)

Ask seasoned employees for help learning the culture and context.

While you may feel obligated to prove your worth by hitting the ground running, you’re better off hitting the ground learning. Asking lots of questions will show respect for the culture you’ve arrived in. Avoid taking inventory of all the cultural anomalies that you feel need changing, and instead become a student of the culture that shaped the organization for years prior to your arrival.

Ask veteran employees for coaching when you confront norms, acronyms, or idiosyncrasies you don’t understand. Further, ask them what they’re most proud of and what their hopes are for the future. Regulate any feelings of judgment you have toward behaviors you find strange or unproductive. You can say: “I’ve never approached budgeting this way before — it’s new to me. Can you help me understand how it’s benefitted the organization?” What may seem like (and indeed, may be) bizarre ways of doing things are perfectly normal to those who’ve been around for a while.

Demonstrate your willingness to adapt before asking the organization to consider adapting to your ideas. In doing so, you set an example of learning and humility — the very things you'll be asking of the organization when introducing change.

Seasons of disruptive change can fracture an organization's sense of solidarity. To counteract the centrifugal force of such divisiveness, bring sources of centripetal force that unite the organization around a common future that, regardless of how long you've been around, is one people will be proud to create.



Ron Carucci is co-founder and managing partner at Navalent, working with CEOs and executives pursuing transformational change. He is the bestselling author of eight books, including *To Be Honest* and *Rising to Power*. Connect with him on Linked In at RonCarucci, and download his free "How Honest is My Team?" assessment.

Using Technology to Make Work More Human

by Allison Fine and Beth Kanter

Published on HBR.org / March 18, 2022 / Reprint [H06X5W](#)



HBR Staff/3DSculptor/Yagi Studio/Getty Images

The Great Resignation wasn't created by the pandemic so much as supersized by it. The unwillingness of workers to rush back into cubicles, behind counters, onto assembly lines, and behind the wheel is a direct result of work cultures that too often default to suspicion, inflexible schedules, and unrealistic workloads. The virtual and flexible work arrangements necessitated by the pandemic were revelatory for many people, but didn't free them from the 24/7 onslaught of tasks, back-to-back meetings, and [emails created by always-on cultures and technologies](#). But the next wave of digital tech — what we call “smart

tech” — has the potential and power to be different and to reverse these trends. Instead of dehumanizing us, smart tech can actually help rehumanize work.

In our book *The Smart Nonprofit*, we define “smart tech” as the AI and other advanced digital technologies that automate work by taking over tasks that only people could do previously. Smart tech makes decisions *instead of* and *for* people. While some feel that the interests of workers are at odds with smart tech — that humans and machines are in direct competition — we believe that this is a false dichotomy that’s uninformed, unimaginative, and just plain wrong. Smart tech and humans are not competing with one another; they are complimentary, but only when the tech is used well.

There will be parts of jobs that are suitable for automation, but few, if any, that can (or should!) be completely replaced by smart tech. What automation *can* change for the better is the experience of work. Rather than doing the same work faster and with fewer people, smart tech creates an opportunity to redesign jobs and reengineer workflows to enable people to focus on the parts of work that humans are particularly well-suited for, such as relationship building, intuitive decision making, empathy, and problem solving.

Companies will be making many choices about automation in the next few years. And those decisions will influence how employees, customers, and other stakeholders perceive your company going forward. For instance, will your company choose to institute:

- Bossware — technology that’s lurking in the background of screens watching employees all day to catch, and presumably punish, anyone taking an unscheduled break?

Or

- Software like [CultureX](#), which can measure and improve workplace culture so that it's less toxic, increasing employee work-life balance while [decreasing the levels of burnout that lead to turnover](#).

Organizational leaders are going to face many choices when it comes to smart tech in the near future. Commercial applications using smart tech are available off-the-shelf for every department from communications to accounting to service delivery. It will require informed, careful, strategic thought to ensure the technology is used to enhance our humanity and enable people to do the kinds of relational, empathetic, problem-solving activities we do best.

Consider the case of The Trevor Project, an organization that provides crisis counseling to young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) people. The Trevor Project is an example of what we call a “Smart Nonprofit” — an organization that has stepped carefully and wisely into automation by understanding “[cobotting](#),” the combination of people and smart tech that brings out the best in both. They created Riley, a chatbot that helps train counselors by providing real-life simulations of conversations with potentially suicidal teens. Riley expands the training capacity of the organization enormously by always being available for a training session with volunteers. But the Trevor Project also knows that staying human-centered and ensuring that teens are always talking directly to another human being is critical to fulfilling its mission. Riley isn't subtracting from the human experience; it's adding to it.

Cobotting goes beyond working with chatbots. For example, Benefits Data Trust (BDT), a Philadelphia-based organization focused on poverty reduction, integrated smart tech into their application process. Call-in

center staff assist clients in navigating and completing applications for public benefits. The computer system was trained on thousands of interactions between call-in staff and clients to make recommendations among dozens of possible public benefits. The system also pre-populated forms for clients, saving staff an enormous amount of time. The pain point they were addressing was the enormous amount of time and documentation it takes for clients to apply for and receive public benefits. As BDT's chief data and technology officer Ravindar Gujral told us, "At the end of the day, our role...is to create a human connection."

Cobotting can also address another workplace stressor: inclusion. For example, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation uses automation to streamline the administration of patient encounters, where scheduling, diagnosis, medication orders, and patient care take place. For example, if a doctor orders a colonoscopy for a patient during an examination, the prescription for the prep medications is automatically sent to the prison pharmacy staff, and the 48-hour liquid diet instructions are automatically sent to food service staff. This is just one of the many patient encounters that can be tracked across all correctional facilities in the system. In addition to this type of automation, visually impaired employees can "hear" information on the screen via speech reading interfaces and use voice-to-text tools to input information on the screen.

Cobotting takes time and careful implementation to do well. However, the benefits to reducing staff overload are enormous. An October 2021 survey by Salesforce of 773 automation users in the United States found that 89% are more satisfied with their job and 76% say they are more satisfied with their stress levels at work as result of using automation.

So how do you get started introducing smart tech within your own organization? Here are a few initial steps you can take:

- **Identify key pain points to determine the right use cases.** These should focus on areas where smart tech can take over rote tasks that can streamline unmanageable workloads and reduce worker stress. Outline exactly what tasks and decision-making people will retain and what tasks will be automated when the system is implemented. This includes identifying how automation will be supervised by someone with subject matter expertise.
- **Choose the right smart tech for the job.** Make sure the product or system you choose will create the right cobotting balance. Ensure that the assumptions built into the smart tech align with your values. And be sure that the tasks that require empathy and intuition will be assigned to people, while tasks such as data entry or analyzing huge swaths of data will be assigned to smart tech — and not the other way around.
- **Create a virtuous cycle of testing, learning, and improving.** Step carefully and slowly, because it can be difficult to undo the harms of automation once smart tech is in place. Pilot test the new system and workflow to ensure that your hopes and assumptions are correct.

Smart tech and automation can make work and workplaces more fulfilling and less exhausting. But doing so requires leaders to dig into the implications of automation and make smart, ethical choices about using tech that enhances our humanity and makes work better, healthier, and happier for everyone.

AF

Allison Fine is among the nation's preeminent writers and strategists on the use of technology for social good. She is the author of the award-winning *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*, and *Matterness: Fearless Leadership for a Social World*. She speaks to social change makers around the world, regularly keynotes conferences, is a founding board member of Civic Hall, and is a member of the national board of Women of Reform Judaism. Her next book, *The Smart Nonprofit: Staying Human Centered in an Automated World*, will be released by Wiley in March 2022.



Beth Kanter is an internationally recognized thought leader in digital transformation and well-being in the nonprofit workplace, a trainer & facilitator, and a sought-after keynote speaker. She is the co-author of *The Networked Nonprofit*, and the award-winning *Happy Healthy Nonprofit: Impact without Burnout*. Named one of the most influential women in technology by Fast Company, she has over three decades of experience in designing and delivering training programs for nonprofits and foundations. Her next book, *The Smart Nonprofit: Staying Human Centered in an Automated World*, will be released by Wiley in March 2022.

How to Vet a Remote Workplace

by **Robert Glazer**

Published on HBR.org / March 21, 2022 / Reprint [H06TU1](#)



HBR Staff/OvsiankaStudio/Getty Images

As employers scramble to meet the demand for remote work, many organizations are saying all the right things to prospective employees without being dedicated to, or effective at, building a healthy, high-performing remote or hybrid workplace. Not all remote workplaces are equal, and the flexibility afforded by remote work is less valuable when the remote workplace doesn't offer adequate connection or a strong underlying culture.

The job search process has always required due diligence from candidates. However, with recruiters feeling immense pressure to deliver candidates and hiring process that are now days versus weeks or months, it can be difficult to get a full understanding of a company's remote work infrastructure during recruitment. Remember, a recruiter's job is to get someone in the door; it's often akin to marketing or sales and may not reflect the reality of the workplace once you get the job.

In this environment, the burden falls on candidates to carefully evaluate a potential remote work opportunity both during and beyond the interview process. In addition to typical job-search fact-finding — asking the right questions in interviews or examining employee review sites such as Glassdoor, for example — candidates must determine whether a workplace ensures that remote employees are treated equally, supported, fulfilled, and effective.

Fortunately, candidates can learn a lot about a company's effectiveness at remote work during the hiring process. The key is to look for attributes about the organization's remote culture and ask pointed questions about the principles and norms that dictate the company's overall culture and remote work experience.

Company Culture and Values

When evaluating if a company has an effective remote culture, start with this key truth: the elements needed for an effective remote company culture are the same ones needed for a great company culture in any type of workplace. Employees vetting whether a potential remote job is right for them should start by seeing if the company has strong cultural principles in place that are aligned to their own values.

Healthy cultures are typically built on clear, consistent core values. Effective core values should not just be marketing slogans that look

good on a company wall or website — instead, they should differentiate a company’s culture and indicate what employee behavior is rewarded and what is not. Working remotely prevents a company from spreading a culture through in-person modeling and imitation. But if a company has clear core values that are consistently rewarded and reinforced, it’s easier to ensure that everyone is rowing in the same direction, even if they aren’t sharing a physical workspace.

As a first step, it helps to research the company early in the application process and become familiar with the organization’s values — either by finding them on the company’s website or by asking for them before the interview. From there, ask interviewers questions about those values in the actual interview.

For example, you should ask the interviewer to share the company’s values and watch how they respond. Does the interviewer know any of the core values, or do they have to look them up? You will know in a matter of seconds after you ask.

You can also ask more specific questions, such as “How do core values factor into employee evaluations and advancement?” “How does the company respond when employees don’t meet the core values?” Ask for specific examples, not abstract concepts. You might even ask, “When were you last recognized for demonstrating a company core value?”

Any interviewer should be able to answer these questions confidently if the company’s values are genuine and consistent. Unfortunately, this isn’t guaranteed; research by the employee recognition software firm [Fond](#) found that at 70% of organizations, fewer than half of employees can name the company’s values.

Doing research outside the interview is essential as well. It's useful to search the company on Glassdoor or a comparable review site to see what employees say about the culture and working experience. If the company truly has strong, consistent core values, they'll likely show up in their Glassdoor reviews.

If a company has strong core values, it's a good sign that the organization has a consistent, healthy culture, which is a prerequisite for effective remote work. If it doesn't, you may be better off walking away.

Remote Work Strategy

Candidates should also determine whether a company has fully committed to a strong remote work environment or whether flexible and remote work is only used to entice people to join the company.

The reality is that many companies invented their remote work policies on the fly in 2020 and have not yet determined their go-forward virtual work strategy. For example, according to [McKinsey and Company](#), 40% of employees say their employer has not communicated a vision for their organization's future workplace model, and 28% say that what they've heard is vague.

Some companies that offer remote roles will have a supported strategy for implementing virtual work and incorporating remote employees into their organization. Others will haphazardly pursue some hybrid of in-person and remote work in an attempt to avoid setting norms and keep everyone happy. Candidates need to know before joining a company whether its remote policy is a well-planned strategy with supporting systems and processes, or an attempt to avoid having to pick a strategy at all.

To find out before you take the job, it's crucial to ask how often remote employees are expected to be in the office. An employer should be able to provide clear guidelines for how often a remote employee must come to work in-person, especially if the role is only partially remote. Do remote employees come to the office on an as-needed basis, on specific days each week, or on certain days each month? A hiring manager at a company with a clear, consistent hybrid strategy will be able to tell you explicitly.

Beyond that, candidates should ask how prevalent remote work is at the organization. There's a big difference between joining a predominantly remote organization or team and being one of the only remote employees on a team that typically works in the same physical space. You might also ask to speak with an employee who works remotely on a team that is mostly together otherwise.

Remember, these questions don't just determine what you'll need to do once you join the team; they also will help you discover what you can expect from your colleagues. It's useful to know when you can expect colleagues to be available, when you might be able to join them for in-person work, and what opportunities you'll have to make peer connections.

It's even helpful to ask specific questions about how a company handles common situations in remote or hybrid work. If some employees are in-person and some are remote, how do they handle one-on-one, team, department, or all-company meetings? What about quarterly reviews? It can be frustrating to be one of the few remote employees joining a conference call or video conference with a bunch of employees in a conference room. In these situations, it's hard for employees to see, hear, or participate, and a lack of careful planning for those situations may indicate an absence of remote-friendly norms in other functions.

Finally, it's useful to ask what sort of tech infrastructure the company has in place, and how their technology supports remote work. Remote work requires digital communication and collaboration tools, and an interviewer should be able to share with you which digital tools they use in their daily work.

These questions should not be difficult for interviewers to answer. The best remote organizations will have already executed according to these details and will be able to tell you what you can expect when you join the team.

And, of course, you don't need to depend only on interviewers to get this information. Back-channel references are a common tactic employers use to vet candidates — reaching out to former managers via LinkedIn to verify what a candidate is telling them, for example. You might consider reaching out to a former employee of your prospective company to ask them what their remote work experience was like. Because they no longer work at the company, you might get a more honest answer about what it's really like to work for the organization.

In-Person Connectivity

A common misconception about remote organizations is that remote employees never connect in-person. In contrast, the best remote organization know that creating opportunities for people to meet and bond in-person helps build the trust and connectivity necessary for effective virtual work.

Candidates should ask if the company hosts all-company events or smaller in-person social events, co-working days, or other opportunities to connect in-person. Companies that invest in in-person meeting opportunities — even something akin to a well-planned [annual summit](#) — create connections within their teams that carry over into the rest

of the year. Most remote employees don't want to work from home to avoid seeing people — they often just want more flexibility or the chance to ditch their painful commute — and do want in-person team-building and connection. It's important for job seekers to know if a company offers those opportunities before accepting a remote job.

As more employees demand remote opportunities, the job market will be flooded with partially or fully remote roles. However, just as in any marketplace, some of these companies will be offering opportunities that are less rewarding than they seem — and may result in buyer's remorse. Candidates must do their due diligence and ask the right questions to determine if they are walking into a good hybrid or remote environment, before accepting the job. Otherwise, the Great Resignation of 2021 may be followed by a great boomerang in 2022.

RG

Robert Glazer is the founder and CEO of [Acceleration Partners](#), a global performance marketing agency and recipient of numerous company culture awards. Bob was also named to Glassdoor's Top CEO of Small and Medium Companies in the U.S. list, ranking #2 out of 50. He is the author of the international bestselling book, [Performance Partnerships](#) and the upcoming book [Elevate: Push Beyond Your Limits and Unlock Success in Yourself and Others](#). 100,000 leaders around the world read his weekly [Friday Forward](#).

How to Mentor in a Remote Workplace

by **Ellen A. Ensher, W. Brad Johnson, and David G. Smith**

Published on HBR.org / March 22, 2022 / Reprint [H06X8Y](#)



Alistair Berg/Getty Images

The nine-to-five in-office workplace isn't coming back. Remote work is now globally pervasive, and a [Gallup survey](#) last fall revealed that working from home — including various hybrid arrangements — is trending permanent. As of September 2021, 45% of U.S. employees were working partly or fully remotely, and 91% of them planned to continue some level of remote work post-pandemic; in fact, 58% would consider leaving their current jobs if access to remote arrangements vanished. When combined with [evidence](#) showing that remote workers are as or

more productive than their in-office counterparts, it's clear that remote work is here to stay.

With this shift comes the need for managers and leaders to master virtual mentorship. Four decades of [research](#) leaves no doubt that employees with access to positive mentoring relationships accrue numerous personal and professional benefits. And when mentoring is a discernible element of a [company culture](#), retention and advancement of talented new employees is enhanced. But how can managers shift their approach to initiating and nurturing these relationships when prospective mentees aren't physically present?

Many individuals incorrectly presume that physical proximity is essential in developmental relationships. But like work itself, mentoring is defined less by the medium in which it is accomplished than by the outcomes delivered. Commitment, trust, relationship quality, and mentor competence are the real ingredients of developmental growth, all of which can be applied to virtual mentorship.

Virtual mentoring is rife with distinct advantages for the new environment of remote and hybrid work. Recent [research](#) on virtual developmental relationships indicates that this form of mentoring can be more egalitarian; visual status cues signaling organizational status and physical stature are minimized in video-based conversations by reducing all parties to a voice and screen of equal size. Moreover, in a post-#MeToo environment, where [cross-gender mentoring](#) may feel fraught, the opportunity for virtual engagement can decrease anxiety about in-person meetings. Virtual mentorship also removes the hindrances of shared space and geography, since online options allow more flexibility in mentor/mentee schedules and locations. The ability to record and transcribe mentoring sessions can enable mentoring partners to refer to and reflect on a past conversation and,

if shared, enables others to learn vicariously. Finally, wide availability of [translation apps](#) and [closed captioning](#) on most virtual platforms now extends a mentor's impact to a global population of prospective mentees and more inclusive of those with disabilities.

As optimistic as we are about virtual mentoring, we acknowledge that there are some potential obstacles. Virtual mentoring may require greater intentionality than mentoring in the face-to-face office, where there are fewer [mentor-of-the-moment](#) opportunities in chance hallway interactions or informal drop-by chats. It also may require more effort to establish trust and rapport in the relationship, since the full range of nonverbal cues and vocal nuance may be missing. As with many online collaborations, virtual mentorship can also suffer from email overwhelm and screen fatigue, which can cause the relationship to become more task-oriented and expediency-driven, rather than focused on relational support.

There is little access to formal training and education on the art and science of successful virtual mentoring. (Only about [30% of companies](#) offered training in virtual mentoring pre-pandemic, but those efforts focused more on software and company policies than tactical interpersonal and social skills for virtual relationship success.) Fortunately, there are skills leaders can learn to succeed. As a start, we suggest sharpening these five virtual mentoring strategies.

Build trust.

Establishing [trust](#) is [foundational](#) to any developmental relationship and may require even greater intentionality in virtual mediums. Such skills include taking the initiative to reach out, demonstrating your commitment to and reliability in meetings, and showing genuine care, concern, and compassion about a mentee's work and life situation. Actively listen, be curious, and avoid assumptions about a mentee's

aspirations or concerns. Talk about how to make the virtual relationship a safe space for both parties (this includes an agreement about confidentiality in terms of what will and will not be recorded or shared), and deliver on any promises you make. Your mentee can't drop by your office to remind you about an introduction you'd promised to make, so earn their trust by following through without being prompted.

Clarify rules of engagement.

In contrast to the more informal nature of in-person meeting arrangements, virtual mentorship requires greater attention to setting expectations around communication logistics. In addition to deciding the frequency of communication, discuss preferred mediums for communication, including synchronous (e.g., video-based platforms that work for both parties, internal mentoring systems, and phone calls) and asynchronous (e.g., email, messaging, and social media platforms such as LinkedIn) options. Which feel comfortable for both parties, and what boundaries around times for communication should be honored? Additionally, when you or your mentee are working remotely, be flexible around meeting schedules and attuned to the demands of caregiving, homeschooling, personal commitments, and other work-from-home realities.

Be intentional when forming the relationship.

Research on building rapport and overcoming biases and assumptions in cross-cultural mentorships indicates that working to establish deep-level similarity is important. For example, consider using relationship-building tools in the early phase of virtual mentoring to better understand your mentee's values, personality, and professional calling. Ask questions that go progressively deeper into the experiences, feelings, and life or career dreams of both the mentee and mentor, so you can feel a level of closeness and similarity. Be intentional

about sharing and reflecting on your similarities, career goals, and relationship objectives to develop a strong working alliance. Thoughtful effort when developing the relationship and discovering shared values is the best way to mitigate implicit biases. These includes homophily in online relationships — the preference for interaction with demographically similar people — and defaulting to stereotypes around race or gender.

Balance authenticity with boundaries.

In one sense, virtual mentoring may lend itself to greater task-oriented formality around mentor-mentee pairings, scheduling, and topics for discussion. However, with much virtual mentorship taking place inside our homes, there will be inevitable glimpses into the personal lives of both parties, including unscripted intrusions by partners, children, and pets.

On one hand, great mentors should welcome these moments — including honest disclosures from mentees about the challenges of work-life integration — as opportunities to empathize, deepen understanding and connection, and normalize these experiences for a mentee by sharing one’s own challenges in this area. Alternatively, mentors should remember to preserve some relational boundaries. This may include avoiding disclosures that may feel awkward for mentees, being mindful of how one is dressed, engaging respectfully with family members (yours and your mentees’), and checking in on one’s comfort level before sharing personal information.

As relative power holders in the mentorship, mentors must strike a balance between keeping it real and undue familiarity or worse — becoming creepy.

When possible, collaborate.

In-office mentoring has traditionally afforded many opportunities for working together on projects such as research, product development, or client pitches that benefit the mentee, the mentor, and the organization. Such collaboration can become a platform for teaching, coaching, and networking with your mentee. Don't overlook the potential for collaboration in virtual relationships, as well.

For example, one of Ellen's healthcare client organizations encouraged virtual mentor pairs to present a project after a year of officially partnering together. One pair created a conference presentation on breast cancer research, while another set up a one-day mobile clinic for mammogram screenings. Deliberate collaboration promotes transferable skills such as project management, presentation delivery, writing, research, and giving and receiving feedback.

Like new managerial skills for remote work, there are new skills for virtual mentoring. With intentional preparation and skill development, virtual mentoring can be quite effective. No matter the medium for your next virtual mentoring relationship, we hope that by developing these skills you will be well prepared for a high-impact virtual relationship.



Ellen A. Ensher, PhD, is a Professor of Management at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles, California. Ellen has been awarded LMU's Professor of the Year for excellence in teaching. Ellen is the coauthor of *Power Mentoring: How Mentors and Protégés Get the Most out of Their Relationships*. She has published over 50 articles and book chapters on mentoring. Ellen is a LinkedIn Learning author of four courses on topics of mentoring and management. For more information, please visit www.ellenensher.com.



W. Brad Johnson is a professor of psychology in the Department of Leadership, Ethics, and Law at the United States Naval Academy and a faculty associate in the Graduate School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. He is the coauthor of *Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in the Workplace*, *Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women*, *The Elements of Mentoring*, and other books on mentorship.



David G. Smith is an associate professor in the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School. He is the coauthor, with W. Brad Johnson, of *Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in the Workplace* and *Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women*.

Workers Don't Feel Like a 9-to-5 Job Is a Safe Bet Anymore

by Carolyn Ockels, Steve King, and Gene Zaino

Published on HBR.org / March 23, 2022 / Reprint [H06WYT](#)



Diamond Sky Images/Getty Images

For 11 years, as the research provider for the [MBO Partners State of Independence Study series](#), we've been charting the growth, profile, desires, and needs of the growing American independent workforce. These are self-employed consultants, freelancers, independent contractors, gig workers, and others who work independently instead of having traditional full-time jobs. We recently found something surprising: An increasingly large majority of

independent workers say that independent work is less risky and more secure than traditional employment.

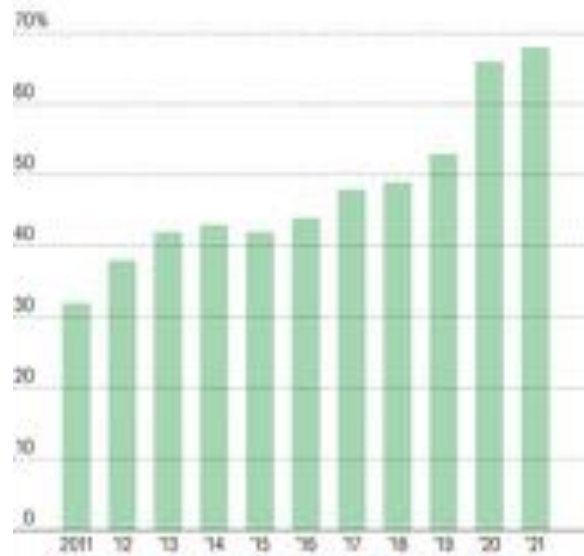
Historically, job security — and the predictable income, attractive benefits, peace of mind, and career progression it represents — has been one of the main attractions of traditional full-time employment. Self-employment, or independent work, involves a series of trade-offs. You might gain greater autonomy or have more freedom to pursue a passion or work you enjoy, but you'll lose the steady paycheck, the camaraderie of coworkers, and the support that companies large and small can provide.

In our [2021 survey](#) of 6,240 U.S. workers, including 928 independent workers, 68% of independent workers responded to the statement “I feel more secure working independently” in the affirmative — up from 32% in 2011 and 53% in 2019.

Independent Workers Report Feeling More Secure

The number of independents who responded to the statement "I feel more secure working independently" in the affirmative has risen significantly since 2011.

Percent of full-time independent workers who report feeling more secure working independently



Source: MBO Partners' 2021 State of Independence report

© HBR

See more HBR charts in [Data & Visuals](#) on HBR.org.

And here's the really interesting finding: For the last four years, we've been asking full-time workers whether they agree with the statement that working independently is less risky than permanent employment. The share of these jobholders saying yes increased from 18% in 2018 to 29% in 2021. Put another way, 7 in 10 independents and 3 in 10 traditional employees say independent work is more secure than traditional employment.

It's also clear that workers — especially highly skilled, well-compensated ones — are voting with their feet. The Bureau of Labor

Statistics reports that some 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs in January 2022 alone. Many of those who quit chose to turn to self-employment. According to a McKinsey study, “31% of employees who left their job in the past six months did so to start a new business.”

The shift is the result of the following powerful, longstanding trends in both the traditional and independent work arenas — trends that were accentuated by the pandemic.

Declining Security of Payroll Jobs

Many workers simply don't see traditional jobs as being as compelling as they were in the past — and with good reason. Over the last few decades, companies have kept wage growth down and pared back benefits. The U.S. Private Sector Job Quality Index, which compares the proportion of higher-wage/higher-hour jobs to lower-wage/lower-hour jobs, has shown a steady decline in job quality in the past 30 years. Plus, the proliferation of information technology has blurred the lines between home and work and stretched many nine-to-five positions to more like 24/7.

Job security is clearly under assault. Even when times are good, corporate restructuring and layoffs have become common. And when a crisis hits, companies take an axe to payrolls. In the Great Recession, between 2007 and 2010, 8.7 million payroll jobs were cut, and they didn't return to their pre-recession peak until May 2014. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the impact on payroll jobs was brutal. U.S. employers slashed nearly 22 million jobs — 14.4% of the total — in two months.

Increasingly Confident Independents

At the same time, independent work is becoming more of a norm in the U.S. economy. According to the 2021 State of Independence report, the number of independent workers has risen steadily over the past decade, reaching 51 million full and part-time independent workers in 2021. Technology, and especially the internet, has made it easier to operate an independent business, or to work as an independent contractor. Platforms, software, and other services have sprung up to ease the burdens and provide support. And the Affordable Care Act, passed in 2010, made it cheaper and easier for the self-employed to get health insurance, which is the most significant benefit concern for most traditional jobholders.

There's another factor at work: Life is procyclical. That is, the more people do any activity, the more others see it as viable. As self-employment has become more common, more employers are comfortable dealing with independent workers, and a larger proportion of the general public knows people who are doing it. Data from the [2018 State of Independence study](#) found that 29% of independent workers and 25% of traditional employees said more of their friends were self-employed or starting their own business than in the past. Last year, 42% of independent workers and 38% of traditional workers surveyed provided that response.

Meanwhile, while it may not provide a bi-weekly paycheck or sick leave, independent work does provide its own sources of security. Many independents believe that having multiple sources of income — multiple clients, different streams of cash flow, etc. — provides a greater level of security than relying on a single employer. And there are multiple dimensions to security. Being in charge of their work lives allows independent workers to adjust to changing economic

conditions rather than be subject to the whims of mercurial managers and employers.

The Pandemic as an Accelerant

The Covid-19 pandemic both heightened the tensions inherent in relying on payroll jobs and accelerated the trends toward people wanting greater levels of work flexibility, autonomy, and control.

The often shattering and all-enveloping experience of Covid-19 has stimulated a fundamental rethinking about what people want and need from work — or whether they want to do it at all. [The YOLO \(You Only Live Once\) movement](#), [the Reddit anti-work movement](#), and [China's *tangping* or “lying flat” anti-work movement](#), for example, show that there's a multidimensional global impulse pushing people away from traditional payroll jobs.

Many have expressed a greater desire to find work that reflects their values and fits their passions. Others have come to realize that they don't want to endure long commutes or be tied to an office. Expanded unemployment benefits gave many people the opportunity and ability to be more selective about which jobs they elected to pursue. The combination of excess deaths, early retirements, and an ongoing crisis in child care have reduced the pool of workers available for full-time jobs. All these factors have combined to increase not only the bargaining power and agency of workers, but also the appeal of independent work.

What Should Companies Do?

Even with the effects of the pandemic subsiding, we shouldn't expect a quick return to the status quo.

So, what should companies do as they strive to hire and retain workers? Obviously, they need to make traditional full-time jobs more appealing, and more secure. Many employers are in a position to provide more predictable income and better benefits than self-employed people can obtain. But that may only go so far. If workers have a different view of what constitutes job security — and how to get it — then companies need to provide the positive attributes independents associate with self-employment.

We have four principal suggestions.

Provide employees with greater levels of work autonomy, control, and flexibility.

Companies must strive to grant employees more control over work/life boundaries and work/lifestyles. This includes and goes beyond allowing more remote work options, which is something most workers want, according to a recent [Pew Research](#) study. Employers also need to give their employees more agency and control over how they do their work.

Show you value employees' contributions.

According to the recent McKinsey article, “the top three reasons employees cited for leaving their jobs in the past six months weren't salary, bonus, and benefits. Rather, they were: not feeling valued by the organization (54%) or their manager (52%) and not having a sense of belonging (51%).”

Similarly, when we asked in our survey of independents why they're satisfied with their work, money didn't immediately enter the discussion. The third-most popular response was, “My customers/clients appreciate the quality of my work.” (The top two were: “I have interesting work” and “work flexibility and control.”)

Provide on-the-job opportunities to stretch, learn, and work in new areas.

Independent workers reported that they appreciate the variety of tasks they get to do and the opportunities to learn new skills. Improving internal mobility for employees would go a long way toward attracting them. Providing gig-like secondments, offering temporary assignments, setting up internal labor marketplaces, and creating short-term teaming sprints to work on specific projects are ways established companies can provide their employees with opportunities to explore different functions, pick up new skills, and work on a variety of projects.

Hire more independent workers.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. That may not be the most sophisticated management maxim. But it is a repeated finding in our work that independents can't simply be lured back to traditional employment by money or compensation alone. In fact, most independent workers (71%) report being willing to earn less in exchange for the non-monetary advantages associated with being self-employed. We also find that independents are generally intent on continuing their path, with 74% saying they intend to remain independent. As more independents regard their path as more secure, employers will increasingly have to meet them where they are.

• • •

Job security is a key reason people choose traditional employment. But declining perceptions of job security, coupled with workers rethinking what they want when it comes to work/life balance, are leading more people to prioritize flexibility, autonomy, and control when choosing where they will work. Because of this shift, to successfully attract and retain top talent in the post-pandemic world, employers will need to give their employees the freedom and flexibility associated with independent work.

CO

Carolyn Ockels is the managing partner at Emergent Research, a research and consulting firm focused on the future of work.

SK

Steve King is a partner at Emergent Research, a research and consulting firm focused on the future of work.

GZ

Gene Zaino is the founder and executive chairman of MBO Partners, a technology platform that makes it easy for independent professionals and enterprise organizations to do business together.

How to Make Progress on Your Long-Term Career Goals

by **Dorie Clark**

Published on HBR.org / March 25, 2022 / Reprint [H06WVK](#)



Richard Drury/Getty Images

It's not that it's easy to achieve our [long-term career goals](#). But if you know what you're aspiring toward, you at least have a sense of the process: [Begin with the end in mind](#), work backward to the present day, and execute assiduously.

But for almost all of us, the last two years have scrambled the trajectories we were on. Foundational elements were upended, from how we work (the widespread shift to [remote and hybrid arrangements](#)) to geography ([11% of Americans moved](#) during the first year of the

pandemic alone) to where we work (before the job market rebounded, the International Labour Organization estimated that 114 million people lost their jobs in 2020). That hasn't just shifted the starting point for our career planning; in many cases, it's also altered our understanding of what's possible and what we actually want.

For some, there's additional clarity: *I want to live near family*, or *I only want a job where I can work remotely*, or *it's time to start my own company*. But for others, the disconcerting truth is that we're just not sure. Most of us would prefer to think long-term about our careers, rather than just veering randomly to snag perceived opportunities and avoid pitfalls. But how can you adopt a strategic lens when you might not be entirely sure where you want to end up? Here are four strategies I've discovered in my research that can be helpful in moving toward your long-term goals — whatever they turn out to be.

Decide what you *don't* want

We often put an enormous amount of pressure on ourselves to know our future direction. Partly that's because humans are hardwired to dislike uncertainty, and also sometimes because we fear losing status with others if it seems like we don't know what we're doing. But that pressure can lead us to prematurely decide on a course of action that may not be a fit. Instead, I advise my clients to take the opposite approach: Get clear on what you don't want, and then take steps to avoid that. It's much easier to identify things you know you dislike, rather than ideating about a hypothetical future.

For instance, you might decide you never want to work for a micromanaging boss again, or you're done with your current industry, or you no longer want to work hands-on and only want to take on advisory roles. Those are extremely useful pieces of data from which to form a more realistic picture of what you do want, by asking: *How can I*

make sure I avoid these things in the future? Those decisions are likely to lead you in the direction you want to take.

Develop provisional hypotheses

We all know it's impossible to do everything at once. And yet it's hard to resist the lure of too many goals. Instead, we need to get disciplined and narrow down our focus. Elizabeth, a professional I profiled in my book *Reinventing You*, was interested in a half-dozen possible careers. Exploring them all could have become a massive waste of time that distracted her from making genuine progress on anything. But instead, she had a methodical approach, gathering “data points” about each profession (ranging from informational interviews to reading industry analyses) in order to find reasons to rule it out (for instance, the weekend hours required in a certain profession might make it a non-starter).

That process allowed her to focus more intensively on a small number of promising avenues. Think about how you can narrow down your options (perhaps, as above, by focusing on what you don't want) and then pick one direction as your “provisional hypothesis” for where you want your career to go. You can always change your mind later, but you've made an informed choice and will be strategically working toward a plausible goal.

Make progress on the basics

In science, “basic research” focuses on increasing our understanding of fundamental phenomena — how the brain works, or the principles of physics, for example — whereas “applied research” translates those findings into practical, real-world uses. In our careers, it's great to be practical, of course — but only if we're sure of the direction where we want to go. For many of us, the myriad of professional choices we might

make leads to decision paralysis and no action at all. Obviously, stasis isn't a great career strategy.

What's far better is to focus on the professional equivalent of basic research and double down on foundational skills and knowledge that will make you better, no matter what direction you ultimately decide to pursue. Learning to code in a particular computer language may not be helpful if you decide to leave engineering — but becoming a better public speaker or honing your time management skills are likely to be useful in almost any profession.

Take stock of your emotional and mental energy

The past two years have been draining for everyone, but we've all been affected differently based on our circumstances (Working remotely and living alone? Constantly barraged by a spouse and kids?). One of the most important elements in thinking strategically about your career is understanding that our lives operate in cycles — I call it “thinking in waves” — and we have to recognize where we are in that process.

You may have been languishing during the pandemic, but now feel ready to shake off the torpor and dive into new projects with zeal. Or you may have spent the past two years working at the outer edges of your limits, just trying to keep everything together. If that's the case, this probably isn't the moment to go all in at work. Instead, you may need to manage your energy and recognize that the best thing you can do for your long-term career success is to take a well-deserved break, whether it's a more formal sabbatical or simply recognizing that it's OK to pause on creating ambitious new goals for yourself right now — and avoid beating yourself up for that choice.

Short-term pressures always intrude on our long-term career planning, and that's especially true when we've been through a collective period

of crisis. Even if we're not entirely sure where we want to end up, by following these strategies, we can ensure we're taking the right steps to move away from what isn't working for us, and toward a future that seems more hopeful.



Dorie Clark is a marketing strategist and keynote speaker who teaches at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and has been named one of the Top 50 business thinkers in the world by Thinkers50. Her latest book is *The Long Game: How to Be a Long-Term Thinker in a Short-Term World* (HBR Press, 2021) and you can receive her free [Long Game strategic thinking self-assessment](#).

To Better Support Working Parents, Talk to Them

by Daisy Dowling

Published on HBR.org / March 24, 2022 / Reprint [H06XR1](#)



David Trood/Getty Images

The pandemic may be ebbing, but one of its most pernicious effects isn't. Two years and a zillion little-kid Zoom-call interruptions later, and we *still* don't have sufficient and effective communications between hardworking mothers and fathers, frontline managers, and senior leaders of our organizations. Without strong connections between those three parties, it's going to be very hard for working parents still grappling with pandemic stresses to get through the next several months — and for all of us to get to a better, more workable place on the other side.

Here's the working-parent communications picture, right now:

- Working moms and dads are demoralized and exhausted from two-plus years of extreme work-plus-caregiving logistics. And for many — like those with kids under five, who are still ineligible for vaccines — the challenges continue. Making matters worse, many or most parents hesitate to talk openly with their managers about their personal situation (burnout, daycare closures) for fear of misunderstanding, judgment, or reprisal.
- Most managers are genuinely sympathetic to coworkers with kids, but they have their own jobs and families to attend to, and worry about being on the hook to cover for every childcare crisis or to act as workplace therapists. So, instead of engaging team members in open conversation, they pull back from it, and focus on the work tasks at hand.
- Senior leaders are doing their best to deliver important messages and rallying cries about 2022 goals, the return to work, and how to rebuild team culture — but those messages simply aren't landing. It appears that employees either aren't listening or don't seem to care, and senior leaders are increasingly confused and frustrated.

The overall result is like a video call gone terribly wrong: We're all shouting, want to be heard, and have all lost control of the mute button.

Here are some strategies and techniques that each of us — leaders, managers, and individual moms and dads — can use to get the lines of communication open and working right now.

Senior Leaders

Your first order of business is to get the facts on what working mothers and fathers in your organization are really dealing with right now. Sure, over the past two years you've heard plenty about working-parent

stress, but do you know *exactly* what those stressors look like for your people, *today*? Maybe parents in field offices are struggling to adapt to the hybrid work model, or maybe the nationwide formula shortage is creating hardship for newer parents.

Without this context, there's a very real risk that you show up as The Leader Who Doesn't Get It, or worse, The Leader Who Doesn't Care. And that, in turn, is going to make it *very* hard to get overwhelmed working parents — who likely make up a sizable proportion of your workforce — to listen to and follow you.

Fortunately, getting the insights you need won't be tough. You can get timely, detailed information through polls, focus groups, your HR team, or simply by walking around. Whatever the means, preserve your leadership credibility by figuring out what's really going on.

Next, adapt your communications style by anchoring important business or organizational messages in the present, and on a human dimension, instead of around facts, figures, and plans. Instead of kicking off your next town hall by detailing your five-year growth objectives, try starting with a statement like: “Despite the incredible challenges and stresses we and our families are all facing now, I want you to know I'm confident in our organization's future. And without diminishing all that we're dealing with today, I want to share what that future looks like....” In other words, meet and connect with your listeners where they are before pivoting to your leadership agenda and the bottom line.

Frontline Managers

You want your team members to stay, and stay motivated — and you want to be supportive without overpromising. Three simple techniques will help.

Ask open-ended questions.

A gentle “Is there any important context you want me to have about your life outside of work?” isn’t prying, and it doesn’t imply that you’re willing to lower any workplace standard. You’re simply demonstrating that the communications door is open, which will read as supportive, and for any working mom or dad will come as a powerful relief.

Praise how your team members operate, rather than what they produce.

Realize that Covid has taken an awful toll on virtually every working parent’s sense of self. Prior to the pandemic, that smart accountant on your team may have been proud of being hardworking, on top of it, expert, thoughtful, and so on. But after two years of distance learning, quarantines, and uncertainty, she probably doesn’t feel any of those things — more like overwhelmed, uncertain, or even failing. When she’s in that headspace, your typical “Hey, good job, and thanks for the budget numbers” type praise won’t stick.

Instead, offer a comment like, “Thanks for working so hard on the budget numbers, as always, and I really value your expert eye here.” In other words, allow the other person to see and experience herself as the consummate professional she wants to be.

Highlight progress and momentum.

Imagine a fast-running treadmill with no off switch: To most working moms and dads, that’s how the pandemic has felt, and still feels. As hard as we run, we can’t make progress — and that lack of forward movement is demotivating.

To re-motivate your people, you need to show them how far they’ve come. So when talking about the R&D efforts, mention “the incredible strides we’ve made as a team.” In your next one-on-one, tell that direct report that you’re “impressed with the impact you’ve made in so short a

time.” The more you can give working moms and dads a palpable sense of moving forward, the more they’ll want, and be able, to keep going.

Individual Working Moms and Dads

You’re so exhausted and frustrated you could scream — but screaming probably won’t get you the flexibility or “give” you want right now. Here’s what will.

Share more solutions and less emotion.

Telling your boss “I’m exhausted” may be transparent and honest, but it isn’t a statement they can directly act on. Moreover, that manager likely feels just as strained as you are, and upon hearing words like “burnout” or “exhausted” may react with indignance (*doesn’t he know I’m sick and tired of this too?!*) or have the instinct to flee what promises to be an unpleasant conversation, neither of which benefits you.

Instead of venting, ask for the vacation time you want, mentioning how it will put you in a better position to tackle the new client work, for example. Make it an easy, low-drama process for your boss to give you what you need.

Lead with your intentions.

Worried about being misread or misunderstood? Then tackle those concerns head-on. A statement like, “I’m not here to complain about my workload — but I am here to discuss the possibility of shifting my hours over the next few weeks” both clarifies your goals and focuses your manager on the right next steps.

Avoid immediate-crisis framing.

The pandemic has presented one burning fire after another, and most managers and leaders are just as nervous, hypervigilant, and tired as you are. So when talking about the flex-work setup you’re hoping for, try

to stay out of emergency mode. A calm “I’m not pushing for an answer today. Think about it, and we’ll regroup” will likely work better than demanding an immediate response.

• • •

As you scanned the recommendations above, they may have seemed strange, or even over-engineered. *Why should I have to make a concerted effort to have what should be simple conversations?* If so, remember: We’re rolling with tremendous pressures and circumstances. Just as we’ve adapted in so many other — hopefully temporary — ways, we can adapt how we talk to each other, too. For all of us to keep ourselves, our careers, and our organizations moving forward, we need to remain connected.



Daisy Dowling is the founder and CEO of Workparent, a specialty coaching and advisory firm focused on working parents. She is the author of *Workparent: The Complete Guide to Succeeding on the Job, Staying True to Yourself, and Raising Happy Kids*, published by Harvard Business Review Press in May 2021.

The Great Resignation or the Great Rethink?

by **Ranjay Gulati**

Published on HBR.org / March 22, 2022 / Reprint [H06WMU](#)



AndreyPopov/Getty Images

A friend of mine — I'll call him Jim — was in the running for a C-suite job at his company, a consumer packaged goods firm. I've known him for years, and he'd always seemed happy and fulfilled in his career. So, imagine my surprise when not long ago I got this two-word text message from him: "I quit."

I texted him back asking if everything was okay. I expected that he would reference a dispute with another leader or a business decision

gone bad. Instead, he said, “I’m becoming the kind of person I don’t want to be.”

We spoke on the phone, and he explained that a recent decision taken by leaders at this firm had given him pause. They had acted to secure economic gain at the expense of customers, suppliers, and the environment and seemed unbothered by their decisions, regarding them as “slam dunks.”

The experience had made him realize that he didn’t really believe in his company or its mission. Whereas previously he might have suppressed his growing doubts, the combination of a personal health scare, the recent death of his father, friction at home, and the prolonged isolation and introspection resulting from the pandemic had prompted him to become more introspective. “Our products aren’t healthy,” he told me. “I wouldn’t want my kids to eat that junk.” The lure of a big paycheck and working for a prestigious and very profitable company had worn off. His only thought was: “Why should I work for this company?”

Many of us are asking such questions nowadays. Unsettled by the pandemic, we find ourselves considering our jobs with fresh perspective. Some are quitting, in what has been dubbed the Great Resignation. But, for many, it’s more of a Great Rethink. Do we *really* like our employers’ culture? Do we feel that we’re fairly treated and have the advancement opportunities we want? Most profoundly, does our work feels as meaningful as we’d like it to?

For those answering no to any of these questions, and looking for more purpose-driven work, my research can help. I’ve gone deep inside dozens of companies, interviewing more than 200 leaders to understand how they bring purpose alive for their employees and other stakeholders in extraordinary ways. My primary aim was to unearth best practices

for what I call “deep purpose” organizations, but I also unearthed some strategies that individuals can use to find more meaning in their careers and lives. Studies show that this can lead to greater fulfillment and even longer lives, so why not give it a try?

So, what should you do?

First, *know thyself*. Almost to a person, the leaders and employees at deep purpose companies whom I’ve met all harbored a burning ambition — an intention they pursued with almost existential fervor. They knew what they’d been put on this planet to do, and that clarity drove them, shaped the choices they made, and inspired others to embrace their own purposes.

And this isn’t just a C-level pursuit. When the professional services firm KPMG rolled out its 10,000 Stories Challenge program, inviting employees to make posters highlighting the purpose they found in their jobs, the contributions were inspiring. One employee who helps banks fight money laundering wrote, “I combat terrorism.” Another who helped small farmers secure financing used the phrase “I help farms grow.”

What’s your personal purpose? Take some time away from the rush of daily life and think about what matters to you and what you’re trying to accomplish. What *is* your ultimate reason for being? Recognizing that your time on this planet is limited, what do you really hope to achieve?

Second, *evaluate whether you truly need purpose on the job*. We seek meaning and fulfillment in different professional and personal contexts. For instance, someone who defines their personal purpose as “helping others to learn and grow” might do that outside of work in their role as a parent, mentor, or coach (life purpose). They might

pursue it indirectly by working in a non-education role for a learning-focused company (organizational purpose) or in non-teaching but still educational roles (career purpose) or directly as a teacher or professor.

If you're making good on your life purpose outside work, you might be able to tolerate a job, career, or employer that is light on purpose but affords other benefits. In other words, it's okay to have a day job. It is however becoming clear that fewer people are willing to go this route and more of us are seeking coherence across different facets of our lives.

Third, if you find you do need or want purpose at work, try "job-crafting." Shape your role to become more purposeful by adjusting the tasks you take on, which colleagues, customers, or other stakeholders you interact with, and your own mental framing of what you're doing. Delegate the work that doesn't feel as meaningful to you but might to others, raise your hand for new projects that connect with your goals, and reach out to like-minded and uplifting teammates.

Fourth, *evaluate your boss*. Do they help you realize it by allowing you express your individuality and giving you work that feels important to you? A notable example is Pete Carroll, coach of the NFL's Seattle Seahawks. Although many professional football coaches take a tough-love, drill sergeant approach, Carroll focuses on developing deep, personal relationships with his players so he can draw out their individual philosophies and reasons for being.

As Carroll sees it, this is the way individuals reach their highest potential and bond to the team's purpose. "If someone feels you're recognizing who they are and what they're all about," he says, "you've opened up the connection to introduce them to the collective purpose."

These bosses are out there — you just have to look for them.

Fifth, *take a closer look at your employer*. As my research found, some companies really do succeed in not merely instituting strong organizational purposes but in helping their employees connect to it in their own ways.

For example, the Boston-based women's technology firm Ovia Health has adopted as one of its core values "Be yourself, be candid, be kind," and it comes to life in many ways: online forums where employees can discuss personal hobbies, an emphasis on diversity and inclusion throughout the firm, and an approach to decision-making that actively incorporates employee opinions.

If your company doesn't help you cue into your personal purpose, you might want to keep an eye out for firms that do. At Microsoft, the approach is similar. As chief people officer Kathleen Hogan told me, "You won't fully work for Microsoft until you make Microsoft work for you."

If your organization doesn't help you cue into your personal purpose, you might want to leave for one that does. Sometimes a change of scenery does work wonders. It did for Jim. A year after quitting his old job, he took a new one in a company oriented around sustainability and responsible business, which better aligns with his own, personal purpose. He earns much less than before but says he's more energized about and proud of his work. "I feel much more whole," he says. Contrary to some pundits who have described the great resignation as the real upgrade in which people simply want to get paid more, in this instance it was more of a great rethink.

As I learned from talking to people in all the companies I studied, it is possible to find deep purpose at work. But recognize, as well, that there

are no shortcuts. You must step back and reflect carefully on yourself and your situation and do what you need to feel and fulfilled.



Ranjay Gulati is the Paul R. Lawrence MBA Class of 1942 Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School. He is the author of *Deep Purpose: The Heart and Soul of High-Performance Companies* (Harper Business, 2022).

It's Time to Take a Fresh Look at Your Company's Values

by John Coleman

Published on HBR.org / March 28, 2022 / Reprint [H06XFC](#)



Juan Moyano/Stocksy

Every great culture needs a mission, a vision, and values. Its mission is the organization's indelible purpose and reason for being. Its vision is its aspiration for itself. And its values (or virtues) are the way an organization commits to working — a statement of how a company does what it does and the principles it will consistently abide by. But these are never meant to be static. Just as the environment around a company changes, so must the company itself.

As you think ahead to what may be the “new normal,” it’s time for organizations to refresh what they stand for. The world has changed with Covid, and it’s almost certain that your old mission, vision, and values don’t fully match today’s context. There is a new emerging focus on things like health (both mental and physical), flexibility, diversity and equity, and other topics. Your customers have likely radically reinvented their lives or businesses, making them reassess what they want or need from your company. And the people in your organization are likely more focused on purpose but less connected to what you stand for, either because they are new (given high turnover) or have been in the midst of reinventing themselves.

But how can a company seek to refresh its mission, vision, and values?

It’s essential that an organization’s leadership team — from the CEO down — own the mission, vision, and values of an organization and the process by which they are formulated. But as I note in the *HBR Guide to Crafting Your Purpose*, every single person in an organization has a part to play, whether shaping the larger corporate process, their own activities, or the culture of their individual teams. So, these statements must be owned and actualized by the organization as a community.

Typically, the organization’s leadership team (including the CEO) will tee up the process by asking a series of straightforward questions:

- **Mission:** What is the core purpose of our collective work together? Why do we exist and do what we do? This is the north star around which cultures are built, the single thing each person can point to as their reason for working in community.
- **Vision:** What are we hoping to achieve together? I prefer these to be both aspirational and actionable, meaning they articulate a bold, long-term vision but one that may actually be achieved by the

company (rather than so bold as to be outlandish or unreachable).

This is the core articulate of the journey you are on together and how you know whether you are making progress.

- **Values:** What core principles will guide the way we work together as colleagues and for our clients? Values are the moral code of an organization — the set of rules you all embrace and abide by that reflect the ethics of the people in the organization and hold everyone accountable to the right standard of behavior.

In addition, it's important in each area to ask “what's changed” over the last two years, which may surface interesting insights about the underlying shifts in the culture and focus of the firm. What is outdated and needs to be left behind? What's new that needs to be embraced?

As a rule of thumb, the ultimate answers to these questions should be simple, memorable, and authentic. Mission and vision should be one sentence each and easy enough to remember that people can repeat them. They don't need to be incredibly original, but they have to be authentic and distinct enough that you can use them to hold one another accountable. Values should be one word or a simple phrase that, again, need not be completely original but should be distinct, meaningful, and memorable.

With these questions in hand, leadership teams at companies should design a process for asking these questions in community and then embedding the answers in the culture. The legendary artist Michelangelo once wrote that, “Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.” Mission, vision, and values are the same. They already exist within your work and your people. The job of an organization and its leaders is not to impose these things like a blank canvas, but to carefully chisel, shape, and refine what is already there.

Here are a few tips for engaging your employees as you ask the questions outlined above and then communicate the answers out to everyone in the firm:

Engage the organization comprehensively.

Let everyone in the organization know you are embarking on a refresh of the mission, vision, and values — taking into special account the changes of the last two years. Make the process formal and public, and think of it as a fun way for everyone to reengage with the company's purpose and principles — or help new hires connect more with the organization. Particularly in hybrid or remote environments, this can be a great way to get colleagues reconnected to the organization and to one another.

Listen extensively and authentically.

Have senior leaders engage a broad group of employees directly. Some of this can be technologically enabled — videos from leaders sent to everyone, surveys, and online tools where employees can submit ideas. But much of it should be real person-to-person contact. Senior leaders from the CEO down should personally lead diverse focus groups throughout the organization, in person or by video, as a way of both connecting with a broad group of people and hearing their feedback directly. In this process of crafting company purpose, leaders should encourage a culture of receptivity to feedback on mission, vision, and values that will long outlast the formal exercise. Highlight great employee feedback. Reward it. And cultivate a leadership team that listens gratefully.

“Launch” the new statements and then communicate consistently.

Release the vision, mission, and values companywide. Post them on the walls in offices and send each employee a wallet-sized card highlighting them. Put them on the website (potentially with deeper explainers for the simple constructs) for external clients to see. Have leaders work

them into company talks, presentations, and events comprehensively. And consider some “swag” (t-shirts, coffee mugs, or similar items) to celebrate their release. We often need to hear things 6-20 times before we internalize them (known as “effective frequency” in advertising) so consistent communication is key.

Recognize those who live the company's purpose and values.

Humans learn best through stories. Words about abstract concepts are fine, but real-life examples of employees living into the vision, mission, and values are irreplaceable. They also offer an opportunity up-front and over time to reward and applaud those employees in an organization who are culture carriers. Find stories of employees demonstrating the company's purpose, and highlight small pockets where you are achieving parts of the vision — perhaps with client or employee interviews and profiles. Shoot videos of colleagues celebrating the times they saw others live the company's values. Create company awards that publicly acknowledge those culture carries who are leading the way.

Purpose matters more than ever to companies and individuals. Now is an essential time to reconsider the core mission, vision, and values of your company. Neglecting this moment would be a missed opportunity. A thoughtful approach to these topics can yield a culture that is focused, reenergized, and fresh.



John Coleman is the author of the *HBR Guide to Crafting Your Purpose* and a coauthor of the book, *Passion & Purpose: Stories from the Best and Brightest Young Business Leaders*. Follow him on Twitter at [@johnwcoleman](#) or contact him through [his website](#).

The Future Is Uncertain. Here's How to Ensure Your Team Can Adapt.

by Keith Ferrazzi and Kian Gohar

Published on HBR.org / March 29, 2022 / Reprint [H06Y76](#)



moodboard/Getty Images

When are we ever going back to the office?

Remember March 2020, when most of us expected it might be in two or three months? Then summer gave way to fall and winter. Some set their sights on returning mid-2021. That thought is now a distant memory.

As the global pandemic begins its third year, it's high time to recognize we're never going back to the way things were. We've entered an entirely new world of work.

The Covid-19 pandemic has killed millions of people worldwide and has caused untold pain and trauma for many millions more in terms of financial losses, lingering illnesses, and agonizing grief. And, as with all crises, the pandemic has also brought out the best in many people. As teams within organizations have scrambled to adapt to their new conditions, many have devised exciting and highly productive new ways of relating to each other and getting their work done. What can we learn from the advances the pandemic has inspired?

As we detail in our book [*Competing in the New World of Work*](#), there is a consistent pattern of leadership competencies that have proven to be most successful in these turbulent times. Through our research involving interviews with more than 2,000 corporate team leaders, we have found that the best results were achieved by teams that did more than merely accommodate their changing conditions. The best teams transformed their ways of working through what we call “radical adaptability.” These are teams that went beyond mere coping with the crisis. They used the crisis to reappraise and reinvent their work processes so that they could continue to adapt to unpredictable change in the years to come. Here are the four essential ways to build radically adaptable teams in our new world of work:

1. Collaborate Through Inclusion

During the pandemic, teams were forced to break through organizational silos and find innovative solutions wherever they could, within the organization or beyond. We call this process “teaming out,” which redefines team membership to include whoever might be critical to achieving the team mission.

The best teams embraced the richness of diversity and inclusion offered by virtual, remote, and hybrid teamwork. They developed new work habits and processes to extract the most value from these opportunities. Some organizations began to explore how online inclusion and collaboration could fuel innovation at scale. Global companies such as Google, AT&T, and Deutsche Telekom began using their employee networks to crowdsource ideas on product innovation and policy development. The Dow Chemical Company, in particular, began using digital virtual tools to collaborate with small customers who previously lacked direct communication with the company. A bold new remote-first approach to external partnerships helped make 2020 a year of innovation and transformation for Dow, as it generated 80% more leads than in its historically best years. “It gives us opportunities to do things better than we did in the past, and it overcomes some of the limitations of doing things in person,” Dow’s chief commercial officer, Dan Futter, told us. “We’re just scratching the surface of where that can take us.”

2. Lead Through Agile Management

Our research showed how pandemic-disrupted companies as diverse as Delta Air Lines, General Motors, and Unilever used the principles of agile management to launch new product lines and processes within weeks, instead of months or years. Delta rapidly launched an entirely new Global Cleanliness Division, General Motors took just a month to retool its factory lines to start making respiratory ventilators, and Unilever, which had no hand sanitizer in the U.S. market, developed and started delivering the new product to stores within six weeks.

By operating in a kind of “crisis agile” mode, they gave nimble, self-organizing teams the freedom to rapid-test ideas and iterate solutions without going up the chain of command for approvals. They produced extraordinary results in record time. Now the challenge is how to learn

from the “crisis agile” experience and build sustainable agile practices into everyday work.

Agile teams with clarity of mission and adequate resources are capable of self-organizing and self-managing. The teams decide which approaches, people, and resources will be required to achieve their objectives, and the behavior within the team evolves from authority-centric norms into customer-centric cultures. Accountability runs from each member to the team, and from the team to each member.

Target, 3M, Dell, and other companies already had well-developed teams for teaching and executing on agile methods before the pandemic. Target has an agile learning center called [Target Dojo](#), where employees are expected to spend almost one-fifth of their time learning new skills centered on agile. This level of support for agile culture gave Target a considerable competitive advantage in dealing with the disruptions and unpredictable changes that took place during the pandemic's first year.

3. Promote Team Resilience

Resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, had normally been considered a personal matter — the responsibility of each individual team member. The pandemic brought out into the open the vital importance of *shared* responsibility. On high-performing teams, leaders promote the idea that everyone is responsible and accountable for each other's health and well-being. When the emphasis is put on team resilience, and when team members pick up responsibilities for each other, the team as a unit can maintain its emotional and physical energies, even when individual members are encountering hardships. This is why some super-resilient teams exceeded expectations for bouncing back from the pandemic's many adversities. These teams actually bounced *forward*.

We determined a set of team behaviors that are the most reliable diagnostic indicators of team resilience — psychological safety, positive intent, fast and frequent check-ins, generosity, gratitude, and empathy among them. Teams that stress the importance of everyone being able to voice their needs and challenges are able to solve problems more quickly and collaboratively, and get to bolder action faster. Remote and hybrid teamwork demands an extra level of mindfulness in this regard. Leaders of remote and hybrid teams need to be much more conscious and deliberate about checking in and giving positive reinforcement — leadership practices that may have been done more casually in person in the past.

4. Develop Active Foresight

Why were so many companies caught completely flat-footed by the pandemic? Back in 2006, *Harvard Business Review* ran an entire special section called [*Preparing for a Pandemic*](#). Bill Gates predicted in 2015 that “microbes not missiles” were more likely to kill [10 million people](#) in the coming decades. The risk of a pandemic disrupting business operations was around the world was well-understood but almost universally disregarded. To paraphrase [Peter Drucker’s axiom about predicting the future](#), the threat was “visible but not yet seen.”

How many other threats — and opportunities — are on your horizon? What future possibilities are currently “visible but not yet seen”? Corporate foresight, which is usually a practice confined to strategic planning exercises, is something that every organization should integrate into regular operations. Every team is capable of developing simple processes and monthly reviews that give that team the ability to see around corners. Teams can use data and industry knowledge they accumulate on a day-to-day basis to collaborate on solutions and design action scenarios that will help them mitigate risks and exploit new possibilities.

Moving Forward as an Organization.

These four practices of collaboration, agility, resilience, and foresight can create a circular flow state in which teams can operate at peak performance. The essence of Radical Adaptability is that it is predictive and proactive, completely unlike the typical adaptive responses to change, which tend to be reactive and conformist. At the organizational level, the radically adaptive response to change entails fundamental changes to how the organization manages its workforce, develops new business models, and executes on its organizational purpose.

KF

Keith Ferrazzi is founder and chairman of Ferrazzi Greenlight, which coaches teams and boards on increasing adaptability and collaboration to capture unexpected growth opportunities and avoid unsuspected risk. He is also a bestselling author on the subject of leadership and teams, and his latest book is [*Competing in the New World of Work*](#).

KG

Kian Gohar is a bestselling author, keynote speaker, and futurist. A former executive director of the XPRIZE Foundation and Singularity University, Kian has coached the leadership teams of dozens of Fortune 500 companies. He's co-author of [*Competing in the New World of Work*](#) (HBR Press, 2022) and has been featured widely in global media.

The Rise of the “Corporate Nomad”

by **Claudio Fernández-Aráoz**

Published on HBR.org / March 30, 2022 / Reprint [H06Y9B](#)



Artur Debat/Getty Images

Today, I am fundamentally a freelance worker, although with a part-time-yet-major commitment to a great institution. I am enjoying life enormously at this stage of my career. However, what got me here were three fascinating decades neither in a traditional corporate career nor as a freelancer, but rather as what I label a *corporate nomad*. It’s a career option that I expect to become increasingly popular — and attractive — in the years to come.

Corporate nomads are individuals who, while maintaining a full-time employment relationship with their organizations, will increasingly participate part-time in geographically dispersed initiatives and projects within their employer’s global network.

The Appeal of Being a Corporate Nomad

While the corporate nomad alternative will still be a small segment of the workforce, I see it growing quickly in the coming years, particularly for individuals in their early 30s to 50s, for several reasons:

- While freelance relationships will likely continue to be an attractive option at the beginning and toward the end of our professional lives, stable employment relationships have important financial benefits from our early 30s to 50s, when we are struggling to pay our mortgages, the family’s education, and save for retirement or future financial independence.
- In addition to financial stability, emotional and social stability are extremely important assets for our well-being. Over the past two decades, a growing body of research has focused on the importance of positive psychological capital (PsyCap). This combination of self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience is easier to develop when we are not alone. A rich network of colleagues, a professional home and family, and a culture where we fit and belong become ever-more valuable assets in an increasingly challenging world.
- For those raising families in their 30s to 50s, giving their children a stable environment without frequent relocations will strongly contribute to their emotional and social health and development. As Goethe put it, “There are two things children should get from their parents: roots and wings.” A stable community and network of local friends and relationships can help kids develop strong roots. In turn, your global perspective as a *corporate nomad* can help you expand your children’s vision, while your growing international network of

virtual friends and relationships will help them open their wings for sporadic travels, exchanges, international friendship, and studying abroad.

- As we navigate the waves of the Great Resignation, switching jobs has become increasingly risky. According to a [recent survey of more than 2,500 respondents by The Muse](#), 72% of those who recently switched jobs have been frustrated, and almost half of these would consider trying to get their old jobs back. Virtual interviews can limit our ability to get a good sense of a new job environment, while the Great Resignation is increasing employers’ pressure to paint unrealistically rosy pictures. Corporate nomads can find exciting part-time challenges within their *current* organizations — lowering the risk of making a company move they may regret. The grass at your current place of employment may indeed be the greenest!
- Being a corporate nomad allows you to be exposed to new people, new geographies, new cultures, new values, and new work projects that will foster your development through stretch assignments.
- Finally, a rich stint as a corporate nomad can be an extraordinary training ground and networking platform if in the future you decide to embark on a new free agent stage. Decades of being a corporate nomad helped me develop for my current freelance stage, not only by building an invaluable global network but, fundamentally, by giving me the hunger to keep on learning and contributing globally. It also helped me build the skills to sense opportunities and partner with a fascinating, diverse, and constantly dynamic universe touching all continents.

My own *corporate nomad* adventures started with leadership advisory firm Egon Zehnder more than 30 years ago. I was living in Buenos Aires for family reasons, but — while spending most of my time doing local client work — I started actively participating on several global initiatives all over the world. These became a long succession

of fascinating projects, that included participating on global teams for training events, reengineering the firm’s executive search process, founding its assessment and development practice, and much more. Since I was living in Argentina and working with a firm that had a network of 67 offices in 42 countries, this demanded significant travel in those days. But I always felt that the effort was negligible compared with the unique prospect of getting to better know and work with fascinating colleagues from all sorts of nationalities, cultures, religions, values, styles, knowledge, and experiences. It was an ongoing journey of excitement and learning, as much as it was a larger opportunity to contribute globally, not just given the constraints of my far away and modest location in Argentina, but even compared to the local contribution I could have made had I accepted an opportunity to relocate anywhere else in the world.

In addition to the personal benefits, fostering this type of global exposure and contribution will also become an increasingly important and effective way for organizations to retain and develop top talent:

- More than 100 CEOs from around the world recently met at Harvard Business School and shared the things that keep them awake at night: 33% said recruitment and retention of talent was by far their biggest challenge. (For context, the next most-cited challenges, which included uncertainty and instability, and inflation/stagflation were only mentioned by 10% of the CEOs). Given the high cost and increased difficulty of hiring, organizations will need to increase their focus on the best way to retain talent. The key for retaining and motivating knowledge workers is to give them higher autonomy, mastery, and purpose, and corporations will boost all three by offering corporate nomads a much richer menu of part-time elective experiences and contributions — geographically, situationally, and functionally.

- Furthermore, organizations that encourage the rise of the corporate nomad will soon discover the extraordinary impact this practice will have on the development of their internal talent. Adults develop mostly on the job and through stretch assignments; opening the global development dimension (without the need for physical relocation) will dramatically expand people’s competence.

How to Become a Corporate Nomad

The rise of the corporate nomad will be inexorable, given the strong and growing benefits for individuals and organizations alike. However, to successfully become a corporate nomad (mostly virtually these days), employees will need to master four key disciplines:

1. Clarify your purpose.

In the wake of the pandemic, and even more so in today’s delicate global geopolitical scenario, we increasingly crave meaning. Before even thinking about what new internal contributions and experiences you might want to apply for, get clear on your purpose. This [Six C’s model](#) can help you think through what you’re looking for, including what to look for in a new job if your corporate nomad visa is denied by your organization.

2. Systematically search for potential project partners.

Once you have clarified your purpose and come up with a series of attractive generic options (in terms of experience, learning, and contribution), you should systematically source for organizational units, functions, and geographies that could benefit from your potential contribution. Equally important, you should search for (and check references on) specific *individuals* you may want to partner with in your nomadic experience. You should take this as seriously as an actual job search, for which [this article and its downloadable decision support tool](#) may be of help.

3. Pitch the idea to your boss.

Once you have spotted an attractive opportunity with a significant chance for success, you should candidly and enthusiastically speak with your boss about the reasons why you would like to focus some of your time on your proposed initiative. In my experience, assuming your choice is a sensible one, most people will interpret your initiative as a very positive sign and strongly support it.

4. Proactively manage your life.

According to [GALLUP's last 2021 State of the Global Workplace Report](#), workers' daily stress levels have reached historic highs. However, the report also shows that a record number of workers have also been thriving. What is their secret? They are proactive in their work choices and masters at managing their lives. The trick is not to *add*, but to completely improve the mix of projects and tasks on your plate. Productivity in knowledge workers has a dramatic spread, as does happiness, and those at the top of both curves are masters at resisting technological invasion: They always plan their week ahead while blocking out time for important tasks; they avoid digital distractions and invasion; and they feel fully comfortable saying no when they have an alternative burning yes. I have consistently found that I am at my highest level of productivity when I work on highly challenging, self-initiated, deadline-driven projects. I feel in flow while at them, and as a result I remain full of energy to accomplish “all of the rest.” Without those projects, though, I tend to procrastinate on everything, falling behind even in my most essential ordinary tasks.

What Organizations Need to Do

In turn, to fully capture the corporate nomad advantage, organizations will need to successfully implement three key disciplines:

1. Change the way they look at talent, shifting from a fixed to a growth mindset.

It won't be enough to successfully implement high-potential programs (already a major challenge). Organizations will need to avoid the trap of rigidly segmenting people into high and low potentials, and instead look deeper for each person's unique potential profile, including their very personal combination of curiosity, insight, engagement, and determination. A look beyond someone's experience, knowledge, and even current competence will allow leaders to imagine a wide range of opportunities for personal development and corporate contribution.

2. Reconsider how they develop their talent.

I am currently advising a leading global cybersecurity firm whose sector is experiencing explosive growth, with February job postings up 31% from December, implying a 400% yearly growth rate in the sector even before the war started in Ukraine. What's more, there's a global talent scarcity of millions of cybersecurity workers. Since the organization is as committed to capturing the growth opportunity as they are to fostering genuine inclusion, they're redrafting their 360-degree review processes in a way that will help everyone become more aware of their true individual potential profile, while helping them look for ways to unlock that potential. In our HBR article "Turning Potential into Success," we explain how organizations can forecast how far someone can develop along key leadership competencies, so as to effectively provide people with the right opportunities.

3. Review their incentives systems, placing higher emphasis on developing global talent.

The best management consulting firms have always excelled at developing global talent. Consider Hindustan Unilever, which became an extraordinary factory of top global leaders by basing up to half of their senior executives' bonuses on the number and quality of leaders they helped develop for themselves and others. As a result, they have

produced more than 400 CEOs for other companies, on top of many senior leaders for the Unilever global network.

The rise of the corporate nomad could provide individuals and corporations alike with an extraordinary chance to reap the benefits of job enrichment and change, without requiring individuals to jump into the wrong place with the wrong fit, and without creating a situation where organizations must replace great employees who should never have been lost in the first place.

As Felix Marquardt puts it in his recent book *[The New Nomads: How the Migration Revolution is Making the World a Better Place](#)*, the root of the ancient philosophy of nomadism is not migration specifically, but rather the frame of mind required — an openness, curiosity, humility, and willingness to embrace and explore new people, places and concepts, all of which are extraordinary sources of corporate innovation and performance. This frame of mind is also the source of personal development and can lead to the sense of profound purpose we crave in these uncertain days. As Marquardt puts it: “When we move, we don’t just learn about the place where we go. We also discover who we are and where we come from.”

The rise of the corporate nomad should not only make us more successful and happier. It should fundamentally make us better human beings, genuinely and proactively embracing inclusion at a global scale... one nomadic project at a time.



Claudio Fernández-Aráoz is an executive fellow for executive education at Harvard Business School and the author of *[It’s Not the How or the What but the Who](#)* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2014).

We Need Trauma-Informed Workplaces

by **Katharine Manning**

Published on HBR.org / March 31, 2022 / Reprint [H06YRB](#)



Yaroslav Danylchenko/Stocksy

The past two years have been incredibly turbulent, as we've faced Covid, racial violence, political upheaval, environmental disasters, war, and more. Anxiety and depression have [skyrocketed](#). Organizations have had to confront issues they never expected and find new ways to support their employees through repeated traumatic experiences.

The reality, though, is that trauma is not new in our organizations. It's not going away, either. [Estimates](#) are that six in 10 men and five in 10 women experience at least one trauma, and approximately 6%

of the population will experience PTSD at some point in their lives. Trauma and distress can arise from a wide array of causes, including domestic violence, sexual assault, racism, bias, harassment, economic uncertainty, political division, and more. New challenges arise every day, and conflict and strife anywhere in our globally connected world affect us all.

As we've seen the lines between work and home blur and a fundamental shift in our expectations of the places we work, organizations have struggled to provide the support and leadership their employees and customers need. That's why it's so important that they take steps now to build the cultures that can see them through this crisis and the ones we'll all inevitably face in the future. To do that, we need to build trauma-informed organizations.

In my work with organizations, I use a simplified version of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration definition of trauma: Trauma is an emotional injury that affects performance and well-being. The same incident can affect different people differently, so the goal is to assess each individual and provide the supports they need. A trauma-informed organization is one that operates with an understanding of trauma and its negative effects on the organization's employees and the communities it serves and works to mitigate those effects.

Why It's Important for Organizations to Be Trauma-Informed

The way organizations support people during periods of trauma is uniquely powerful, and the ramifications are long-lasting. This is because in times of trauma, the twin concepts of institutional betrayal and psychological safety come into play.

When we are in a period of crisis, many of us look to our institutions to support and protect us. If they fail to do so, or if they take steps that we fear will harm us or those we care about, that can create a second injury, called an institutional betrayal. The term “institutional betrayal” was first coined by psychologist [Jennifer Freyd](#), who [describes](#) it as occurring when an institution you trust or depend upon mistreats you. It can arise due to deliberate actions that harm, as well as from [failing to act](#) when action is expected. These actions or inactions can exacerbate already-difficult circumstances. Institutional betrayal may arise due to an organization’s large-scale actions, like a Covid response that leaves many workers feeling vulnerable and trapped, or the actions of an individual, like a manager’s belittling response to a claim of harassment or bias.

The flip side of institutional betrayal is psychological safety. Largely popularized through the work of [Amy Edmondson](#), psychological safety is the sense that within a team or organization, it is acceptable for someone to admit that they made a mistake, or don’t know the answer, or are struggling. In a recent [study](#), Google found that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical to making a team work. And the fastest way to build psychological safety was for team members to support each other through hard times. As Charles Duhigg at The New York Times Magazine put it: “To feel ‘psychologically safe,’ we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, and to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can’t be focused just on efficiency.”

Thus, if we fail to respond appropriately in our work with those experiencing trauma, we can add a second injury to the first. But if we respond well, we build trust and connection. Either way, the manner in

which we support each other in times of crisis will reverberate in our organizations for many years to come.

How do we ensure that our organizations have the skills and resources to navigate trauma effectively? The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) identifies six guiding principles for a trauma-informed approach: 1) safety; 2) trustworthiness and transparency; 3) peer support; 4) collaboration and mutuality; 5) empowerment, voice, and choice; and 6) cultural, historical, and gender issues. I would simplify these to three overarching concepts:

- Acknowledgement (“I will be heard”)
- Support (“I can get the help I need”)
- Trust (“I will be treated fairly”)

Acknowledgement

As I discuss in my [book](#), *The Empathetic Workplace*, an important aspect of a trauma-informed approach is the willingness to listen to and acknowledge the pain of those experiencing trauma. Sharing a story of trauma can be healing, [mentally](#) and even [physically](#). It isn't enough merely to allow people to share their experiences, though; they need to feel genuinely heard as well. An acknowledgement can be as simple as a manager saying to an employee whose spouse is dying, “Thanks for letting me know. I'm sorry for all you're going through,” or an office-wide communication that addresses a community trauma. The key is that an acknowledgment neither denies the experience of those suffering (“It will all work out for the best”) nor distracts from it (“Let me tell you how I persevered through something similar”). When we fail to acknowledge the pain that someone is experiencing, we can veer into [toxic positivity](#) or even [gaslighting](#).

Support

There are often tangible forms of support that people need in times of trauma and distress, like mental health resources, referrals to medical information, and assistance with funeral and other expenses. Such support can make an incredible difference in a person's healing and demonstrate that the organization is there for its employees when they need it.

It's also important when working with those in crisis that we communicate frequently and clearly. When the unthinkable happens, we often feel blindsided and insecure. When it feels difficult to regain a sense of control over our lives, receiving information can help. As John F. Kennedy [said](#), "In a time of turbulence and change, it is more true than ever that knowledge is power." Therefore, another type of support that the organization can provide is frequent and reliable communication. This communication can take any form, from a text alert system to a Slack channel dedicated to informing employees about the crisis at hand to a daily email from the CEO. Whatever you use, it's important that the communication be consistent and dependable.

Trust

We all feel more confident when we understand the rules. If the policies and values an organization has in place are in name only, it creates a sense of unease at best and [moral injury](#) at worst. Thus, the trauma-informed organization should have policies and procedures that are genuinely supportive of employees in need (some good places to start are [this U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\) report on harassment](#) and [this model policy on domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking](#)) and ensure that those policies are widely known and followed. Policies should robustly implement the organization's stated values, and training on them must be thorough, effective, and ongoing. (See [here](#) for some good advice.)

It is particularly important that leaders are vocal in their commitment to the organization's values and unwavering in upholding them. When bad behavior is not addressed, it can become contagious; very quickly, the organization's values erode and toxicity takes over. For people to feel safe raising issues, they must understand the rules and trust that those rules will be applied fairly and transparently.

It's been two years since the coronavirus began its sweep across the globe. As vaccines are more widely available, its grip on the way we work is loosening. The employees who return to the office have changed, though. The Great Resignation has shown that employees have different expectations of their organizations than they did a few years ago. They desire purpose and connection, and they want to be seen. The organization that shows through its actions that it cares for its employees beyond the short-term profit they generate, that shows a real interest in who they are and supports them in good times and bad, will earn loyalty, engagement, and trust — and will deserve it.

It may not be possible to predict or avoid the next crisis our organizations will face. However, with forethought, planning, and commitment, we can be prepared to meet the next challenge — whatever it may be — and come through it stronger.



Katharine Manning is the President of Blackbird DC, which provides training and consultation on empathy at work when it matters most. She's the author of *The Empathetic Workplace: 5 Steps to a Compassionate, Calm, and Confident Response to Trauma on the Job*. She also teaches at American University and in the Master's in Trauma-Informed Leadership Program at Dominican University. She has worked on issues of trauma and victimization for more than 25 years, including 15 years as a Senior Attorney Advisor on victims' rights at the U.S. Department of Justice.

How Teams Are Retaining Employees Right Now

by **Cannon Thomas and Laura Delizonna**

Published on HBR.org / April 01, 2022 / Reprint [H06YRG](#)



Sean Justice/Getty Images

More than [25 million people](#) quit their jobs in the second half of 2021. The so-called “Great Resignation” is in full force. And quitting begets more quitting — so much so that The New York Times coined a new term for it: [quitagion](#).

Why are so many people quitting their jobs? According to a recent [McKinsey report](#), employers believe that it is a problem with compensation or work-life balance. But the employees who are quitting tell a different story. Their main reasons for quitting are 1) not feeling

valued and 2) not feeling a sense of belonging. And yet during the pandemic, the most productive companies actually broke this trend and improved employee job satisfaction by 48%. What do these successful organizations have in common? They practice five principles that help their teams connect and thrive.

To illustrate these principles, we'll use the example of Michelle Taite, a CMO who was appointed to help accelerate the integration of two companies after an acquisition. As we reimagine work in the post-pandemic era, consider how these principles can help you create a sense of belonging on your team and show team members that they are indeed valued.

Put People First

When the conditions are right, people can accomplish more together than anyone could alone. In an ideal world, the more people give, the more they get. A win for one is a win for all. Achievement is a positive sum game. In this state, people feel like they're part of something bigger than themselves. Enjoyment heightens and productivity is elevated in turn. When a team does not achieve this, they enter a zero sum game, a state where everyone is motivated by their own self-interests, and the team as a whole suffers.

Foster a positive sum game by creating an environment where team members join together, rather than protecting themselves from the zero sum game. This happens when team members relax into a trusting relationship that they feel is not just transactional but based in genuine care. When that relationship is achieved, team members trust each other to have their backs and respect each other as individuals with needs, aspirations, and joys. Referred to as shared empathy, this state is a leading indicator of effective teams. Leaders and teams cultivate shared empathy when they learn and care about each other's

deeper experience and take interest in each other's lives — celebrating birthdays and inquiring about people's children, spouses, and hobbies.

When Michelle stepped into her new role, she introduced herself to her team first and foremost as a person. She shared pictures of her family, her interests, and her heritage. Michelle's team created a Slack channel devoted to fun and people, letting their personalities shine. She posted snippets from her own life, like a weekend family photo or her child's meltdown with the caption "sometimes mornings are interesting here." Make time for humor and create room for personal connection. Open meetings with ice breakers like, "What made you laugh this weekend?", "What's your favorite candy?", or "What was a highlight and lowlight of your week?"

Rally Around Shared Goals

Anyone who has ever been a part of a sports team knows that achieving together can be a bonding experience. Tapping into the desire for greatness, team members strive together and challenge each other to bring their best. The joy of learning and ultimately winning is magnified tenfold when shared with others. Challenges bond teams — but only if they share a belief that striving to win unites them.

Michelle and her team use the hashtag #BeatOurBest to galvanize themselves around bold goals as they strive to build on their greatest achievements. When defining their marketing goals, the team framed the conversation around two questions: "What must we do to truly serve the needs of our customers and fuel growth?" and "How might we #BeatOurBest?" The *how* encouraged teammates to learn, experiment, and push the boundaries in service of the greater goal. And they specifically use the hashtag to unify. Michelle signs off in her weekly email with "Let's #BeatOurBest together." The hashtag helps orient

them to the shared experience of reaching into the unknown and discovering just how big their wins can be.

Model Humility and Curiosity

People bond when they share a set of values that make them feel like there is something special about their group. Humility and curiosity are two values that can supercharge bonding. Humility is the recognition of our limits. When a leader models humility, it opens up space for others to contribute. The leader is recognizing gaps that others can fill and also creating an environment where it is psychologically safe to give bold ideas and risk being wrong. Curiosity is the recognition that there is always more to learn. This fuels the excitement of experimentation and growth.

Recognize opportunities to show humility by responding to feedback with openness and curiosity instead of defensiveness. Lead with inquiry and be clear that your proposals are a starting point. This encourages divergent opinions and creativity. Michelle demonstrated humility and curiosity when she told her team, “I am going to ask a lot of questions. They might be stupid, but that’s okay. I’d really love to learn.” To encourage curiosity, show delight in moments of discovery directly and indirectly related to the work. In her weekly newsletter, Michelle shares insights and inspiration she gathers from her own reading, podcasts, and TED videos. These serve as thought starters for the team.

Celebrate Wins

Shared joy — especially the joy of team wins — reinforces bonds. The stress of hitting targets can drain the joy out of work. Celebrating wins together keeps the focus where it needs to be for a team to excel and bond through progress. In her newsletter, Michelle celebrates “Awesome Work of the Week,” featuring accomplishments big and

small, recognizing the unique value that each team member brings to the greater effort. Her team has a “ka-ching” button they press whenever someone has an idea that unlocks the work. This reinforces diversity of input and marks small steps forward in a fun and lighthearted way.

Connect the Dots

When teams understand their *why*, motivation and performance increase. Knowing that one’s work has impact and feeling that the work is meaningful are two of the top five predictors of a high-performing team. Always connect the dots between the work and the greater purpose or goal, and help every individual understand how their own work contributes to the collective success.

And remember that the *why* that matters to humans like no other *is* connection. Their work connects them to consumers, to other parts of the organization that depend on them, and most of all to each other. Teams that deliberately invest in these connections are unique. They not only endure, but grow through challenge. These are the teams that people yearn to be part of. Build those teams, and their members won’t want to leave.

CT

Cannon Thomas, PhD, is an Assistant Clinical Professor at University of California, San Francisco and the founder of CTP Strategies. He is an executive coach specializing in helping individuals and teams develop and execute on a clear guiding mission.

LD

Laura Delizonna, PhD, is an executive coach, instructor at Stanford University, keynote speaker, and culture consultant at Delizonna.com. She specializes in equipping leaders of top companies with the frameworks and tools to build high performance cultures.

How the Metaverse Could Change Work

by **Mark Purdy**

Published on HBR.org / April 05, 2022 / Reprint [H06YV3](#)



gremlin/Getty Images

Imagine a world where you could have a beachside conversation with your colleagues, take meeting notes while floating around a space station, or teleport from your office in London to New York, all without taking a step outside your front door. Feeling under pressure with too many meetings scheduled today? Then why not send your AI-enabled digital twin instead to take the load off your shoulders? These examples offer but a glimpse into the future vision of work promised by “the metaverse,” a term originally coined by author [Neal Stephenson](#) in 1992 to describe a future world of virtual reality. While defying precise

definition, the metaverse is generally regarded as a network of 3-D virtual worlds where people can interact, do business, and forge social connections through their virtual “avatars.” Think about it as a virtual reality version of today’s internet.

While still nascent in many respects, the metaverse has suddenly become big business, with technology titans and gaming giants such as [Meta](#) (previously Facebook), [Microsoft](#), [Epic Games](#), [Roblox](#), and others all creating their own virtual worlds or metaverses. The metaverse draws on a vast ensemble of different technologies, including virtual reality platforms, gaming, machine learning, blockchain, 3-D graphics, digital currencies, sensors, and (in some cases) VR-enabled headsets.

How do you get to the metaverse? Many current workplace metaverse solutions require no more than a computer, mouse, and keyboard keys, but for the full 3-D surround experience you usually have to don a VR-enabled headset. However, rapid progress is also taking place in computer-generated holography that dispenses with the need for headsets, either by using virtual viewing [windows](#) that create holographic displays from computer images, or by deploying specially designed holographic [pods](#) to project people and images into actual space at events or meetings). Companies such as [Meta](#) are also pioneering haptic (touch) gloves that enable users to interact with 3-D virtual objects and experience sensations such as movement, texture, and pressure.

Within the metaverse, you can make friends, rear virtual pets, design virtual fashion items, buy virtual real estate, attend events, create and sell digital art — and earn money to boot. But, until recently, the implications of the emerging metaverse for the world of work have received little attention.

That is now changing. The effects of the pandemic — especially limitations on physical meetings and travel — are spurring a search by enterprises for more authentic, cohesive, and interactive remote and hybrid work experiences. The metaverse seems set to reshape the world of work in at least four major ways: new immersive forms of team collaboration; the emergence of new digital, AI-enabled colleagues; the acceleration of learning and skills acquisition through virtualization and gamified technologies; and the eventual rise of a metaverse economy with completely new enterprises and work roles.

Like Being There: Teamwork and Collaboration in the Metaverse

The metaverse promises to bring new levels of social connection, mobility, and collaboration to a world of virtual work. [NextMeet](#), based in India, is an avatar-based immersive reality platform focused on interactive working, collaboration, and learning solutions. Its mission is to remove the isolation and workforce disconnectedness that can result from remote and hybrid work. I interviewed Pushpak Kypuram, Founder-Director of NextMeet, who explained the inspiration behind their virtual workplace solution: “With the shift to remote working from the pandemic, keeping employees engaged has become a top challenge for many companies. You can’t keep 20 people engaged in the flat 2-D environment of a video call; some people don’t like appearing on camera; you’re not simulating a real-life scenario. That is why companies are turning to metaverse-based platforms.”

With NextMeet’s immersive platform, employee digital avatars can pop in and out of virtual offices and meeting rooms in real-time, walk up to a virtual help desk, give a live presentation from the dais, relax with colleagues in a networking lounge, or roam a conference center or exhibition using a customizable avatar. Participants access the virtual environment via their desktop computer or mobile device, pick or design their avatar, and then use keyboard buttons to navigate the

space: arrow keys to move around, double click to sit on a chair, and so forth. Kypuram gives the example of employee onboarding: “If you’re onboarding 10 new colleagues and show or give them a PDF document to introduce the company, they will lose concentration after 10 minutes. What we do instead is have them walk along a 3-D hall or gallery, with 20 interactive stands, where they can explore the company. You make them want to walk the virtual hall, not read a document.”

Other metaverse companies are emphasizing workplace solutions that help counter video meeting fatigue and the social disconnectedness of remote work. [PixelMax](#), a UK-based start-up, helps organizations create immersive workplaces designed to enhance team cohesion, employee wellness, and collaboration. Their virtual workplaces, which are entered via a web-based system on your computer and don’t require headsets, include features such as:

- **“Bump into” experiences:** PixelMax’s immersive technology allows you to see your colleagues’ avatars in real-time, making it easier to stop them for a chat when you bump into them in the virtual workplace. In a recent interview, Shay O’Carroll, co-founder of PixelMax, explained that: “Informal and spontaneous conversations account for a huge amount of business communications — [research](#) suggests up to 90% in areas such as R&D — and during the pandemic we lost a lot of this vital communication.
- **Well-being spaces:** These are dedicated areas for users of the world to take a break and experience something different. As Shay O’Carroll explained: “We have created well-being areas designed as forests, or aquariums. They could even be on the moon. These areas can contain on-demand content such as guided meditations and/or exercise classes.”
- **Delivery to your physical space:** Clients can add features such as the ability to order take-out food or books and other merchandise within

the virtual environment and have these delivered to your physical location (e.g., home).

- **Live status tracking:** Just as in the physical workplace, you can walk around and get that panoramic sweep of the office floor, see where colleagues are located and who's free, drop in for a quick chat, etc.

The ultimate vision, according to Andy Sands, co-founder of PixelMax, is being able to connect different virtual workplaces. It is currently building a virtual workplace for a group of 40 leading manufacturers in interior design that are co-located in Manchester, England. "It's about community building, conversations and interactions. We want to enable worker avatars to move between a manufacturing world and an interior design world, or equally take that avatar and go and watch a concert in Roblox and Fortnite."

Remote work can be stressful. Research by [Nuffield Health](#) in the UK found that almost one third of UK remote workers were experiencing difficulties in separating home and work life, with more than one quarter finding it hard to switch off when the work day finishes. Virtual workplaces can provide a better demarcation between home and work life, creating the sensation of walking into the workplace each day and then leaving and saying goodbye to colleagues when your work is done. In the virtual workplace, your avatar provides a means of communicating your status — in a meeting, gone for your lunch break, and so on — making it easier to stay connected to colleagues without feeling chained to the computer or cellphone, a frequent source of stress in traditional remote work situations.

Better teamwork and communication will certainly be key drivers of the virtual workplace, but why stop there? The metaverse opens up new possibilities to rethink the office and work environment, introducing elements of adventure, spontaneity, and surprise. A virtual office

doesn't have to be a drab, uniform corporate environment downtown: why not a beach location, an ocean cruise, or even another world? This vision provides the inspiration for [Gather](#), an international virtual reality platform that allows employees and organizations to “build their own office.” These dream offices can vary from “The Space-Station Office” with views of planet Earth to “The Pirate Office,” complete with ocean views, a Captain’s Cabin, and a Forecastle Lounge for socializing. For the less adventurous, you can choose from options like the virtual Rooftop Party or meeting in the Zen Gardens.

Introducing Your Digital Colleague

Our work colleagues in the metaverse will not be limited to the avatars of our real-world colleagues. Increasingly, we will be joined by an array of digital colleagues — highly realistic, AI-powered, human-like bots. These AI agents will act as advisors and assistants, doing much of the heavy lifting of work in the metaverse and, in theory, freeing up human workers for more productive, value-added tasks.

Recent years have seen tremendous progress in conversational AI systems — algorithms that can understand text and voice conversations and converse in natural language. Such algorithms are now morphing into digital humans that can sense and interpret context, show emotions, make human-like gestures, and make decisions. One example is [UneeQ](#), an international technology platform that focuses on creating “digital humans” that can work across a wide variety of fields and different roles. UneeQ’s digital workers include [Nola](#), a digital shopping assistant or concierge for the Noel Leeming stores in New Zealand; [Rachel](#), an always-on mortgage adviser; and [Daniel](#), a digital double of the UBS Chief Economist, who can meet multiple clients at once to provide personalized wealth management advice.

Emotions are the next frontier in the metaverse. [SoulMachines](#), a New-Zealand-based technology start-up, is bringing together advances in AI (such as machine learning and computer vision) and in autonomous animation (such as expression rendering, gaze direction, and real-time gesturing) to create lifelike, emotionally-responsive digital humans. Its digital humans are taking on roles as diverse as skincare consultants, a covid health adviser, real-estate agents, and educational coaches for college applicants.

Digital human technology opens up a vast realm of possibilities for workers and organizations. Digital humans are highly scalable — they don't take coffee breaks — and can be deployed in multiple locations at once. They can be deployed to more repetitive, dull, or dangerous work in the metaverse. Human workers will increasingly have the option to design and create their own digital colleagues, personalized and tailored to work alongside them. But digital humans will also bring risks, such as increased automation and displacement of human work for lower-skilled workers who generally have fewer opportunities to move to alternative roles, or possible erosion of cultural and behavioral norms if humans become more disinhibited in their interactions with digital humans, behavior that could then carry over to their real-world interactions.

Faster Learning in the Metaverse

The metaverse could revolutionize training and skills development, drastically compressing the time needed to develop and acquire new skills. AI-enabled digital coaches could be on-hand to assist in employee training and with career advice. In the metaverse, every object — a training manual, machine, or product, for example — could be made to be interactive, providing [3-D](#) displays and step-by-step “how to” guides. Virtual reality role-play exercises and simulations will become common, enabling worker avatars to learn in highly realistic, “game

play” scenarios, such as “the high-pressure sales presentation,” “the difficult client,” or “a challenging employee conversation.”

Virtual-reality technologies are already being used in many sectors to accelerate skills development: Surgical technology company [Medivis](#) is using Microsoft’s [HoloLens](#) technology to train medical students through interaction with 3-D anatomy models; [Embodied Labs](#) have used 360-degree video to help medical workers experience the effects of Alzheimer’s Disease and age-related audiovisual impairments, to assist in making diagnoses; manufacturing giant [Bosch](#) and the Ford Motor Company have pioneered a VR-training tool, using the Oculus Quest headset, to train technicians on electric vehicle maintenance. UK-based company [Metaverse Learning](#) worked with the [UK Skills Partnership](#) to create a series of nine augmented reality training models for front-line nurses in the UK, using 3-D animation and augmented reality to test learners’ skills in specific scenarios and to reinforce best practices in nursing care.

With deep roots in online gaming, the metaverse can also start to tap the potential of gamified learning technologies for easier and faster skills acquisition. PixelMax’s O’Carroll observed: “The game becomes the learning activity. In the medical world, we’ve used gamified technologies to train lab technicians; you’ll break out in different groups and then go to, say, a virtual PCR testing machine where you’ll go through stages of learning about how operate that machine, with your training result then recorded.” For the first responder community in the UK — police, fire fighters, medical crew, etc. — PixelMax is working on games that combine physical training with immersive gamification to enable first responders to do repeat training, try different strategies, see different outcomes, and look at different ways of working as a team.

Research has established that virtual-world training can offer important advantages over traditional instructor or classroom-based training, as it provides a greater scope for visually demonstrating concepts (e.g., an engineering design) and work practices, a greater opportunity for learning by doing, and overall higher engagement through immersion in games and problem-solving through “quest-based” methods. Virtual-world learning can also make use of virtual agents, AI-powered bots that can assist learners when they get stuck, provide nudges, and set scaled challenges. The visual and interactive nature of metaverse-based learning is also likely to appeal particularly to autistic people, who respond better to visual as opposed to verbal cues. Virtual reality tools can also be used to combat social anxiety in work situations, for example by creating realistic but safe spaces to practice public presentations and meeting interactions.

New Roles in the Metaverse Economy

The internet didn’t just bring new ways of working: it brought a whole new digital economy — new enterprises, new jobs, and new roles. So too will the metaverse, as the immersive 3-D economy gathers momentum over the decade ahead. IMVU, an avatar-based social network with more than 7 million users per month, has thousands of creators who make and sell their own virtual products for the metaverse — designer outfits, furniture, make-up, music, stickers, pets — generating around \$7 million per month in revenues. Alongside the creators are the “meshers,” developers who design the basic 3-D templates that others can customize and tailor as virtual products. A successful mesh can be replicated and sold thousands of times, earning significant income for its developer. The Decentraland platform is creating virtual realtors, enabling users to buy, sell, and build businesses upon parcels of virtual land, earning a digital money called “Mana.”

Looking further ahead, just as we talk about digital-native companies today, we are likely to see the emergence of metaverse-native enterprises, companies entirely conceived and developed within the virtual, 3-D world. And just as the internet has brought new roles that barely existed 20 years ago — such as digital marketing managers, social media advisors, and cyber-security professionals — so, too, will the metaverse likely bring a vast swathe of new roles that we can only imagine today: avatar conversation designers, “holoporting” travel agents to ease mobility across different virtual worlds, metaverse digital wealth management and asset managers, etc.

Challenges and Imperatives

Despite its vast future promise, the metaverse is still in its infancy in many respects. Significant obstacles could stymie its future progress: the computing infrastructure and power requirements for a full-fledged working metaverse are formidable, and today’s metaverse consists of different virtual worlds that are not unified in the way the original internet was. The metaverse also brings a thicket of regulatory and HR compliance issues, for example around potential risks of addiction, or unacceptable behaviors such as bullying or harassment in the virtual world, of which there has been some [concern of late](#). While many issues remain, business leaders, policy makers, and HR leaders can start with the following imperatives for successful collaboration in the metaverse:

- **Make portability of skills a priority:** For workers, there will be concerns around portability of skills and qualifications: “Will experience or credentials gained in one virtual world or enterprise be relevant in another, or in my real-world life?” Employers, educators, and training institutions can create more liquid skills by agreeing upon properly certified standards for skills acquired in the metaverse, with appropriate accreditation of training providers. This will help to

avoid quality dilution and provide the necessary assurance to metaverse-based workers and future employers.

- **Be truly hybrid:** As the rush to remote work during the pandemic showed, many enterprises had been laggards when it came to the adoption of truly digital ways of working, with outdated policies, lack of infrastructure, and a strict demarcation between consumer and business technologies. Enterprises must avoid these mistakes in the metaverse, creating integrated working models from the start that allow employees to move seamlessly between physical, online, and 3-D virtual working styles, using the consumer technologies native to the metaverse: avatars, gaming consoles, VR headsets, hand-track controllers with haptics and motion control that map the user's position in the real world into the virtual world (although some versions use only cameras). Yet this is only the start. Some [companies](#) are developing virtual locomotion technologies such as leg attachments and treadmills to create realistic walking experiences. [Nextmind](#) uses ECG electrodes to decode neural signals so that users can control objects with their minds.
- **Talk to your kids:** The metaverse will force companies to completely reinvent how they think about training, with a focus on highly stimulative, immersive, challenge-based content. In designing their workplace metaverses, companies should look particularly to the younger generation, many of whom have grown up in a gaming, 3-D, socially-connected environment. Reverse intergenerational learning — where members of the younger generation coach and train their older colleagues — could greatly assist the spread of metaverse-based working among the overall workforce.
- **Keep it open:** The metaverse of today has largely emerged in an open, decentralized manner, spurred on by the efforts of millions of developers, gamers, and designers. To fully harness the power of this democratized movement for their workers, enterprises must not only guard against efforts to control or dominate the metaverse, but must

actively seek to extend and open it up even further, for example by pursuing open-source standards and software where possible, and by pushing for “interoperability” — seamless connections — between different virtual worlds. Otherwise, as we have seen in the social media sphere, the metaverse could become quickly dominated by major technology companies, reducing choice and lessening the potential for grass-roots innovation.

The workplace of the 2020s already looks vastly different from what we could have imagined just a couple of years ago: the rise of remote and hybrid working has truly changed expectations around why, where and how people work. But the story of workplace transformation doesn't end there. While still in its early stages, the emergent metaverse provides an opportunity for enterprises to reset the balance in hybrid and remote work, to recapture the spontaneity, interactivity, and fun of team-based working and learning while maintaining the flexibility, productivity, and convenience of working from home. But three things are clear. First, speed of adoption will be important. With most of the technology and infrastructure already in place, large enterprises will need to act fast to keep up with metaverse technologies and virtual services, or risk being outflanked in the market for talent by more nimble competitors. Second, the metaverse will only be successful if it is deployed as a tool for employee engagement and experiences, not for supervision and control. And, third, metaverse-based work must match the virtual experiences that workers, particularly younger workers, have come to expect of the technology in their consumer and gaming lives.

Guided by these principles, business leaders can start to imagine and create their own workplaces of the future.



Mark Purdy is an independent economics and technology advisor based in London, UK.

The “Great Resignation” Is a Misnomer

by Whitney Johnson

Published on HBR.org / April 06, 2022 / Reprint [H06YVT](#)



aluxum/Getty Images

There's a movement afoot. In the last two years, [millions of Americans](#) have left their jobs. It's the outgrowth of the tremendous disruption of the pandemic, an event unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. The mass movement began two years ago under that duress and has gained momentum even as the pandemic itself eases. It's been called the Great Resignation, but I push back against that descriptor. I am inclined instead to name it the Great Aspiration.

Having been so deeply disrupted by the pandemic and forced to make abrupt and significant changes under pressure, many people reevaluated their priorities and are now making changes of their own choosing: Where to work and for whom, where to live, whether to return to the office or continue working remotely, how to accommodate the needs of children and elderly parents, etc. All of these and other questions are being examined, and we’re finding new answers. Workers are aspiring to proactively make the life they want.

There are some exceptions, of course.

Many individuals, especially women, have been forced from the workplace to care for and educate their children during pandemic shutdowns and have not yet been able to return. Some of them, by choice or necessity, will not return. I predict that this will lead to a blossoming of “cottage industries” in the years to come — new businesses started and grown from home by resourceful and innovative workers who don’t have or don’t seek a path back into the traditional workforce. Most of them will follow new aspirations. Sadly, some will not return at all, having been permanently disrupted.

But the Great Resignation appellation is, I believe, mistaken. Most workers are not simply quitting. They are following a dream refined in pandemic adversity. They are aspiring to grow in the ways most important to them.

While this phenomenon is not something most of us have experienced at quite this scale, it is not an unprecedented event. People have faced unexpected sea change disruption before and have adapted. Consider the massive social upheaval caused by the Industrial Revolution. In the last half century, technology has displaced industry as the driver

of change in the workplace, in population movement from smaller communities into urban hubs, and in daily life.

The type of change that we’re experiencing on a global level is not new. Consider the story that one of my team members tells about her great grandfather, who was indentured to a blacksmith for seven years from age 13 to 20. He learned traditional skills like shoeing horses and building wagons. As a young married father, he moved his family from the east to the west coast, establishing his own blacksmithing business in Santa Monica, California. Early in the 20th century, in middle age, he was disrupted by the advent of the automobile. Very quickly, the demand for wagons, and shoes for the horses that pulled them, came crashing down. He evolved his skills and reinvented himself as a general contractor which, in the California boom, proved to be far more lucrative than blacksmithing could ever be. The present situation offers a similar opportunity to reimagine our career and life objectives to maximize our growth.

One of my most memorable podcast guests in this vein is Feyzi Fatehi, CEO of Corent Technologies. I share a little of his story in my new book, [Smart Growth](#). Born in Iran, Fatehi left his home as a young adolescent to attend boarding school in Cambridge, England, adjacent to the great university. The next year he was learning and growing at the Hun School, near Princeton University in the United States. While a teenager, he managed the disruption of leaving his home country and living and studying in a different country, not once but twice. Alone!

Fatehi attended college at the University of Texas, Austin, and finished his degree as the first solar engineer graduating from a program he helped create, combining architecture, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering. He told me, “As soon as I graduated, there was a change of policy in the federal government and all the tax

subsidies went away. My dream of being a solar engineer died that day. I graduated and was instantly disrupted because my market died. So, what do you do, as an immigrant, just trying to pursue happiness, education, enlightenment, and make a living?”

Fatehi is a growth-centric person, and one of the most dedicated disruptors I have met. He didn’t *resign* when his dream died; he *aspired*. He returned to school, spending three years learning the basics of another new field — software architecture, earning a master’s degree. He flipped burgers and did custodial work to pay his way. Despite a serious economic downturn when he graduated for the second time, he was offered a job at Hewlett Packard (HP) — during a hiring freeze.

At HP, he worked on a variety of cutting-edge projects with varied talented teams. Every time the work became less challenging, he would collaborate with his managers to get new opportunities. He completed an MBA, attending school part-time so he could continue with the full-time work he loved. But eventually, after 14 years, he felt he’d run out of opportunities to learn. He said, “I always told myself that when you feel too comfortable you have to move...and the learning had declined.”

He chose to leave HP to join a visionary startup working on software as a service. He took a 50% decrease in compensation and left stock options on the table. He was warned that he was committing financial suicide. But the money was less important to him than the growth opportunity. The new company was the first in its sector to achieve a billion dollars in valuation, but they were, Fatehi says, about five to seven years too early. They couldn’t continue to scale.

According to Fatehi’s account, [a 2005 article about the cloud](#) changed the game. Corent, the company that he now serves as CEO, arose from the new interest stimulated by that article. Fatehi feels good about the

transitions he’s made throughout his career: “It feels great to have the courage to have a bold idea and get behind it and make it pervasive in an industry. There’s never a boring moment, never a boring day. Tough days. Challenging days. Sleepless nights. Phenomenally exciting, inspiring days.” And he’s definitely evaded financial disaster.

Knowing that we want change, however, is not the same as knowing what change we really want. To avoid “[buyer’s remorse](#)” as we pursue our aspirations, I recommend time spent exploring these facets:

- Do you believe your new objective is achievable? Or are there intermediate steps you need to take to believe that you can succeed?
- Is it easy to test? Is there a simple, short-term way to test your aspiration to see if it’s really the good fit you’re hoping for?
- Is the new aspiration familiar enough to be achievable while still being novel enough to offer an invigorating challenge?
- Is it compatible with your identity — how you show up in the world, and how the key people in your life (parents, partners, children, close friends) anticipate that you will show up? If not, it may still be worth pursuing, but expect pushback.
- Is the reward going to be worth the cost? Leaving currently acceptable employment to pursue a dream entails costs of various kinds, not just financial ones. Spend time calculating whether the reward you anticipate is valuable enough to pay the price.
- Does it align with your values? Is it in harmony with your *why* for your life?

The Great Aspiration presents an unprecedented opportunity for organizations, as well as for workers. Yes, there will be some uncomfortable churn. We’ve experienced some on our own team and may have more. But leaders who can rapidly pivot to meet employees where they are — searching for meaning, yearning to grow, and wanting

to work for personal fulfillment as much as for compensation — can tap into the largest pool of talent on the move in several generations. Organizations can aspire also, to attract valuable new talent, rather than resigning themselves to loss.



Whitney Johnson is the CEO of Disruption Advisors, a tech-enabled talent-development company and author of [*Smart Growth: How to Grow Your People to Grow Your Company*](#).

Where We Go Wrong with Collaboration

by **Rob Cross**

Published on HBR.org / April 04, 2022 / Reprint [H06YAT](#)



Imgorhand/Getty Images

Practically everything we do at work is a collaboration. Pre-pandemic, many people spent 85% or more of their time each week in collaborative work — answering emails, instant messaging, in meetings, and using other team collaboration tools and spaces. This number has only grown throughout the pandemic, with no end in sight as we move into various forms of hybrid work.

The dilemma is that conventional wisdom on teamwork and collaboration has created too much of the wrong kind of collaboration,

which hurts our performance, health, and overall well-being.

My [Connected Commons](#) colleagues and I have spent a decade quantitatively studying how successful people — those who are top performers *and* are thriving in their work — manage collaboration in today’s hyper-connected work context. What we learned was that the more successful people were not distinguished by larger networks, but rather by more efficient ones. By collaborating in a more purposeful fashion, the successful people I studied were 18-24% more efficient than their peers.

In-depth interviews with more than 600 successful women and men showed how they accomplished this feat through three categories of behaviors:

- **Identifying and challenging beliefs** that lead us to collaborate too quickly
- **Imposing structure in our work** to prevent unproductive collaboration
- **Altering behaviors** to create more efficient collaboration

It turns out that the first category — beliefs about ourselves and our roles — is the most important of the three, accounting for 50% or more of the overall problem. When I say “beliefs,” I’m talking about deeply-held, and often unexamined desires, needs, expectations, and fears centered around how we feel we need to “show up” for others each day. A desire to help can lead us to jump into a project or debate without being asked. A need for status can prod us to drive collaborations back to ourselves. Fear can block us from saying “no” to a collaborative request that we know we can’t handle.

A first step in reducing collaborative overload is becoming aware of these internal triggers. Reflect on the statements below and consider which beliefs you need to guard against:

“My desire to help others makes me too easy an outlet for collaborative requests.”

Helping is the quintessential constructive act, and it gives us a sense of purpose, fulfills a deep need to be useful, and bolsters our identity. But if you jump in too quickly or too often or in ways that solve others’ problems without building capability, you inevitably become the path of least resistance for too many requests.

Remember that saying “yes” to one thing means saying “no” to other important priorities — both professional and personal. Be clear on these priorities and get comfortable saying “no.” Don’t solve peoples’ problems directly when you do jump in. Instead, connect them to the right people, point them to the information or resources they need, or coach them on how best to solve the problem. You will be less likely to be sought out immediately the next time — *and* you will still have helped.

“My sense of fulfillment from accomplishment leads me to engage in collaborative work that creates overload.”

The bursts of satisfaction that you get from accomplishing something can be addictive, preventing you from focusing your energy where it is needed most: the work where you add the greatest and most distinctive value.

Avoid activities that give you the sugar rush of accomplishment for accomplishment’s sake. Often these are routine and somewhat mindless activities, like fighting through all email rather than ignoring some and focusing that time on more mentally taxing work. In the extreme, some

people even confessed to writing things on a to do list for the simple joy they received from crossing them off! Extract yourself or give partial direction while building others' capabilities. If you must engage in a small task, remind yourself that good enough really is good enough.

“My desire to be influential or recognized for my expertise creates excessive reliance on me.”

The desire to influence others and be recognized can drive excessive collaborative demands back to you. Expertise can become a trap of its own: A focus on your own can prevent you from developing it in other people.

Don't continue to look for status in the expertise that defined you yesterday. Be mindful of subtle ways you comment in meetings or jump into email threads. One unintended consequence is that people might start believing they need to defer to you or get your input before advancing every single idea. In addition, you may not entirely understand the context in which your suggestion is being made; by jumping in, you may inadvertently be offering advice that won't actually help the project in the end.

“My concern with being labeled a poor performer leads me to engage in collaborations that create overload.”

The worry about getting a negative label makes it almost impossible to say “no” to a request, not only from higher-ups, but also from peers — you may be concerned that saying “no” could impact you later in invisible ways.

Don't think that saying “no” is your only option. Offer choices, such as, “What order would you like me to get these done in?” Create transparency into your capability and capacity and the volume of

demands you are already facing. Then discuss true needs and see if there is a different way to accomplish the request.

“My need to be right leads me to spend too much time preparing for and engaging in collaborative activities.”

Whatever the source of the need to be correct — a threat to your identity as a competent teammate and fear are common factors — it generates unproductive activities, pushing people to spend hours preparing for meetings, writing perfect emails, and creating excess work for everyone.

It’s better to admit that you don’t know the exact answer but are able and willing to quickly find out. By being authentic about your limits and having the courage to ask questions, you not only reduce your unproductive activities, you also create space for others to be honest about their limitations, too.

“Fear of losing control of a project — or a belief that I am the most capable person to do the work well — keeps me from delegating tasks or connecting people around me.”

Fulfilling your need for control can leave you overwhelmed. Moreover, holding onto work and delegating only to people you trust makes team members feel that their autonomy has been diminished — and so their performance lags.

Draw a line between high-risk tasks that really do require your expertise and lower-risk work that you can delegate without concern. Let go to build capability in others and free up time to engage in work where you add the greatest value. And celebrate others’ solutions and resist the temptation to point out how you would have done it differently.

“My need for closure results in communications that create unnecessary work and stress for others and drive future interactions back to me.”

An overemphasis on completeness for completeness’s sake creates unnecessary stress for your team members and may send them off chasing unclear objectives that don’t align with the team’s overall work. This happens in quick moments when, for example, you fire off ill-thought-out emails late at night to cross things off your to do list, but provide poorly thought-out directions that initiates a frenzy of activity around you.

Remind yourself that closure — or an empty email inbox — should not be a priority aim. To experiment with what this feels like, don’t answer all emails. Let non-priority work or requests either wait or slide off your radar screen altogether. Skip a meeting and see if people notice.

“My discomfort with ambiguity and managing adaptation as a project unfolds results in excessive collaborative work to overly perfect or obtain buy-in for a plan.”

Ambiguity-averse people never have enough information, a clear-enough process, or a perfect-enough plan — and so they always seek more data, more-thorough processes, and a better strategy. Their demands for these things consume hours of others’ time.

Focus on being *directionally correct* and remain open to adapting ideas and plans as new information comes in. Look to produce a solution in 20 minutes that helps move a plan ahead, rather than spending three hours to get to a more-accurate solution or employ a more thorough process.

“FOMO drives me to engage in collaborative work that creates overload.”

Too often, FOMO drives unproductive choices to jump into new collaborative projects. You may end up in projects that overburden you and that aren't well aligned with who you really want to be or what you really want from your career.

Before jumping into a new project, make sure that your plans aren't driven by an emotional, knee-jerk reaction based on fear or social comparison. Cultivate relationships in your network with people who know you well. Tap these people to develop a counter-narrative that might help you avoid making a decision based on FOMO rather than doing what is truly best for you.

• • •

Ninety percent of the people I interviewed were clearly exhausted and burned out — not from the actual workload but from collaborative demands rising exponentially before and throughout the pandemic. Yet, about one in 10 were living life more on their terms today, resulting in both higher performance and resilience at work — and thriving outside of work. A fundamental key to my 10-percenters' success was that they were more aware of triggers that led them to jump into unproductive collaborations. Think about it: Many of us today have a historically unprecedented ability to shape what we do and who we do it with that generations before us would envy. Why give this gift up?



Rob Cross is the Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Leadership at Babson College, founder of the Connected Commons, and the author of *Beyond Collaboration Overload* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2021).

How DAOs Could Change the Way We Work

by Steve Glaveski

Published on HBR.org / April 07, 2022 / Reprint [H06YZL](#)



Hiroshi Watanabe/Getty Images

Every technological revolution has transformed the way we work. The plow turned hunter-gatherers into farmers. The spinning jenny and the power loom turned farmers into factory workers. Industrial automation and computers turned factory workers into office dwellers, and then the internet fundamentally changed the way we got work done. And now, there's a new transformation on the horizon that promises to change the way we work again: Web3.

Web3 represents the next iteration of the World Wide Web. It's built upon blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies, and is characterized by greater decentralization, transparency, and shared ownership. As venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz's general partner [Chris Dixon](#) [tweeted](#), Web1 was read-only (directories), Web2 was read-write (social media), and Web3 is read-write-*own*.

Web3 looks set to transform work as we know it. And the decentralized autonomous organization, or DAO, is set to be the vehicle that leads the charge.

DAOs are effectively owned and governed by people who hold a sufficient number of a DAO's native token, which functions like a type of cryptocurrency. For example, \$FWB is the native token of popular social DAO called Friends With Benefits, and people can buy, earn, or trade it. Today, there are many different permutations of DAOs as depicted in [this image](#) from crypto investor and DAO thought leader Cooper Turley, with [some being more decentralized than others](#). DAOs run the gamut from media organizations, to venture funds and grant programs, to social networks, video games, financial and tech platforms, and philanthropic efforts.

So how exactly could DAOs change the way we work?

More Autonomy Over Where, When, and How We Work

As DAOs proliferate, instead of having one employer and a 40-hour workweek, we might contribute several hours a week to several DAOs. This is already typical amongst early adopters to the space. Today's creator economy, populated by vloggers, bloggers, and podcasters, can give us a glimpse into what the Web3 working world might look like, with the typical creator earning income from a variety

of projects such as coaching, consulting, and content monetization on various platforms such as YouTube, SubStack, and Patreon.

Freedom to Do More Fulfilling Work

The technology-centric nature of DAOs may result in rudimentary, algorithmic work being automated, freeing contributors up to be the most creative and useful versions of themselves and allowing them to spend more time on high-value activities — the type that stimulate the flow state — and less time on monotonous, shallow tasks.

While 85% of today's global workforce is disengaged at work, DAOs will give people more freedom to choose projects whose mission and vision truly resonate with them, jobs that align with their strengths, and values-aligned people to work with. This could also help to mitigate the work-life conflicts, excessive workloads, lack of autonomy, and office politics that drive workplace stress.

More Decision-Making Power

Contributors will be able to use their DAO's native tokens to vote on key decisions. You can get a glimpse into the kinds of decisions DAO members are already voting on at Snapshot, which is essentially a decentralized voting system. Having said this, existing voting mechanisms have been criticized by the likes of Vitalik Buterin, founder of Ethereum, the open-source blockchain that acts as a foundational layer for the majority of Web3 applications. So, this type of voting is likely to evolve over time.

Different Compensation Structures

While DAOs are likely to have a set of core contributors (at least in the early stages) who might be engaged on a full-time basis and even earn salaries, most people contributing to DAOs will instead complete

individual tasks, or “[bounties](#),” such as “[build a messaging app](#)” or “[moderate an online community forum](#).” Contributors can work-to-earn (W2E), and generate either native tokens or fiat currency denominated in USDC, a digital currency pegged to the US dollar, or both.

For example, I recently contributed an article to the investment DAO [Global Coin Research](#) and earned 30 of its native \$GCR tokens. These tokens can be traded on exchanges such as [UniSwap](#) for other tokens or fiat currencies, and represent ownership in a DAO — which is limited by the number of tokens in its token pool, not dissimilar to the total number of shares a corporation is limited by.

Token holders could then use platforms such as [Yearn](#) to “stake” their tokens. Staking effectively amounts to depositing tokens into a central liquidity pool where they’re used to validate blockchain transactions. Stakers earn APY (annual percentage yield), which effectively amounts to interest, which in some cases can [exceed 20%](#).

In the developing world, the play-to-earn (P2E) model, a variation of W2E, is already bearing fruit for an army of teenagers. For example, [Axie Infinity](#) is a token-based video game where gamers collect, breed, raise, battle, and trade creatures known as Axies. The game’s native token, AXS, has a [market cap](#) of \$4.3 billion at the time of writing. But unlike traditional video games, where players don’t actually *own* their characters or peripheral assets such as swords, players *own* their Axies as NFTs (non-fungible tokens) and can sell them on the [game’s marketplace](#). The average Axie gamer — typically a teenager from the Philippines — earns about \$10 to \$20 per day playing the game, on par with the country’s average salary, while the price of Axies can appreciate over time with some fetching a price of [300 ETH](#) or about \$1 million at time of writing. Axie Infinity generated [U.S. \\$1.3 billion](#)

revenues in 2021, attributable to Axie marketplace transaction fees and Axie breeding fees.

Another permutation of this model is learn-to-earn (L2E). An example is the platform RabbitHole, which pays you to learn about Web3 applications. And other permutations include create-to-earn (C2E) — such as writing articles or designing artwork in exchange for tokens, and use-to-earn (U2E), such as posting comments and engaging with Web3 social media applications such as Minds.

In addition to all of this, token holders can also speculate on their tokens, the price of which might increase in value over time based on supply and demand, much like traditional shares in a company.

Work From Anywhere

As many traditional managers with apparent trust issues continue to hide behind the cloak of “team bonding” while sending everyone back to the office in the wake of the pandemic, DAOs not only don’t care where you work, they also don’t care when you work or what you look like while you’re working — in fact, many contributors are recognized only by their NFT profile pics. Netflix co-founder Marc Randolph said on the Future Squared podcast that “in a place where you’re evaluated solely on the quality of your work, no one really cares about your appearance.”

Instead of working from a central office all year long and having two to four weeks off, most DAO contributors will likely work remotely, bond in virtual social spaces such as CryptoVoxels or The Sandbox, and for several days or weeks a year, get together in real life for inspiring conferences and retreats.

Traditional organizations that demand that their employees go into the office for two to three days a week effectively anchor their employees to life in one place — usually close to a central business district. Firms with such archaic and mobility-limiting positions will likely find it increasingly difficult to win the battle for Millennials and, in particular, Gen-Z talent.

Some might argue that DAOs, like many gig economy companies, threaten labor rights, but DAOs themselves are looking to address this. For example [Opolis](#), a digital employment cooperative, helps DAO contributors and contractors get their health insurance and 401K retirement plans in order.

The DAO movement is still in its infancy, and has a number of its own challenges to work out when it comes to governance and trust. The mainstream adoption of Web3 rests upon the resolution of questions related to user experience (UX), security, scalability, and regulatory clarity. However, at the current pace of talent acquisition, capital-raising, and innovation in the space, mainstream proliferation could happen sooner rather than later.

At its core, Web3 promises more fulfilling and outcomes-focused work, with a fairer distribution of ownership and rewards — and that is a future worth building.



Steve Glaveski is author of [Time Rich: Do Your Best Work, Live Your Best Life](#), and founder of innovation accelerator [Collective Campus](#) and web3 agency [Metavise](#). He hosts the [Future Squared](#) and [Metavise](#) podcasts. Find him on Twitter at [@steveglaveski](#).

FROM OUR SPONSOR

Businesses and organizations in nearly every industry have been forced to re-examine the nature of work — how and where work happens, what gives employees purpose, the role of technology, and how to navigate the changing needs of a modern workforce.

Now, as offices reopen and in-person activities resume, employers need to go beyond re-examining work to reimagining it. Employees everywhere want flexibility, and businesses and organizations prepared to offer it will win the talent war and stave off the Great Resignation among their workforce.

At Zoom, we help businesses and people connect so they can do more together, no matter where they are. Organizations of all sizes turned to Zoom during the pandemic for essential communication, and we're helping them transform how they connect and collaborate moving forward.

We've seen how customer needs and expectations have changed, too. Personalized experiences, on-demand service, and the ability to communicate when or how they choose — whether by phone, video, chat, or text — are no longer nice-to-haves. They are the expectation. Businesses around the world use Zoom to uplevel and reinvent their customer interactions with virtual experiences, events, video messages, and more.

As organizations enable their “anywhere workforce” to serve customers and clients from home, reimagine their workspaces for effective hybrid collaboration, and build flexibility into their culture to support employees, Zoom is here every step of the way, with solutions to help you communicate, connect, and work better.

