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WORKPLACE AUTOMATION

How the fourth industrial revolution is turning our lives, not just our jobs, upside down



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Getting social with your job applicants

Zita Goldman looks at how to effectively leverage job references and social media to find the right fit for a vacant role

Recruiters often go out of their way to gather information about job applicants beyond their jobseeker personas. The traditional way to learn about them is from their former line managers' or colleagues' references, which give the prospective employer an idea of how the candidate works within a team – whether they tend to be reconcilers or troublemakers, learn from criticism or resent it, embrace change or dread it, get ready ahead of schedule or well behind it.

References from previous employers, however, are not always fit for purpose for a couple of reasons. First of all, both chasing and writing them can be time-consuming exercises, and – unlike the prospective new employer – the former employer doesn't have a vested interest in providing one. Moreover, some employers are often hamstrung by having to comply with the basic reference policy of their company and aren't licensed to provide any information on the candidate beyond employment dates and job roles.

Although the costs of repeating the recruitment procedure if a new employee underwhelms are well known, HR departments often adopt a frugal approach to getting references – even if it would be money well spent. Carefully designed, GDPR-compliant questionnaires completed by former co-workers can provide a treasure trove of relevant information about the candidate, especially if it's completed by more than two referees (recruitment specialists recommend requesting five to seven references for senior roles).

What can turn references into an even more powerful recruitment tool is timing. Thanks to the cost-saving mindset mentioned above, references are typically provided following the job interview. After a successful interview, by that time – more often than not – the halo effect has kicked in and the references serve only as a confirmation of a decision that's already done and dusted. Therefore, any disconcerting details from former employers at this

stage are likely to be overlooked. Bringing reference checks forward in the selection process may give more weight to their findings and contribute to better choices.

How can social media inform recruitment decisions?

Although some statistics suggest that 94 per cent of recruiters use social media, the extent to which they rely on this channel ranges from informal checks on personal accounts, to hosting job boards on the brand's Facebook site, to directly messaging talent in a sector-specific LinkedIn community.

Running social media checks on job applicants is a bit of a grey area. For recruiters it's a great opportunity to take a peek into the candidate's informal self and natural habitat. Job seekers, on the other hand, are either blissfully unaware of the damage their personal social media activity can do to their career, or play catch-up by changing visibility settings and removing dodgy pictures to make sure no future employer is deterred by their account.

As for the charge of businesses stalking prospective employees on Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest, although a clear-cut line could originally be drawn between private and professional social media sites, this distinction is getting increasingly fuzzy. For small businesses a social media account on Facebook is a great opportunity to build an online presence at low cost, while big brands use theirs as a marketing tool. Very often, individuals also set up a professional account on these so-called private websites to have better exposure.

From serendipity to an established HR practice

Social recruitment – the sourcing of candidates through social media platforms – however, is a far more resource-intensive and strategic exercise than just screening candidates via social media. It involves building up a corporate hub on social media by providing online content, infographics, posts and videos of current employees and updates of company events.

The strategic purpose of this social media presence is to create a talent pool of individuals interested in the company's values and activities, and who have skillsets that make them potential future candidates. Some businesses even grant special insider status to these individuals, which enables them to participate in Q&As, chats with employees about the work culture, corporate values or even open positions. Company advocates, inspired employees who highlight the advantages of working for the company on various platforms, have a major role to play in making this social media community more robust.

Although social recruitment is regarded as resource-intensive and requires a separate social media-savvy recruiting team, there seems to be a consensus about its efficacy. Advanced search features of social media sites can help identify the right talent. By setting up or joining groups specific to a sector or industry, recruiters can approach and engage with potential recruits, who will be more comfortable about being solicited for jobs as it comes from someone in their online community.

The biggest potential of this emerging recruitment method lies precisely in the ability to reach out to passive candidates who aren't active jobseekers but may be ready to jump ship for an irresistible offer. This is more head-hunter territory than the remit of online job boards.

Currently, however, online jobsites are still the first port of call for corporate hiring teams. But if a study of Boston-based marketing company Aberdeen Group, which found that 73 per cent of millennials (those between 18 and 34) found their last position via a social media platform is anything to go by, this may change rather soon. As they, and the digital-native Generation Z cohort after them, are gradually becoming the backbone of the labour force, they will set the trends that the rest of us – including jobseekers and recruiters alike – will need to follow. 



How virtual production is redefining the filmmaking process

Virtual production has exploded in popularity due to a demand for incredibly high-quality film and TV production, at a fraction of the time and cost. With the rise of large-scale production companies such as Netflix and Amazon, audiences are spoiled for choice while filmmakers face the challenge of delivering visually stunning productions at a rate unimaginable in pre-streaming days.

To meet this huge demand, filmmaking processes need to be reviewed. Traditional film production occurs in a linear phase: scenes are storyboarded, actors are filmed on set, location or greenscreen, then visual effects teams add the finishing touches during post-production. But this is both lengthy and expensive as teams can only see and decide on the final output during post-production.

What if these creative decisions could be brought in much earlier in the process? Virtual production enables filmmakers to render photorealistic computer-generated scenes on an LED background and interactively visualise them in real time.

With much of this technology rooted in gaming, filmmakers can now build incredibly high-quality scenes with game engines such as Unreal Engine. Together with high-power graphics cards, camera

tracking and augmented and mixed reality, these technologies marry the digital and physical world, where what you see in camera is what you get.

disguise, a leader in extended reality, envisioned a solution where all these technologies integrate into one core workflow, breaking down barriers between creative and technical implementation. Our Extended Reality (xR) platform for virtual production takes in the real-time rendered CG content and delivers it into the physical LED space, at any scale.

disguise xR brings everyone together – from the director to the producers and the talent on stage – enabling them to see how their scenes will progress and make creative decisions on the fly, improving content using the disguise software.

With disguise xR, filmmakers can capture the creative magic of working together as they would with physical sets, while minimising the amount of time, money and uncertainty of conventional post-production.

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Discover everything you need to know about xR at web.disguise.one/xRguide marketing@disguise.one disguise.one/en/xr

The office is stepping down to make way for the laptop

With the majority of businesses embracing remote or hybrid work, laptops have become emblematic of the conventional office. They represent, almost in their entirety, what the office once stood for: a place for work, collaboration and communication. With this change in dynamic comes new challenges, opportunities and considerations that will have three direct consequences for businesses.

Embracing remote employees will open your organisation up to a global talent pool

The beauty of life is that no two people are the same, so why should businesses treat them as anything other than unique? When we're untethered from the office yet still able to work (thanks in no small part to laptops), it encourages personal accountability for our own lives, irrespective of an office location. It means employees could be located anywhere in the world and still be working, and organisations can fully realise the strategic advantages of being a truly global business.

This new freedom afforded to employees makes them more loyal, engaged and productive, because they're worrying less about where or when they're working and thinking more about what they need to get done. Geographical autonomy also opens the organisation up to talent across the world, spurring innovation and diversity



in the workforce as well as a spike in productivity.

The relationship between the employee and the business will evolve

An opportunity has arisen for organisations to create a much closer and more personalised relationship with every employee in the long term. Here's why. In the office world, employees' first and main point of contact was their manager. So it was down to managers to monitor engagement, satisfaction and productivity, and feed back to HR if anything was amiss.

That changed when the pandemic hit. It became the collective responsibility of HR teams, IT organisations, and line managers to check in on employees they could no longer physically see, whether that be to monitor wellbeing or check they had the right equipment to work from home.

Enlightened IT and HR teams used this unprecedented scenario to discover new ways to engage with employees via laptops, effectively deploying experience and sentiment analysis to respond to challenges as they faced them. This strategy will only mature further in the world of hybrid work, obviating the need for full-time office workers.

Employers will adopt a more outcome-based contract with the workforce

Traditionally, work contracts have specified core working hours as a stipulation for good work. But that sort of agreement didn't work too well during the pandemic: parents had to care for young children around work, some had to care for older relatives, others experienced personal grief or mental health problems as the virus ravaged every nation. It was virtually impossible for

work to continue as normal. Forward-thinking organisations quickly realised that it mattered not whether an employee's status light stayed green, but that things got done. What we saw was a shift from presenteeism to objectivism.

"Objectivism" is a focus on what you want an employee to achieve, not how many hours they work. What does this mean in practice? That organisations can ensure all employees are working to a common goal, driving business success and know what they need to achieve around their responsibilities outside the workplace. It doesn't matter what time of day work is done (with obvious exceptions), just that it is.

Reshaping our approach to device management

There's no doubt that laptops will be the driving engine of long-term hybrid working and where meaningful experiences are created. It seems only logical, therefore, that we give them the same amount of thought and consideration as we give to physical office spaces. In the long term, organisations' plans to move to hybrid working require a robust process for managing employees' experiences so our people can be productive and engaged no matter where they are.

INDUSTRY VIEW

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The race office for space

Work was already changing before Covid, but a year later, the nine-to-five sofa slog has left many missing the human element of day-to-day working life. Paul Bray looks at whether flexible shared office solutions are now a viable third way as we approach the dreaded “new normal”

It's tough at the top, and for Nicole Clemens, CEO of brand design agency Design by Structure, the decisions start the moment she arrives at the office. Where to work today? A concentrated burst at her own desk, a team brainstorm in the collaboration area, a confidential phone call in one of the quiet booths? Or should she chill among the plants seeking her next Big Idea, take in the sun on the terrace, or swap insights with a complete stranger while the kettle boils for coffee?

Welcome to the sometimes surreal, often enriching (and almost always cheaper) world of the shared office – in this case Fora's centre in Shoreditch, east London. Clemens moved in a year ago, achieving the Tardis-like coup of significantly reducing her firm's office footprint and costs, while gaining the use of a lot more spaces, plus instant membership of a buzzing hive of like-minded businesses.

The watchword of shared office accommodation is choice, with options ranging from ad hoc hot-desking in a communal space to fully private office suites with shared facilities, and even arrangements with two or more firms sharing the same space on different days.

“Tenancy agreements are much more flexible than traditional long-term leases, and all building and facilities services are managed by the operator, leaving the tenant with one monthly bill that covers the lot,” says Julian Cooper, managing director of serviced office operator Clarendon Office Group. “According to the Flexible Space Association there are more than 6,000 flexible offices in the UK.”

London accounts for almost a third of the UK's flexible office centres, according to the UK Flex Market Review by workspace



“Historically this type of space was the preserve of start-ups and entrepreneurs, but we’re now seeing larger corporate firms take flexible workspace, from HSBC to Facebook” – Steve Jude, Newflex

innovation specialist Instant Group. But this balance is shifting in favour of suburbs and satellite towns, perhaps as staff seek a better work-life balance and their employers seek lower costs.

Monthly rates for flexible premises tend to be in the £200-£400 range per workstation depending on location – significantly cheaper than many conventional offices. On top of this, the pandemic-enforced shift towards more home and flexible working has dented demand, especially in city centres.

“Covid-19 has made flexible offices a buyer's market,” says Amanda Lim, head of flexible office solutions at real estate consultancy Knight Frank. “Most providers have reassessed their asking rents and considered discounts and incentives, with some even adding ‘Covid-19’ clauses promising greater flexibility in the event of another lockdown, or in the most extreme cases the ability to tear up your contract with a month's notice.”

“We're seeing landlords offering rent-free periods and the first six months at half price,” adds Nick Riesel, founder of commercial property agency Free Office Finder. Although he adds that, “If price is an issue, it's worth being savvy and trying to take space now before everyone starts returning to the office.”

However, while cost plays a part, the bigger attraction of shared office space is flexibility, according to Steve Jude, CEO of flexible office operator Newflex. “Long before Covid-19, we saw big spikes in interest when the EU referendum was announced. During uncertain times, the last thing tenants want is to be tied into an inflexible 10-year lease. Businesses scale up and down, and a flexible office gives them the freedom for this.”



Shared offices: top tips

Culture... You want a space that feels right, so pay a visit and consider whether the culture would fit with your company. *Julian Cooper, Clarendon Office Group*

Test drive... Ask for a free trial day. It's a great way to see if the space works for you. *Nick Riesel, Free Office Finder*

Scalability... Talk to operators about how easy it would be to scale up or down, and how much notice they would need. *Julian Cooper*

Staff... Listen to your employees, understand what they want out of an office and how often they want to attend. *Steve Jude, Newflex*

Security... Consider the data protection implications of sharing office space and ensure you're storing and processing data securely. This includes shared support services such as reception desks. *Nick Carter, Boyes Turner*

Be brave... Embrace the change, allow your team to help you find solutions, don't be afraid to try something new. *Nicole Clemens, Design by Structure*

The lion's share (80 per cent) of demand for flexible space still comes from individuals and small businesses, according to Instant. But just as there is no one-size-fits-all space provider, so there is no identikit tenant.

"Historically this type of space was the preserve of start-ups and entrepreneurs, but we're now seeing larger corporate firms take flexible workspace, from HSBC to Facebook," says Jude. "We're seeing a shift to the 'hub and spoke' model, where firms will have a downsized HQ supported by smaller, shared spaces in additional locations. We recently launched a 'local' initiative where users of our London locations have free access to our suburban locations closer to their homes. This kind of flexibility will become commonplace."

The main sticking point for firms looking to go flexible tends to be the lease on their existing premises. "Unless the tenant has a right to terminate the lease early, they'll usually be limited to some standard options, such as putting the lease on the market with commercial agents and looking to either transfer the lease to a new tenant or grant an underlease of all or part of the space to a new undertenant," says Nick Carter, partner and head of property at law firm Boyes Turner. "However, with many companies still working from home and others looking to market their space, supply exceeds demand

in some areas, making the prospects of disposal challenging."

The HR aspects of the move may also require sensitivity. When PR agency Mandate Creative moved to a flexible space in central London run by The Office Group, it consulted its whole team, individually and collectively,

to identify any areas of concern. "We found some people put great emphasis on having a fixed desk and were hesitant to go virtual," says managing partner Stu Campbell-Carran. "But within days of the move they all preferred it."

"The extra amenities of flexible offices, such as rooftop terraces, gyms, yoga classes, meditation rooms and large cafes, can boost employee satisfaction, productivity and wellbeing, and incentivise people to return to the office after months of working from home," adds Lim.

Some firms may feel anxious about discarding the homely carapace that makes their own offices feel special. But Campbell-Carran found the opposite. "In a shared office there's no way of amassing piles of random 'stuff'. Co-working spaces work beautifully because you've cut the ties of the traditional office and can work in a nimble, progressive and fuss-free way."

For Design by Structure, the shift to flexible premises has been something of a watershed. "The new office has made us completely rethink how we use and appreciate space and manage certain aspects of our business activities, such as leaving our printer behind and moving to more digital ways of working," says Clemens. "Moving into a shared space has certainly changed our business for the better." ■

Hybrid working is so much more than a choice between home and office



It's a truth universally acknowledged that the world of work has been changed forever by the pandemic. But while no one expects a return to traditional ways of working, opinions are divided about what the workspace of the future will look like.

The conventional wisdom is that when restrictions lift, most people will choose to split their work time between home and office. But that betrays a lack of imagination and a failure to grasp the true impact of what we're going through. The much-vaunted hybrid model of working will not be a binary choice, it will be something altogether more profound. And the most progressive employers are quickly taking action to drive change.

The concept of the physical office as a core part of an organisation's operating model will not disappear. Indeed, the role of the office will grow but it will become more intentional in its design and purpose. The old workplace model based on supervision and oversight is giving way to one based on autonomy and trust. The familiar patterns of office life are important, but they will sit alongside a new world of employee-centred choice.

TOG was founded in 2003 with a mission to reinvent the office space market and improve the way people work. Today, TOG is the leading design-led provider of flexible workspace, with more than 50 buildings across the UK and Germany.

Having a Work Space at TOG gives you access to so much more than just an office. It's a passport to a host of working areas, gyms, yoga studios, meeting rooms, lounges, screening rooms, meditation rooms, cafés, bars, roof gardens and event spaces.

Tasks such as team meetings, problem solving, client presentations, one-to-ones, quality thinking time, content generation and even relaxing may be best performed in a different setting or in a different location depending on a host of variables. Employers that offer this kind of dynamic working model will have a big head start in the future battle for talent.

Traditionally, larger corporates have used flexible office space to solve short-term tactical problems, rather than as part of the strategic management of people and assets. The pandemic is forcing a reappraisal of who the right partners are for these organisations. At the same time, the flexible office market is realising

“The concept of the physical office as a core part of an organisation will not disappear. Indeed, the role of the office will grow but it will become more intentional in its design and purpose”

it needs to evolve so that it can serve the needs of larger corporates.

That requires a service culture rooted in deep real estate expertise – a “best of both worlds” proposition that marries sophisticated customer experience management with a modern, agile approach to structuring solutions and service agreements.

At TOG we are already partnering with a number of corporates, from providing a new model for their key offices through to the creation of a dispersed campus of locations across London that augments a large HQ.

The scale and agility of the TOG platform is steadily attracting more and more big employers, including bp. The energy giant has leased Douglas House, a 50,000ft² property that will provide a new hub for the company's venturing, digital and mobility futures teams, providing 700 desks for 1,000 employees and including showcase and presentation areas,

a barista bar and a state-of-the-art gym, as well as a roof garden and event space.

The hub will bring together technology- and innovation-focused teams currently spread across different London locations. As part of their TOG membership, bp staff will have access to the entire TOG platform including coworking spaces, video conferencing booths, tech-enabled meeting rooms and event spaces across all of London.

Companies such as bp, Ocado, GSK and a slew of high-profile tech firms known for their world-leading workplace strategies are working with TOG to lead the charge towards a more progressive way of working. Even before the pandemic struck, these businesses were embracing a future that offers much more than a binary choice between home and office, adapting their employer proposition to meet the evolving needs of their people.

Change in working practices is not new, but the pandemic has rewritten the rules once again. Employers that fail to embrace the shift will be left behind.

INDUSTRY VIEW

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Automatic for the people

We live in an age of updating, upgrading, upskilling and upheaval. But if businesses are to truly benefit, they need to understand that the fourth industrial revolution is only getting started – and that its effects will be felt far beyond just our working lives. Nick Martindale investigates

When the internet was created as a military communication system, no one could have foreseen the impact it would have on global society or economies 50 years later. The so-called fourth industrial revolution – itself a consequence of the internet – will almost certainly be a similar tale.

“For me, the fourth industrial revolution is the combination of future technologies, building on top of [the third], the digital industrial revolution,” says James Denning, senior vice president, EMEA, at Silicon Valley software company H2O.ai. “It’s around artificial intelligence, machine learning, chatbots and software robotics, but mainly technology starting to perform knowledge-based tasks traditionally done by humans.”

In the corporate world, 70 per cent of UK businesses have accelerated digital transformation programmes this year, despite the challenges of Covid-19, according to research by Dell, while a study by Virgin

Media Business and the Centre for Economics and Business Research suggests sustained investment in transformative digital technologies could help grow UK GDP by £232 billion (6.9 per cent) by 2040 – an economic boost of similar magnitude to the GDP of Finland or South Africa.

Thus far, though, the impact has been relatively

the next big advances and things like AI when we haven’t even fully realised the potential, and reaped the benefits, of something as simple as analytics.”

It’s a message echoed by Maynard Williams, managing director at Accenture Technology in the UK and Ireland. “These capabilities can be applied in almost any organisation

“Digital transformation is not about deploying new technology, but changing how the whole organisation works, interacts and communicates” – Chris Underwood

limited. Caroline Carruthers, CEO and founder of global data consultancy Carruthers and Jackson, and former chief data officer at Network Rail, believes there’s been a “false start” when it comes to AI and digital transformation. “Everyone has focused on the big and exciting stuff like automation without properly building up the foundations that underpin them,” she warns. “It’s always funny to hear people talking about

and have the power to change all industries,” he says. “However, they will only develop successfully if businesses build the right foundations with one key technology: the cloud. There’s been a lot of hype surrounding these technologies over the past decade, but it’s only now as businesses create this foundation for them to scale that we’ll start to see their real value.”

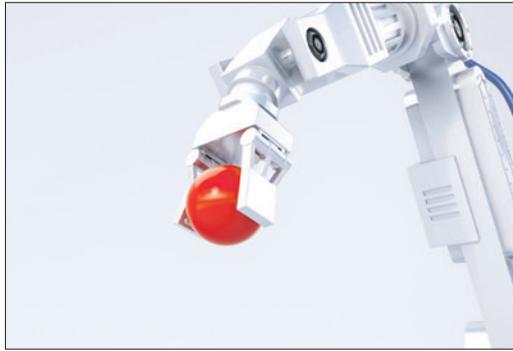
There are signs, though, that such technologies are



starting to be adopted in a more strategic fashion. “A few years ago, many of these technologies were applied individually, as pilots or for high-impact, operational systems,” says Ken Figueredo, senior representative at oneM2M, the international standards body for machine-to-machine and the internet of things (IoT). “Now they are central to the business agenda of most organisations. Users and solution providers also recognise that the components are complementary and self-reinforcing.

“For example, industrial IoT technologies enable connectivity and supply data to AI or machine learning algorithms which, in turn, enable better insights and consistent decision-making. This has an impact on change management, operational staffing and the need to recruit personnel with different skills. The resulting efficiency gains, engineering innovation and commercial incentives trigger a further round of investments in AI, machine learning and industrial IoT enablers.”

But it’s fair to say the most exciting use cases lie in the future. Karthik Krishnan is global CEO of Britannica Group and adjunct professor at New York University – Stern School of Business, and is optimistic. “These technologies will put us in hyperdrive



and forever transform systems, including education, politics, finance and how we live, work and play,” he says. “With a green orientation, we will go from altering and manipulating material properties to altering and manipulating biological functions to live more harmoniously with

“It’s pointless having driverless cars if they’re driving down streets where people are starving” – Caroline Carruthers

nature. We’ll be able to ‘print’ food and replace body parts at will. It’s not hard to imagine how that will disrupt traditional supply chains and change how we farm.”

On a personal level, this should filter through into better work/life balance, believes Carruthers. “This should be the core driving force behind the next industrial revolution; it’s

pointless having driverless cars if they’re driving down streets where people are starving,” she says. “We have the ability to totally redefine society with data and technology we would never have thought possible even 20 years ago.” She gives the example of a surgeon in Newcastle using connected technology, robotics and a super-fast networking to perform live surgery in Rio de Janeiro, helping to share expertise around the world.

The use of AI in a medical context could be particularly appealing, believes Bart Vanneste, an associate professor at UCL School of Management. “Sometimes people prefer dealing with anonymised interfaces,” he points out. “If you are overweight, you might be worried about talking to someone about that as you could be afraid they might judge you. If you are telling a robot that, it will only digest the information and make a recommendation on the best course of action or medication.”

One issue for businesses will be skills, particularly the need to retain staff. According to the World Economic Forum’s latest Future of Jobs report, 50 per cent of employees will need reskilling by 2025 as the adoption of technology increases. “Repetitive tasks are unlikely to prosper,” says Antonio Espingardeiro,

You say you want a revolution...

Concerns over the impact of new technology on society and economies are nothing new...

The first industrial revolution (1760-1840) used water and steam to mechanise production, transforming factory processes and accelerating the UK’s shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy. It gave rise to the Luddites, a group of English workers who destroyed machinery, especially in cotton and woollen mills, between 1811 and 1816

The second industrial revolution (1870-1914) saw advancements in manufacturing and production technology, paving the way for the expansion of rail and telegraph lines and the advent of electricity. In 1913, Henry Ford installed the first moving automotive assembly line

In 1986, the Wapping dispute saw print workers

strike over plans by Rupert Murdoch’s News International to move production to a new plant which allowed journalists to enter copy directly rather than using print workers. The strike failed and 6,000 print workers were dismissed, ushering in a new age of modern publishing facilities

Even though the fourth industrial revolution is still being shaped, the fifth is also underway, with a message that will sound familiar. “The fifth industrial revolution envisages high-performance connectivity between humans and robots, as well as objects from the surrounding and operational industrial environment,” says Marina Ruggieri, professor of telecommunications at Tor Vergata University of Rome.

IEEE member and software and robotics expert.

This may require fundamental cultural change. “Digital transformation is not about deploying a new technology but changing how the whole organisation works, interacts, communicates, and wins and manages customers,” says Chris Underwood, MD at executive search and leadership development firm Adastrum Consulting. “The focus needs to be on HR teams to train the workplace across all functions, and leadership teams to remain curious and seek to understand the risks and rewards of the digital ecosystem.”

While some jobs will inevitably disappear or

evolve, the fourth industrial revolution will also create entirely new roles. Figures from job site Indeed reveal vacancies for jobs with the term “robotics” in the title surged by 21 per cent in 2020. “Robotics software and maintenance engineers are the most in-demand job titles, while certain medical roles such as surgery theatre practitioners also require robotics skills,” says Jack Kennedy, UK economist at Indeed. “Alongside the e-commerce, distribution and healthcare sectors, consulting and professional services firms are posting many robotics jobs. [They] are also on the rise in the tech, finance, recruitment and higher education sectors.”



In fact, a lack of skills is one of the factors holding back the development of new technologies, warns Mike Carter, president, enterprise, at satellite communication firm Inmarsat, drawing on the results of research the company did in 2018. “Over half (56 per cent) of businesses surveyed reported a need for additional staff with expertise in digital security, 48 per cent required more in-house skills in data analytics and 42 per cent needed more staff with technical support expertise,” he says. “Additionally, 37 per cent of all organisations indicated they would benefit from new skilled staff to drive the strategic development, management and deployment of the internet of things.”

Yet there are limits to any kind of technology. Richard Justenhoven, director of global products at Aon’s Assessment Solutions, gives the example of AI being used to improve efficiency when making hiring decisions. “Working with data-generated information saves time, work and provides a solid shortlist,” he says. “But humans

make the final decision on hiring. People remain in control.”

Colin Parris, senior vice president and chief technology officer at GE Digital, warns against expecting technology to work perfectly every time. “Take a wind turbine, for example,” he says. “If it operates in mild weather conditions day after day, it will have consistent data that will enable it to make ‘closed loop’ decisions for itself. But let’s say a 100-year storm hits. Suddenly, the data is no longer consistent. As soon as the turbine recognises that, it will flag for a human to help fix the issue.”

Carruthers believes the biggest benefits may yet to be identified. “It’s important to remember that some of the biggest revolutions and innovations have come about due to mistakes,” she says. “New jobs, new industries, better work/life balance – anything is achievable, which is what makes a revolution like this so exciting. It’s a little bit like when you give a kid some Lego: they can build anything they want, with the only limitation being their own imagination.” ■



The future home office is global

We used to have offices because we defined work within constraints of both time and place. We had set working hours and locations that shaped how we worked.

But in recent years tools have become available to enable us to work differently, and the concept of the office is rapidly becoming dated. Start-ups and innovators were already finding new paths, but it took Covid-19 to accelerate change more widely across the board.

So as we look forward to the end of lockdown, what will the office become? Will there be a permanent change in our concept of where, when and how work happens?

Where you are is less important than making things happen

Covid has taught people to work in a distributed way. And if you can work with your team anywhere, why not employ people globally? Distributed working makes national boundaries irrelevant, and legal and financial compliance is not the headache many fear. Adaptavist was founded in the UK, but now more than half of our people are based in other countries. We benefit from the best of global talent, diversity in thinking and a follow-the-sun operating model. There’s no reason

this thinking can’t apply to knowledge-based business, leading ultimately to global campuses of home offices.

Working when you want makes time zones irrelevant

Say you worked nine-to-five in the UK because those were the company rules. This means you could never work with someone based in California because your day finished as theirs began. When you can work when you want, as long as the job gets done you can organise your time to get the best results for your tasks and your life.

Unlocking the workflow constraint

Digitally transformed businesses have cultures that allow them to adapt to threats and opportunities. Adaptive organisations do not need change to always come from the top down – ideas can come from anywhere when people can collaborate with each other. For this to happen, information needs to flow freely and across business functions. A DevOps approach to business will help organisations with continual experimentation and learning so they can adapt to thrive, whatever the future holds.

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The open route to 5G

Guy Clapperton talks to Stefano Cantarelli, chief marketing officer at Mavenir

Imagine there was a major new technology that was going to transform everybody's life. Conspiracy theories aside, it was going to make everything faster, and enable objects such as autonomous vehicles to communicate with each other instantaneously so the world would be safer and more efficient.

Now add a caveat or two. Assume the operators of this new technology were dependent on two providers who offered both the hardware and software, with many competitors having dropped out over the years. This might be as much due to politics as technology or business. Add to this the idea that the existing version of this new technology is essentially plastered over old infrastructure and consider also that it's a closed technology, so anyone wanting to add bits will have to master the gateway into it rather than use a common open interface.

The 5G duopoly

These are all elements of the infrastructure that currently makes up 5G, the super-fast wireless network currently being rolled out across the world. And this is what concerns Stefano Cantarelli, chief marketing officer of Mavenir, a disruptive and innovative player in the global telecommunications space. His main worry is the absence of competition. An industry veteran, he has seen the mobile network infrastructure providers dwindle from a vibrant community to effectively just two players, Nokia and Ericsson, with Huawei the most recent to exit because of political concerns.

"Without competition you find companies sit back and take a rest," he says. "Without competition



there is no innovation. And although there's no sign of it happening, if either of the infrastructure providers came into difficulties in the coming years we'd really end up in trouble."

Opening up a new model

The difficulties with the existing infrastructure are numerous, Cantarelli argues, partly because it is restricted so the hardware manufacturer makes the software as well. A preferable model is Open RAN (Radio Access Network), in which the whole structure is virtualised and made multi-vendor. Mavenir is one of a number of companies promoting this new approach.

Virtualisation consists of making the software independent of the hardware so it is possible to fire up a virtual computer (or other device) anywhere. This allows an

infrastructure to be set up anywhere, offering extreme flexibility.

There are obstacles. Inertia is one of them. There was an adage in the IT industry 30 years ago: nobody ever got fired for buying IBM. The same holds true of the current "safe" options, which is why Mavenir is calling on governments to incentivise mobile carriers to adopt the Open RAN infrastructure. Its openness allows smaller, local companies to add specific products and functions without having to master both hardware and software production. This would widen participation and make competition and therefore innovation better. "Some governments are already helping," says Cantarelli, "with tax, with help finding premises and with incentives that support the local economy."

Equally importantly, Open RAN allows for a more thorough implementation of what's known as standalone 5G: at the moment nearly all the 5G service in the world consists of a 5G radio signal overlaid on 4G or older infrastructure. Think about putting performance petrol, suited to racing cars, in a family vehicle and you get the idea. Open RAN, with its virtualised multi-vendor approach, makes it possible to get the best of all worlds, allowing the use of one company's radio signal with another's processors.

Unlocking 5G for everyone

Currently, the unit that distributes a network signal and the radio signal that carries it are locked together, which means the supplier must specialise in both. It has to be a giant, which is why there are now only two. Governments, and indeed mobile network operators, would like there to be more.

According to the Telecoms Infrastructure Project – a Facebook-backed industry group looking to help extend advanced mobile network services – there are now 15 commercial deployments of Open RAN across the world, with Vodafone UK among them. A further 50 trials of the technology are also happening.

Open RAN is a powerful alternative in a market whose operators are demanding a greater choice. It opens the field up to smaller, more localised suppliers, who will need to innovate to compete. Cantarelli is clear: although his job is in marketing, his soul is in technology. "I am all about those technologies that disrupt the way we work," he says, "And this is the biggest disruptor to this established market for 20 years."

INDUSTRY INTERVIEW

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Embrace the golden age of contingent workforces

Among those who study and monitor the world of work, there is a growing sentiment that we have entered a golden age of contingent workforces. External talent has become both an inextricable part of strategic workforce planning and a critical competitive differentiator for post-Covid growth. The contingent workforce is delivering significant value for employers, but what do the latest contingent trends mean for organisations, and how can employers ensure they grasp this opportunity?

Increasing ED&I

The events of 2020 have driven equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) to the top of the corporate agenda. This focus has extended ED&I initiatives to talent suppliers, managed services providers and recruitment outsourcing firms. To truly cultivate diversity, external talent partners need to reflect an inclusive culture and a commitment to ED&I to credibly sustain outreach and engagement efforts amongst the communities they support. Without this commitment from partners, enterprises risk falling short of their aspirations to foster ED&I as a public and corporate good.

Focus on statement of work

With budget control crucial, more businesses have reviewed their external workforce spend. For many, it quickly became clear last year that

there were gaps of information relating to purchased and outsourced services managed through SoWs. At the same time, the quick shift to remote work heightened the focus on how projects are structured and managed. In this new environment, a preference has emerged toward outcome and deliverable based purchasing to streamline budgets, improve supplier accountability and increase visibility to enable organisations to effectively scale workforces up and down.

A strong contingent voice

In a similar vein, the ability to complete a holistic workforce diagnostic and identify who is employed and how they are contracted has never been so important. A “contingent voice” needs to be at the table now and in a post-Covid environment. Unless this opportunity is supported with continued action to improve external workforce engagement, the opportunity to benefit from total talent management will be diluted.

Those organisations that grasp this opportunity to capitalise on these trends and maintain the momentum will be the drivers of economic recovery post-Covid. Will your firm be one of them?

INDUSTRY VIEW

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Why establishing trust is more important than monitoring productivity

In the wake of Covid-19, many organisations – and employees – are concerned about maintaining productivity. The shift to remote working, combined with the challenges of balancing career and caring responsibilities has led to the need for more flexibility.

Providing this flexibility requires trust, and while some organisations have put their employees under scrutiny, those that understand the importance of trust have focused on enabling them to work in a way that accommodates these trying times.

Employees at all levels are already facing huge amounts of stress and anxiety, which is proven to undermine performance. Measures such as employee monitoring software only intensify these pressures, creating the perfect conditions for burnout.

Instead of focusing on short-term gains at the expense of employee health and wellbeing, now is the time to put more trust in your people. Studies have shown that employees working for organisations with high levels of trust are more productive, have more energy at work, collaborate better with their colleagues and stay with their employers longer.

Building trust takes time, but it doesn't require putting blind faith in your employees. As an

organisation you can invest in technology that enables you to understand the needs of your employees in real time, encourages management behaviours that establish trust, and creates a feedback culture that relies on transparency and accountability.

In doing so, it's possible to create an organisational culture that is more enjoyable for everyone involved, while still delivering high levels of performance and productivity.

Based on 10 million survey responses, our data reveals that Peakon customers improved employee engagement by 2 per cent between January and July 2020. Employees felt most positive about the ability to work remotely, the change to their working environment and the support given for their mental health.

Covid-19 has forced organisations to make changes in months that might once have taken years. Those that have embraced this transformation and provided the trust and support that employees need are the same ones more likely to prosper in the new normal.

INDUSTRY VIEW

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Download the full report at Peakon.com/heartbeat



The financial health of businesses in the UK isn't the only thing to have suffered as a result of Covid-19. So too has the wellbeing of employees, who arguably stand as the most vital asset of any business. The human cost of the pandemic, beyond the physical healthcare burden, has been staggering – referrals for mental health support services, especially among young people, have skyrocketed. Many of those seeking help will be working professionals, and many may be struggling to admit to their colleagues the full scale of the toll this past year has taken on them.

Covid-19 hasn't acted alone to produce such significant levels of economic and human insecurity. Brexit has had a similarly destabilising effect, giving rise to a whole range of unknowns that threaten to undermine the health of companies across the board. Will the cost of doing business rise steeply? Will the recession force some to go under? Will EU staff face problems continuing with their employment?

The confluence of the two has produced great uncertainty and instability. But within crises lie opportunities – in this case, to better determine how the workforce can become more productive and resilient, how companies can better retain existing staff and attract new personnel, and how management can meet the complex and diverging needs of their employees.

Keep 'em keen

The time spent out of the office over the past year will have prompted workers across the country to re-evaluate where their priorities lie. Many will have found that the new arrangements work for them: they no longer have to commute, and they can spend more time with their family. They may also realise they can work from anywhere. For some, the prospect of returning to the old ways doesn't appeal.

This is something businesses have to reckon with. How, when staff have experienced something different to traditional ways of working, can they hold onto their prized employees? How can closer attention be paid to their wellbeing?

Why people power is at the core of your business

After a year of upheaval many firms have found their staff to be their greatest untapped resource. Paying attention to their needs and managing and hiring intelligently can pay off hugely in the long term, writes Francis Andrews



And how can businesses meet the demands of a rapidly changing employment landscape?

Proactive management: Struggling employees will often feel reluctant to come clean on the exact nature of their burdens. This can happen both at the micro-level – a mistake has been made and a staff member tries to bury it – and at the macro: someone is feeling anxious or burned out, but isn't confident they'll be listened to. Management must proactively encourage people to come forward, by developing a culture of openness and understanding and by enabling staff to speak candidly. This can be done via walking catch-ups or "drop in" sessions, and by signalling clearly that mental health will be treated the same as physical health. In the post-pandemic era, this openness might be seen as the new baseline for a healthy workplace, and it will have a measurable impact on staff retention and performance, and in turn the overall health of the business.

Employee engagement: Keeping hold of good employees requires

more than just a monthly pay-cheque. There is significant fear now that with changes to the workplace as a result of digital transformation, mergers, remote working or otherwise, staff numbers will be cut. That anxiety has a profound effect on performance and commitment – staff may decide to pre-empt any change to their role, or indeed redundancy, by seeking opportunities elsewhere, and management should communicate clearly what is in store for the business and its staff.

Transparent management processes are thus key to employee loyalty. But employee retention can also be secured by giving staff a personal stake in what the business does, and in which direction it heads in. Employees need to feel they can influence decision-making, and that they are bringing measurable value to a company. This can either be through regular courting of employee perspectives on business-related matters and regular appraisal, or even more material routes: by giving them shares in the company and ensuring they're satisfied with the perks that come with the role.



Upskilling: Why would someone stick around in a job that offers them no personal development? This is a question employers neglect at their own peril. The simple security of a nine-to-five won't keep staff enamoured with a role for long. People want to learn, and make sure that as the working landscape changes – through digitalisation, automation, remote working or otherwise – so too can they adapt to new demands. Investment in upskilling employees helps sustain their enthusiasm, making them confident they can get to grips with these changes and, importantly, showing that their employers think them worthy of that investment.

Recruitment: With all that said, getting the right people for the job is now more important than ever. Retention starts with recruitment, and businesses that lack a smart recruitment strategy will struggle to find highly skilled employees. There are ways to strengthen those processes: investigate word-of-mouth referrals, place new staff on trial periods, advertise on specialist job websites, be sure you know the potential employee's long-term plans, and perhaps even draw on management consultants, although be mindful that they are often expensive and bring no guarantee of success.

Yet a good strategy will only ever be worthwhile if the processes are in place to ensure good hires stick around. Employees are much more aware of what they need in order to stay positive and focused. Employers who meet the expectations of their staff are more likely to survive the hard times – and those who don't will struggle. 

It's best for businesses if their people teams are free to evolve

The ways in which we work are changing, and the same can be said for people teams – more proactive and integrated arms of HR that aim to create happier employees and healthier businesses. For the future of HR to remain bright, their evolution is essential.

Consider team structures

It helps to think of team structures within context. After all, evolution truly occurs when you build a model to suit your company, and change it when circumstances demand. This could require teams built with an emphasis on hiring, relocation, onboarding or other



factors, but it must be tailored. Strike the right balance between structuring and restructuring. Consider a year to 18 months at most to prevent “change weariness” in your team.

Form workplace teams

The pandemic has altered how we view the traditional

office. People teams – indeed, any teams – have to think about how to adapt when not everyone is in one location.

For a company to scale successfully, teams and employees being able to successfully work together must be part of its culture. A workplace team focuses

on end-to-end experiences for the best working environments, IT technology and tooling. Think of it as having a mix of IT, office management and property skillsets.

The workplace team concept can serve as a catalyst for HR evolution, because its role is to consider how teams need to evolve in the “new normal”.

Less administration, more expertise

Unnecessary volumes of admin work can often get in the way of potential, and the capacity of people teams to help attract, develop and retain top talent. That’s

why implementing effective HR software is crucial, helping you make time and room for more strategic, data-driven and meaningful initiatives than can unlock your business’s productive potential.

The first step is finding a solution that not only digitises your processes but grows with your company and plays into its success.

INDUSTRY VIEW

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Why cloud is king: the future of work depends on it

The pandemic has proven a strong catalyst for cloud adoption. Enforced lockdowns across the globe have forced organisations, big and small, to accelerate their digitalisation strategies at pace. Cloud technology has quickly emerged as the “holy grail” for homeworking and, as we consider the future of work, it is clear that cloud’s supremacy has become securely established.

Distributed working is here to stay

Distributed hybrid-working will become permanent, even in hold-out industries such as contact centres, which previously stood defiantly as one of the last mill-style working environments.

All organisations will need to retain the agility of hybrid working in an uncertain future of changed expectations. In the contact centre, for example, it will no longer be enough to lash together tools and technologies every time operations are threatened with disruption – the tech needs to be already established in the cloud, with a workforce ready to roll in multiple locations.

Demand for distributed working to continue is coming from two directions: from workers who, having tasted freedom, refuse to resume the chains of daily commuting, and demand that employers continue to provide that flexibility, and from businesses which have learned that



employee experience and customer experience are intrinsically linked.

Customer experience is a stand-out winner from the trials of the pandemic, having emerged as the primary differentiator between businesses.

The so-called ordinary workers are revolting. They want the benefits of flexible location and hours that were previously the

preserve of the select few. That means cloud technology, enabling flexible shift patterns, better work-life harmony – and improved customer satisfaction.

Integration for collaboration

An effective distributed workforce requires a range of internal collaboration tools. An organisation’s external, consumer-facing communications tech needs to integrate with the internal-facing tools used around the wider organisation. Today’s cloud communications solutions integrate with the new office standards, Teams and Zoom, to promote a collaborative and informed workforce, wherever the individuals may be.

As innovation ramps up, and businesses future-proof their operations, cloud technology’s reign looks set to continue through 2021 and beyond – and the future of work depends on it.

INDUSTRY VIEW

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Leading from the front: how business leaders should set the tone when it comes to mental health

The past 12 months have taken a toll on the mental health of most people, and it's important to talk openly about the challenges we face

Experts indicate that stress and anxiety are normal in moments of crisis. But the challenges posed by the pandemic have been enduring, and the path to normality is likely to be long. And, so, the stress many of us have felt over the past 12 months has the potential to become problematic and even damaging.

Anxiety doesn't discriminate by wealth or status. Recent data from premium health insurer Bupa Global in its Executive Wellbeing Index¹ showed that 70 per cent of high net worth individuals from around the world have experienced symptoms of mental ill-health since the start of the pandemic. Business leaders face a double challenge: not only must they manage their own mental health, they also have a duty of care to look after their employees.

Addressing stigmas

Despite the wealth of information, resources and even legislation available to support people with mental health issues, talking about these topics could still be considered difficult by some.

According to Bupa Global's Index, 33 per cent of business leaders feel that seeking help for mental health issues could impact on their social standing or professional reputation.

Stigma and discrimination can worsen someone's mental health



problems and delay or impede them getting help and treatment, so it's vital to tackle them.

"The first step is being open and honest: accepting our challenges, rather than brushing them under the carpet," says Dr Luke James, medical director at Bupa Global. "Just because you're successful doesn't mean that everything is okay, and because there's no one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with mental ill-health, expert support is essential."

Indeed, business leaders have a responsibility to break down the stigma associated with mental health issues such as stress and anxiety to ensure everyone can thrive at work.

Leading by example

Being an effective manager is about much more than simply delegating workloads and tracking performance against KPIs and targets. It's clear that a happy

workforce is a more motivated and productive one, so the first step is talking about mental health openly and honestly.

For Dr James, the key is viewing mental health for what it is – a problem with someone's health. "We find it normal, or at least easier, to talk about our physical illnesses than we do about how life, stress and mental ill-health affects our brain," he explains. "But the truth is that speaking up about mental health in the workplace is the only way to break this stigma."

Some organisations are already putting this into practice. Indeed, as part of an initiative from the World Health Organisation², a number of organisations, including Clifford Chance, Deloitte and HSBC, have teamed up to encourage other firms to advance "the desperately needed conversation around creating an open, welcoming, and supportive workplace environment

for all when it comes to mental health" – signing a pledge committing themselves to promoting and developing a more positive culture around mental health.

Bupa Global's approach to mental health support

At Bupa Global, our purpose is helping people live longer, healthier, happier lives. We recognise that mental health is just as important as physical health and believe in helping people to feel their best and stay that way too. To support this, we have removed both annual and monetary limits across plans for in-patient and day-patient mental health treatment (up to the annual maximum limit of your chosen plan).

INDUSTRY VIEW

For more information about Bupa Global premium health plans visit bupaglobal.com/withyou, or talk to our Private Client team today on 03333 315758

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1. Bupa Global Executive Wellbeing Index (September 2020). Research conducted among 450 high net worth individuals and senior executives across UK, France, USA, UAE and Egypt

2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2021/01/25/business-leaders-back-push-to-improve-workplace-mental-health>

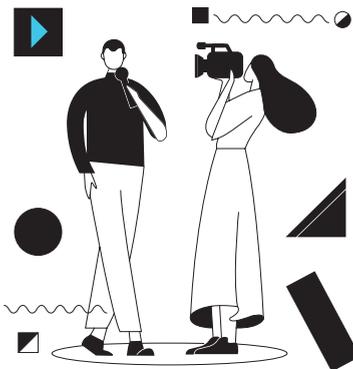
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