

Building Narratives on The Future of Work



**FUTURE
OF WORK**

Introduction

Technological disruption, increasing longevity and shifts in social structures are transforming work and increasing the need for both organisations and people to adjust. For example, data from the OECD showed that half of all workers will need to significantly adapt to the new working environment.ⁱ The role and responsibility of the organisation to its workforce is also shifting. According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, 72% of people trust businesses more than governments to help them navigate periods of change.ⁱⁱ

To help people navigate the changes ahead, companies need to provide a narrative on the future of work. A narrative is a way to make sense of time and causality, and is defined as the way people use language to communicate experience, knowledge and emotions.ⁱⁱⁱ It is essential to the way we view our lives, and can be found within almost every mode of communication and every culture. To create their narrative on the future of work, organisations need to consider the key trends shaping their industry and ask themselves what work will mean for their people and how work will be done in the organisation. This will help provide a sense of direction in the face of transformation and job disruption.

We explored with FoW members how to build this narrative, and what challenges and aspirations they had around the subject. First, we conducted an in-depth literature review to identify how work and organisational responsibility is transforming and what is needed to build a narrative, including drawing on narrative theory from sociology and history. We augmented these insights with views shared by Consortium members on a series of Focus Group calls. Finally, we identified case studies to provide practical examples of future-proofed practices.

This FoW report reflects the insights of our multi-dimensional research approach, as well as the practical experiences shared by our delegates and expert guest speakers at the Building Narratives on the Future of Work Masterclass, held in London on 5th June 2018.

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1. THE EVOLUTION OF WORK

We are at an inflection point: the tasks that people are engaged in at work are transforming. Alongside this, the relationship between organisations and the workforce has progressed. Understanding both these shifts is an essential starting point for any organisation seeking to craft a narrative on the future of work.

To begin with, the place of work in society and the relationship between those working and those employing have undergone frequent changes throughout history, with several key pivot points.



The industrial revolution and the homogenisation of work and workers

Widespread industrialisation led to increased living standards and urbanisation but also standardised, dehumanised work. Work was deskilled, designed to make workers fit a production line, resulting in workers losing their autonomy and becoming interchangeable with the parts they created.^{iv} This became more widespread with the rise of Fordism and mass production, as employers sought to maximise profit using unskilled labour and machinery. In this period, employers tended to see their workforce as a homogenous group and, despite the rise of industrial relations, the expectations from workers remained simple: a wage and hours of work. The needs of individuals were not factored in.

The rise of the individual

This began to change following World War II and the rise of personality testing, the most popular being the *Myers-Brigg Type Indicator*, which continues to be used today. The rise of personality testing was not only representative of the growing influence of psychology in the world of work but also symbolised the beginning of a shift towards a more individualised view of workers



This individualised focus continued in the latter half of the 20th century, as organisations began to provide their workers with more autonomy, although still within the context of a 'parent-child' relationship. Combined with the increasing number of women in the workplace and the shift from a 'work' to 'career' mindset this led to increased desire from people for more flexibility and independence from employers. In an increasingly digitalised and technologically focused world, workers wanted to be liberated from being a cog in the machine. This was epitomised by a 1984 advert for Apple computers that showed a tired workforce being freed from grinding, standardised work by a heroine in red shorts.^v

The era of autonomy... and instability

However, structural changes such as mass deregulation meant that this rise in more autonomous, individualised work also coincided with increased insecurity for workers. Today, people may have greater agency but they can also no longer expect a job for life. This has been exacerbated by increased longevity and technological disruption, and led to organisations taking more interest in the emotional and social well-being of their workforce.



A new emphasis on well-being

Well-being is big business, and no longer seen as peripheral to organisations but instead central to their people management. The global wellness industry is today worth \$3.2 trillion, with talent increasingly expecting well-being support.^{vi} Instead of seeing their workforce as homogenous, many employers now attempt to take a more humane approach. This is by no means the case amongst all organisations. Indeed, the rise of the gig economy has led to many employers not feeling a responsibility to their workforce. However, amongst forward-thinking organisations there is now a greater emphasis on building a culture of lifelong learning and strong emotional health. This organisational responsibility has bled more and more into issues that were previously considered personal. In contrast to the past, companies can now monitor and create programmes to boost employee emotions, sleep or mental health.

So, what does this mean for the work of the future? Creative intelligence will become more important as robots replace human endeavour in repetitive, routine tasks. This means that work will require more skill and artistry. In this future of craft or creative work, people cannot be anxious and fearful or they will be unproductive. It will therefore be essential for organisations to support their people in building work that provides autonomy and well-being. This begins with the creation of a clear narrative from the organisation about how work is changing, the uniquely human skills that their workforce will need, and what the journey will look like in acquiring these competencies.

The evolution of work: Questions for people leaders

- Do we know how work has evolved in our organisation?
- Do we support our people in building their well-being?
- Are we prepared for a future of craft and creative work?

The 10-year narrative of FoW

Here at the Future of Work Research Consortium, we have been researching the future of work for 10 years. During this time, we have challenged assumptions, around what work is, how work gets done, and who the workers of the future will be. We have also remained people-focused in looking at the interconnection of trends and individuals.

In the early years of FoW, we explored how external trends were impacting work and organisations. We identified five macrotrends (technology, low-carbon, society, economy, globalisation) and 32 microtrends, and examined how consortium members were responding to these forces. This included running a diagnostic with FoW members so that they could discover how the trends were impacting their organisation.

We then asked what this meant for people. Change happens faster at a personal level than an institutional level. Individuals often react more quickly to technological and social change than businesses who must adapt as a result. For example, the impact of trends such as longevity or women in work can be seen in the behaviour of individuals before the implementation of organisational practices and processes. Examining what is happening in people's lives allows organisations to adjust their people practices, helping create a more engaged workforce. This, in turn, helps companies build a sense of agency in their workforce and a more adult-to-adult relationship with their people.

2. BUILDING YOUR NARRATIVE



2.1 What does a narrative look like?

Narrative is one of the major ways that people make sense of experience and communicate this knowledge to others.^{vii} This is particularly true during periods of change, hence why organisations should create a narrative on the future of work for their people. According to narrative theory, a narrative at its most basic level contains characters, a plot and chronology, but does not necessarily have a clear endpoint.^{viii} Instead, a narrative is a way to make sense of time and causality.

Within organisations, narratives are pervasive and often the building blocks of identity. For example, the history of a company posted on its website is a narrative, as are the gossip and stories that people share amongst each other.^{ix} Each selectively uses information to make sense of experience and provides a view of what it means to be part of the organisation. There are three benefits that can be gained by organisations who build a narrative on the future of work.

Firstly, it allows the organisation to tell a story about who they are and where they are going. A person's brain when hearing a story is different than when receiving any other form of information, including straight facts and data.^x Neuroscientists from Emory University and Princeton University discovered that stories build connections between the storyteller and the listener, showing heightened connectivity in the left temporal cortex of the brain.^{xi} This is the part of the brain responsible for processing emotions, memories and speech. The neural changes lasted not only for the period of the experiment but for several days – explaining why we sometimes say that a story is so powerful that we can't seem to shake it. Presenting information in a narrative or story, therefore, allows organisations to build long-term engagement with talent, alongside a sense of affinity to and sense of belonging with the company.

Secondly, narratives contribute to sense-making. Job disruption and flux can cause fear and anxiety, and building a narrative on the future of work alleviates these concerns. Stories create meaning for collective experiences now and in the future, something that is essential if organisations want their people to successfully navigate the trends that are shaping the future of work. Shared narratives create collective frames for people to map out their experiences and reality.^{xii} They provide clarity and reduce the risk of paralysis around decision making.

Finally, narratives build collective identity.^{xiii} As collective identity is socially constructed, if organisations work with their workers when building this narrative, then this will help solidify this identity. This is particularly crucial when it comes to building an organisational narrative on the future of work. In periods of change, collective identity builds cohesiveness and resilience, helping create a shared sense of belonging. It provides a sense of community, making knowledge sharing and collaboration easier. It also makes

people more likely to remain onboard with any alterations to the organisation that a company may need to make as they adapt to the trends impacting work.

2.2 What should your narrative be?

At the Masterclass, we also explored which characteristics a successful narrative should have. Firstly, it needs to be **transparent**. This means the organisation knowing and communicating its non-negotiables, that is, the signature processes and practices that will stay constant in the face of change. Transparency is key to employee engagement and building trust between organisations and their workers.^{xiv} If an organisation is clear about what it means to work for them and how this may change in the future, it will help alleviate people’s concerns about the transformations occurring.

This is not always easy to achieve, as it can be difficult for organisations to know exactly how work may be transformed by AI and automation, for example. During our focus group, participants noted that this uncertainty makes it hard to be honest with talent, as



they do not want to convey a narrative that misleads their workforce. In addition, Rabobank highlighted that working in a highly-regulated area like banking complicates their ability to be honest with their workforce. For participants, illustrating how the organisation will help people invest in the future and acknowledging the positive aspects of change can help counteract any anxiety their people may have.

What does a narrative look like? Questions for people leaders

- Does our organisation’s narrative create a sense of belonging amongst colleagues?
- Does our organisation’s narrative provide clarity and meaning?

Masterclass Insight: Building a Narrative through Jams

At the Masterclass, Alice Bretherton, Head of Organisation Development at KPMG and Harriet Molyneaux, Head of Digital Engagement at Hot Spots Movement discussed how organisations can work with their people to create a compelling and engaging narrative on the future of work. Alice Bretherton described how running a Jam allowed KPMG to involve their people in a wide scale dialogue on the future of the organisation. 4000 people in 11 countries discussed how KPMG could attract and retain future talent, the impact of technology and leadership over 72 hours. This allowed KPMG to recognise pain points in the organisation and engage in long-term thinking, both of which are essential in crafting a narrative on the future of work.

Secondly, the narrative needs to be **co-creational**, engaging in a dialogue with the workforce, so that people are aware of how the organisation will support them through periods of change. In our focus group, for example, several organisations described how they work with talent to help them gain the skills needed in the future. As discussed at the Masterclass, Accenture have several tools that allow their people to determine how their job may be impacted by automation. Initiatives like this help provide a sense of autonomy and control over the future, rather than anxiety and fear.

A narrative on the future of work also needs to be **enduring**, and provide purpose, a story and sense

of meaning about the future. As the future can seem abstract, people need to believe that there is a sense of purposefulness to an organisation's actions, even if there is uncertainty around what these actions may be. Stories are powerful because they not only absorb an audience but also because people suspend their natural inclination to counterargue when they are transported or engaged by a narrative.^{xv}

Finally, a narrative on the future of work needs to be **'composed'**. This means it should tell a story about who the organisation is and provide a sense of calmness and stability, so people feel they will be supported in navigating the trends shaping work.^{xvi} Again, to provide this composure organisations need to ensure that the narrative reflects how the company is perceived by talent. If, for example, an organisation with a culture of agile working and collaboration created a narrative that described high-pressure, long hours work and a competitive culture it would not be accepted by their people.

What should your narrative be? Questions for people leaders

- Is your narrative clear about non-negotiable areas?
- Are you involving your people in crafting your narrative?
- Does your narrative tell a story about who you are as an organisation?
- Does your organisation provide a sense of purpose?

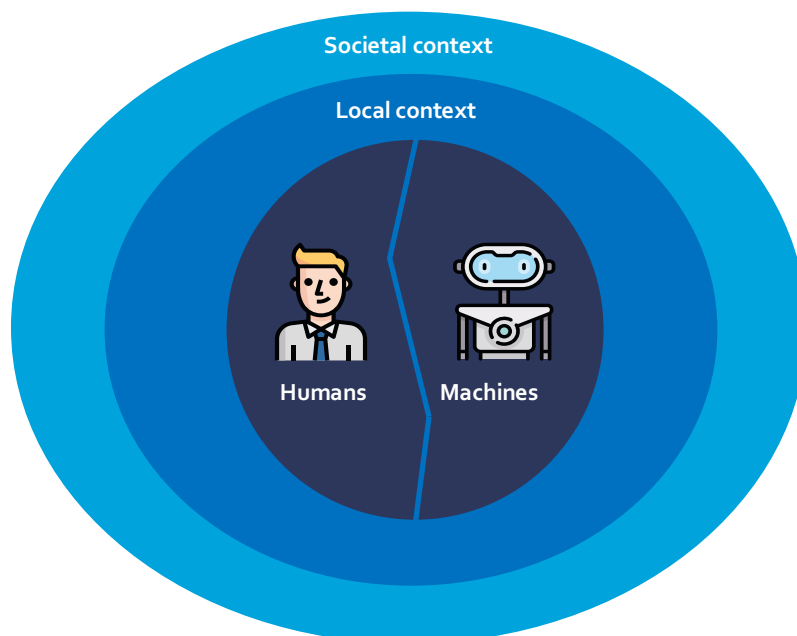
3. WHAT DO YOU NEED TO FACTOR INTO YOUR NARRATIVE?

As can be seen, narratives are powerful. Organisations therefore need to ensure that their narrative on the future of work is rooted in certain key areas, and provides a story on the trends, what work means, what work is and how work gets done in the organisation. There are four areas to consider.

3.1 Engage with the trends

Engaging with the trends is key to developing a compelling narrative on the future of work. For organisations, this engagement means understanding the forces that are shaping work at a societal level. These trends can be categorised into those centred in technology, such as AI and robotics or big data, and those rooted in demography, such as longevity and increasing number of women in work. Technology frequently receives the greatest attention, as the effects can often be viewed as more tangible or as requiring a more immediate response. During the Masterclass, Tony Greenham, Director of Economy, Enterprise and Manufacturing at the RSA explored the impact of automation, and the responsibility of organisations in developing a new social contract (See Masterclass Insight: Realising a better world in an age of technology).

However, both contribute to social change, which impacts the way that people think about and approach work. Organisations need to be ahead of the curve when it comes to this change. Cultural lag means that individuals often react to change more quickly, leaving organisations and governments to catch-up. An awareness of the trends allows companies to counteract this, increasing their knowledge of the shifts that are occurring and planning their response, rather than being unthinkingly reactive. In addition, organisations need to be aware of the interconnection of these trends. Longevity, for example, is impacted by technological changes which make it easier to develop robots to undertake elder care. There is an increasing number of women in work because of widespread social shifts in family structures and education, but this is also amplified by technological developments which make it easier for people with children, for example, to work flexibly.



Organisations also need to tailor this engagement with the trends to their own local context. As was highlighted during the focus groups, there can be great variation in context by country or by sector. The issue of longevity requires a very different response in Japan, which has an ageing population, than in a country with a young population such as Nigeria. Equally, in responding to automation, for example, there will be a different response in the health and social care sector than in sectors like banking which have a high risk of job disruption. As can be seen, engaging with the trends requires a thoughtful approach. Organisations need to both develop awareness of the broader societal and technological changes that are occurring, but also not lose sight of their own local particularities.

Masterclass Insight: Realising a better world of work in an age of technology

At the Masterclass, Tony Greenham, Director of Economy, Enterprise and Manufacturing at the RSA discussed the RSA's work on automation and the importance of building a new social contract. The RSA's research concerns how power can be evenly distributed in the British economy, alongside the societal impact of technology.

Greenham explored the challenges and benefits around technology and automation. The RSA's view is that automation is occurring too slowly, with many SMEs not talking full advantage of technology to automate their processes. However, Greenham also noted that the rise of the gig economy and technological disruption have not necessarily led to good work. The modern economy has provided greater autonomy and flexibility but, simultaneously, less security.

To enable good, future-proofed work and economic security the RSA advocates the creation of a new social contract, which is fit for a transformed world of work. The social contract has evolved over the last 100 years, from a paternalistic state to the free market. The new social contract should consider how we allocate risks, rights and responsibilities for quality work, with input from consumers, employers and civic institutions. As Greenham explored, it should be centred within four themes: lifelong learning, worker voice, employment practices and economic security. Organisations therefore need to reflect on their role and contribution to this new contract, and how they can ensure they build security into the jobs despite increasing technological disruption.

3.2 Understand what work means

As noted, the shift in organisational responsibility has meant an increased awareness about the well-being and individual needs of people. An organisation's narrative on the future of work therefore needs to consider how work is viewed by their workforce, and what work means in the company.

Firstly, this means acknowledging the extent to which their people connect work and identity. Connections between a person's self-perception and work, and the centrality placed on a job to a person's life varies by individual. In their research, Kate Walsh from Cornell University and Judith Gordon from Boston College argued that people are more

likely to gain a sense of identity from their job if they see it as a career or connected to a broader sense of purpose.^{xvii} During the Masterclass, Dan Cable from London Business School also highlighted the importance of a sense of purpose in making people feel more engaged and productive, pointing to the importance of activating ‘the seeking system’ to encourage experimentation (see Masterclass Insight: Becoming Alive at Work).

However, organisations also need to ensure that they do not assume that all people gain a sense their identity from their job. Since 1992, Gallup has occasionally asked Americans whether they get sense of identity from their job. The results over time have been generally stable, with around 55% of people saying they do, while around 42% describe their job as just something that they do.^{xviii} Contrary to many of the stereotypes around generational cohorts, there is not significant difference between how those over 45 and those 18-44 view their job.^{xix} This again shows the importance of taking an individualised approach and not assuming people are homogenous when building a narrative on the future of work.

The organisational narrative also needs to consider ‘good work’ that provides meaning, autonomy, dignity and a sense of belongingness to show people what work will mean in the company, in spite of technological disruption and social change.

Masterclass Insight: Becoming ‘Alive at Work’

During the Masterclass, Dan Cable from London Business School explored why people are disengaged and how organisations can help their workers rediscover purpose at work. Cable showed that, historically, humans are excellent at changing and advancing. Without wings we built planes to fly, without resistance we developed vaccinations for diseases. So why do people oppose change? The answer lies in the history of work.

During the industrial revolution, employers made strict decisions regarding how people would work. The resulting division of labour and hyper-specialisation of tasks successfully increased efficiency and productivity but did so at the cost of creativity and personal connections with consumers. Work was deliberately repetitive, mundane and disconnected and innovative ideas were perceived as mistakes. Our 18th century predecessors created organisations in which stepping out of your comfort zone and looking at the bigger picture were punished. This trend has continued, as 70% of today’s workforce is disengaged.

Cable explained how recent neuroscientific research has revealed that a part of the human brain (the ventral striatum) is responsible for inspiring us to explore, experiment and seek meaning. This ‘seeking system’ releases dopamine when we look beyond what we already know and learn from our environments.

So, how can you activate your seeking system at work?

1. Self-expression – how do I understand the unique value I bring?
2. Prompt curiosity through experimentation – how do I learn from my environment?
3. Experience purpose beyond money – how do I find meaning?

The elements required for ‘good work’ are mainly socially constructed, and can be impacted by both the organisational culture and the views of broader society. ‘Good work’ must provide meaning and deliver some sense of value. The anthropologist David Graeber, for example, has identified what he terms ‘bullshit jobs’ and explored the negative ramifications for people who feel that is worthless and lacks value.^{xx} Work must also give people a sense of control and allow them the space and support to express themselves effectively.^{xxi} In his presentation, Dan Cable suggested that organisations think about ‘freedom within a frame’, providing workers with autonomy within a certain context, which is not as high a risk for managers. Work that has dignity is work that provides status or respect from other people, alongside a sense of purpose. Finally, work must provide a sense of belongingness, and help people feel part of and supported by a broader group, and allow them the support to be collaborative and co-operative.

The concept of ‘good work’ is one that resonated with our members. During our focus group, participants questioned whether it is possible for ‘good work’ to be conveyed in job descriptions. They noted that there can often be variance in interpretation of what ‘good work’ means to individuals, and that people can add meaning to their own work rather than relying on the organisation to provide it. The organisational responsibility instead should rest on disseminating the purpose of the organisation to help people find a sense of meaning and building accountability and autonomy in their workforce. Equinor, for example, have removed performance ratings to allow workers to be given more ongoing feedback, while Rabobank have removed KPIs from their organisation’s performance management. This helps provide people with sense of autonomy and control, integral to ‘good work’.

Understand what work means: Questions for people leaders

- Am I aware of how my people connect their job and identity?
- Am I providing the space and support for my people to build autonomous and purposeful work?

3.3 Understand what work is

A narrative on the future of work also needs to factor in what work provides for people. As explored at the Masterclass, organisations need to answer two fundamental questions when it comes to work. Does the work help my people learn, and secondly does it keep them healthy? Both elements are crucial if organisations are to help their people develop the skillset and energy to react to job disruption and transformation.

Work is learning

In an age of longevity and technological change, it is essential for individuals and organisations to embrace lifelong learning, and for the latter to help provide a narrative



and support for people as they change and adapt. Companies can no longer rely on educational institutions to provide people with the diverse skillsets needed to be able to successfully transform. Instead, organisations themselves will have to become learning environments and demonstrate to talent what the narrative on learning is in the organisation. During our focus groups, consortium members were clear on the need to help their workers reskill, and pointed to upskilling as a strategic

priority. Standard Bank shared their programme called ‘skills as currency’, which ensures people remain relevant in the workplace, while KPMG noted the importance of upskilling to their brand as a future-proofed company. Rabobank also shared their programme which trains workers to become robot programmers and thus automate part of their own role (See Rabobank Case Study).

The desire for this learning is coming directly from people, who want more personalised, continuous learning. A 2018 Workplace Learning Report from LinkedIn showed that 60% of people preferred to learn at work, while 58% preferred to learn at their own pace.^{xxii} Companies are increasingly aware of the need to embed learning, and the risks to this learning. During our Masterclass activity ‘Crafting a narrative on good work’, the most common threats to learning cited by our members were a parent-child mentality, a lack of time, the increasing pace of change and too much focus on the short-term over a the longer-term.

So how can organisations ensure they become learning environments? Workplace learning should remain part of and driven by the wider social and economic context, and link development of the individual with development of the organisation.^{xxiii} A balance between formal and informal learning is crucial. The academic Sally Sambrook has distinguished between ‘learning at work’ and ‘learning in work’, noting that ‘learning at work’ is associated with planned training and education courses, while ‘learning in work’ is associated with the more informal activities within these processes, such as discussing, observing or asking questions.^{xxiv} This is, in essence, the difference between training and development. A training organisation focuses learning on the current job and skill requirements, while a development organisation focuses more on future skills and requirements.^{xxv}

A learning environment is also not limited by physical space, especially in today’s interconnected world where virtual learning is becoming increasingly commonplace. Instead, it is more like a support system that accommodates the unique learning needs of each individual and provides the social connections needed for successful learning and development. The role of managers is crucial in building these social connections and encouraging learning. During our Masterclass activity, for example, members cited signalling and role-modelling as crucial in encouraging learning amongst their people. Equally, the 2018 LinkedIn report found that 56% of workers said they would spend more time learning if their manager directed them.^{xxvi}

Finally, a learning environment requires experimentation.^{xxvii} As noted, the organisational responsibility to its workforce has become increasingly personalised, and this personalisation crucial for building a learning environment and helping build a sense of autonomy. Organisations cannot view learning as a one-size fits all solution, but should instead view it as a dialogue with their people around the skills required for the future and the support they need to build this. Connecting work and learning in an organisation's narrative on the future of work demonstrates that the company is aware of the forces transforming work and that equipping their people to grow and develop is a key target for them in the years ahead.



Work is health

Increasing longevity and technological disruption mean that organisations need to support people's well-being, so that they remain energetic, healthy and engaged. Gallup has estimated that lack of engagement from unhealthy, stressed or anxious workers costs American businesses \$550 billion a year.^{xxviii} As such, an organisation's future of work narrative must demonstrate how the company will provide work that is healthy and beneficial.

Organisations are providing an ever-increasing number of wellness programmes which target physical health and broader well-being. Over \$8 billion dollars was spent collectively on wellness plans by employers.^{xxix} During the Masterclass Activity, members echoed this, by sharing examples of how they improve employee wellness, such as subsidised gym membership, flexible working and storytelling the importance of work-life balance and good mental health.

Yet, there is a risk of initiative overload or misalignment. Well-being is a personal matter and people want personalised wellness programmes, which many companies do not provide. Research by Deloitte found that there was a discrepancy between what talent value around well-being and what employers offer. 60% saw wellness counselling as highly valuable or valuable, but only 35% of employers provide it, while 53% of cited back-up daycare as valuable or highly valuable, which only 8% of employers provide.^{xxx}

A healthy workplace can also be impacted by aspects like status or control, not traditionally connected to health. Research from The University of Berkley has shown that the way people are treated at work can affect their physical health. People who feel insufficiently rewarded for their efforts at work - what is called effort-reward imbalance - are twice as likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease, depression or alcohol dependency compared to those who felt sufficiently rewarded.^{xxxi} As with learning, social connections are also crucial, particularly within management. The same research found that people who felt that their boss was not fair-minded had almost a third more incidents of cardiovascular disease compared to those who did.^{xxxii} When thinking about building a healthy workplace, therefore, organisations need to think more widely about what impacts well-being, and ensure they know what their people want. This will allow them to provide a narrative on what it means to work at the organisation, and how supporting employee well-being is a core element of this narrative.

Understand what work is: Questions for people leaders

- Do I know what my people want when it comes to well-being?
- Do I support the unique learning needs of each individual in my organisation?
- Do my people feel sufficiently rewarded for the work that they do?

3.4 Understand how work gets done

A narrative on the future of work also needs to factor in how work gets done in the organisation. This includes developing a point of view on how humans and machines will interact and collaborate in the organisation and which organisational structure to use.

As noted, organisations must engage with the trends that are shaping work and use this knowledge to figure out a response and point of view. One of the most significant areas to consider is around how increasing automation and use of AI will impact human workers and the work that is done. AI is a huge market, predicted to rise from \$8 billion this year to \$47 billion by 2020, and is rapidly evolving.^{xxxiii} The relationships between humans and machines are transforming as a result, and it is this area that organisations need to factor into their narrative. In the past, AI was more reactive and passive. Machines did not have the ability to form memories or use past experiences to inform current decisions, nor create a view of the world themselves. AI then became more predictive and generative, and is now able to forecast how people will behave.

As AI evolves, the next step will be what is classed as ‘general AI’. This refers to the ability of a machine to mimic the intelligence or tasks as well as or better than humans. If this occurs, we could have complete synergy between machines and humans, in stark contrast to the passive, reactive relationship of the past.

Masterclass Insight: Placing people at the heart of Nucleus Financial

During the Masterclass, Kirsty Lynagh, Chief People Office at Nucleus Financial shared how the organisation is rethinking their people strategy. Lynagh described how careers today are now seen as jungle gyms, not ladders, and the importance of involving workers in decisions around career progression.

At Nucleus, instead of a traditional ladder, they have a career progression framework. This is centred on development, not performance, with transparency across the whole company on what is needed to develop. Instead of traditional job levels they have broad categories, and instead of a hierarchy they use a circular model, placing higher roles at the 'centre' rather than the top.

Nucleus also encourages individual workers to drive their own career progression. They have a microsite where people can see all the roles and skills needed and self-nominate for any role they would like. Career progression is crowd-sourced, so people need to explain to their colleague why they think they should progress.

The rapid evolution of AI means that companies must develop a point of view on human-machine collaboration in their organisation. The academic Guy Hoffman is developing ways to increase 'collaborative fluency' between humans and machines, aiming to develop robotic team members that can work alongside their human counterparts.^{xxxiv} 'Collaborative fluency' refers to the co-ordinated meshing of joint activities between members of a well-synchronised team. This is much easier between humans than with humans and machines. When a human team is in sync, they build on what each other says, they interrupt and react to points,

naturally converging to a high-level of co-ordination. Machines cannot do this, as they are more rigid in their interactions. The possible rise of this fluency means that organisations need to understand how machines and humans work alongside each other productively, and in which areas and on which tasks this collaboration takes place.

Companies also need to understand the structure of work itself. There are several different types of organisational structure, which determine task allocation, co-ordination and supervision in a company. Organisations, for example, can have a more stable hierarchical, functional structure, with clear job roles and titles. In contrast, they could have a flatter holocracy, with fluid job roles and description, and increased collaboration agility (for a practical example of this see Masterclass Insight: Placing people at the heart of Nucleus Financial). They can also have both types of structure depending on department or function. Within their narrative on the future of work, organisations need to figure out which structure is most conducive to the success of their business and be reflective on who they are, and then allow this to inform their narrative.

Understand how work gets done: Questions for people leaders

- Do I have a point of view on how human-machine collaboration will be implemented in my organisation?
- Am I rethinking the way that parts of the organisation are structured?

Member Insight: Embedding FoW at Commonwealth Bank of Australia

At the Masterclass, Debbie Lotz, CFO of Europe and Americas described how the London part of the organisation has involved all 200 of their workers in a branch-wide conversation regarding what the organisation could do to preserve people's productivity, vitality and transformation. After a collaborative, co-creational brainstorming session, the Working Group developed CBA's Future of Work (FoW) London Programme.

The FoW London Programme is split into two main work streams: 'Help Me Now' and 'Help Me Get "Future Fit"'. The 'Help Me Now' stream addresses what is currently changing for people and their specific functions within the bank. Its objective is to focus people's attention on how technology is (and will be) affecting their role and how people can build the tangible skills which will be vital in the future, from design thinking to cross-functional collaboration.

The second stream of CBA's FoW London Programme, 'Help me Get "Future Fit"' involves building a transformational mindset and considering 'the big picture'. This stream is mainly centred around educating people on future technologies and megatrends but also considers the importance of developing diverse networks and making embracing change a part of the company culture. CBA expects that the programme will go through a number of iterations as it progresses, which reflects the forward-thinking, agile approach of the programme itself.

THE CALL TO ACTION



Once aware of the need for a narrative and what needs to be considered when building one, organisations then need to take action. These actions should be rooted in three main areas: people, the HR department, and the CEO of the company.

4.1 Know your people

As involving people in a dialogue is crucial in building a narrative on the future of work, HR leaders to know their people and not rely on assumptions or stereotypes. Organisations often work off pre-conceived ideas: younger workers must be digitally savvy and prepared to change jobs frequently, for example, or older workers must be preparing to retire or exhausted or lack motivation.

However, research from Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott found that such assumptions are incorrect. Younger people do not have more energy, with 43% of those under 45 saying they were exhausted, but only 35% of people over 45.^{xxxv} In addition, in contrast to the idea that only younger workers are interested in learning, Gratton and Scott found that 60% of those over 45 claimed to be actively learning.^{xxxvi}

To counteract any bias or assumption, companies need to become age agnostic, and not use age as a shorthand when designing policies, incentives or in capturing performance. Avoiding generational stratification is also crucial. If older workers do not want to slow down, as many people think, then an organisation's recruitment practices need to reflect this and not focus on a narrow age band, which fails to spot talent at other ages. Finally, companies need to redesign retirement, to better utilise these older workers. Instead of approaching retirement on a case-by-case basis, organisations need to think more broadly. Having a softer transition towards retirement, for example, or the option to dial down working hours without loss of status or role.

4.2 Reinvent the role of HR

As part of the narrative, HR also need to ensure that they adapt and transform as needed, becoming both a broker of time and a guardian of good work.

Contrary to common perception, time is a resource and one that organisations often squander. People often make rigid divisions between the present/short-term and the future/long-term, with significant implications for decision making. A focus on the short-term leads to viewing time as a scare resource, making people more likely to make trade-offs, thinking about *whether* they should do something. Viewing the future as abstract, they put off decisions that could be beneficial in the longer term, like saving or learning. This is a problem for organisations, particularly those going through change and therefore requiring people to learn new skills and adapt



behaviours. Research from Stanford University proposes that organisations take an elevated view of time. This involves viewing all units of time as equal.^{xxxvii} In this **mosaic view of time**, a day is like any other day, not more important because of its proximity to your present. This zoomed out perspective forces people to consider now *and* later, making the future less abstract and pulling potential opportunities into the present. Becoming a broker of time therefore means viewing time as an asset and thinking about how HR can help their people reap the benefits from effective investment in it.

The importance of ‘good work’ to crafting a narrative on the future of work has already been explored in this report. Often, the way that organisations design jobs inadvertently depletes the elements that make up ‘good work’. During the Masterclass Activity, for example, participants identified the blockers to a sense of belongingness, crucial to ‘good work’. Remote working, silo thinking and a lack of trust were identified as representing the biggest risks by our consortium members.

HR needs to protect ‘good work’, especially as jobs continue to be disrupted and transformed. During our focus group on HR as the Guardians of Good Work, consortium members identified building accountability in their workforce as crucial in developing meaningful work. HR need to trust their people and their capabilities, giving them the freedom to decide the pace and order in which they complete their work. Personalisation is also key. Designing malleable job descriptions and involving workers in the direction of the organisation will help people build a sense of autonomy in an organisation’s workforce. Finally, HR should ensure that they are viewed as the people experts in the organisation, rather than more concerned about rules and hiring and firing.

4.3 Enhance your support of the CEO

To ensure that any narrative on the future of work gains traction within the organisation, the role of the CEO is crucial and must be enhanced by HR. There is already desire from people for CEOs to take a more active role in the organisational response to job disruption and change. 64% believe that CEOs should take the lead on change rather than waiting for government to impose it.^{xxxviii} However, CEOs are currently not stepping up. Indeed, 80% of CEOs do not think that they have a sufficient strategy to address the 14% workforce automation risk.^{xxxix} In addition, the rise of social media has led to an increasing expectation from people for CEOs to provide clarity on what they stand for, or risk being seen as inauthentic. For example, in the US the CEO of Merck resigned from Donald Trump’s business advisory council after the president failed to condemn Neo-Nazi protesters, citing the moral value of speaking out.^{xl}

People leaders therefore need to support their CEO in building a narrative on the future of work to assuage these anxieties. They need to explain why a narrative is important, and work closely with them to build it. CEOs are often under immense pressure, and it is HR’s role to help them when it comes to issues around the future of work. In addition, as shareholders and CEOs think more short-term people leaders need to become guardians of the long-term view by working with the CEO on building a narrative on the future of work.



4.4 Ensure leaders act as role-models

Leaders also need to be role-models, influencing business culture by leading by example to embed the narrative. This is particularly relevant when it comes to new ways of working. Flexible working policies are one of the key expectations from people.^{xli} Yet flexible and family-friendly working are still not viewed as part of the broader business strategy by many organisations.^{xlii} This is often a result of an absence of senior role-models, both male and female,

and fear that working flexibly will impact career progression. Leaders and managers at all levels need to act as role-models, as it is often those that workers have the most interaction with on a daily basis that have the most influence.

Leaders also need to champion learning. As highlighted, continuous and life-long learning is crucial for building ‘good work’ and a successful narrative on the future of work. Leaders need to role-model this and demonstrate that a learning mindset is a key characteristic in succeeding in the organisation.^{xliii} People will increasingly choose organisations based on their capacity to create learning opportunities, and will stay if these opportunities are available. Leaders need to develop a point of view on learning, make their involvement and investment in learning initiatives a priority, and help their people to develop the skillsets necessary to transform and adapt.

The call to action: Questions for people leaders

- Do I ensure that practices and processes are not based on stereotypes and assumptions?
- Do I invest in time as a resource?
- Are my leaders role-modelling flexible working and championing learning?

KEY MESSAGES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building narratives on the future of work is a topic that is crucial for people leaders to consider. Our research on the topic, including detailed insights shared by members and information from a variety of academic sources, has led us to three actions that we believe organisations need to take when building their narrative on the future of work.

Create an active narrative

Crafting a narrative is an active, not a static process. It requires involvement from stakeholders across the organisation, from the CEO, to HR. It also requires a knowledge of your talent, and what they expect from work in your organisation. People are looking to their employers to provide a sense of clarity and feeling of action when it comes to the future of work and people leaders need to provide that sense of purpose. They can do this by ensuring they place 'good work' at the centre of the way they design jobs and building the structures and environment for work to be a place of learning and health.

10 Key Takeaways from the Masterclass

1. Re-think time as a mosaic. Time is not linear in terms of how we get things done.
2. People expect you to have some sort of narrative on the future.
3. Creativity is multidisciplinary. Combining approaches = creativity.
4. Despite innovation you still need great leadership.
5. You need to let go properly. Crowdsource solutions – people know what they are doing!
6. Avoid stereotypes. No generational prejudice!
7. HR as the guardians of good work. People should design their own jobs.
8. Work is learning and work is health. Really analyse your jobs.
9. Activate your seeking systems and empower your people to experiment.
10. Be very clear on what you can see when building a narrative.

Be prepared to take a bet

The power of narratives is rooted in what they say about the identity, future and purpose of an organisation. They are more than a regurgitation of facts and statistics. A narrative on the future of work does not need to be precise, but it does need to emphatically tell a story and provide a point of view. Showing that you have considered what work will mean in your company, how work will be done and what the place of work is reassures people. This may mean experimenting or taking a bet on what you think is to come, but it is this acknowledgment of ambiguity that gives your narrative its power.

Know your non-negotiables

Despite the importance of acknowledging uncertainty, organisations also need to be thoughtful about which areas require clarity. If a narrative on the future of work is telling a story about who you are as an organisation, this story should show which areas are non-negotiable. This may be recognising that jobs will be lost, or that a long-hours culture will be here to stay. It may be demonstrating to your people that a sense of purpose and meaning will remain core to the work, even as the actual tasks that are done transform.

The importance is in setting out these non-negotiables, and providing a sense of transparency and honest dialogue to your people, in the face of job disruption and change.

We look forward to working with members to embed these insights and help your organisation craft a narrative on the future of work.

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APPENDICES: CASE STUDIES

Global HR Conference: Bringing Millennials and Senior Leaders Together

Overview

To help gather fresh insights and incorporate diversity of thought into their HR strategies, KPMG invited 10 of their high-performing millennial employees from around the globe and across the business to their annual global HR conference in Silicon Valley to gain feedback on their experience of working with KPMG and input to their HR initiatives. The decision to this group ties into a wider strategy of building a world-class people experience across the global network.



The Aim

KPMG is firmly grounded in the belief that millennials' ability to think differently is something that brings great value to the organisation and including them in the conversation drives a more people-centric approach to the HR strategy and bring new perspectives to HR issues and discussions.

How it works

Each year, KPMG holds a conference for the Heads of HR of the 23 biggest member firms. The three-day in-person event is designed to bring KPMG's global HR community together, to co-create KPMG's HR policies and practices and to showcase leading thinking between member firms. This year, the KPMG Global HR team was keen to inject a future focus so decided to locate the conference in Silicon Valley, at the heart of innovation where organisations are known to be leading places to work, to benefit from these external influences.

Normally the reserve of senior HR leaders, KPMG took a more innovative approach this year by inviting millennial employees from other areas of the organisation to encourage fresh thinking. These high performing colleagues were identified by Heads of HR as future leaders within the organisation. They were encouraged to represent their peers, and to articulate their experiences of KPMG, good and bad, and what they believed would make the biggest difference in the future.

To this end, the event provided a unique opportunity for the next generation to give feedback to the HR leadership and to connect to them through real stories. Furthermore, the conference also provided a challenging environment for this millennial group as they were tasked with presenting solutions to some of the most pressing HR issues KPMG member firms are facing.

The format of the event ignited an engaging dialogue, with the following key messages fed back to global leadership:

- Firstly, the millennials expressed how they felt KPMG could drive a more attractive employer brand to new talent by drawing attention to many of the innovative and creative aspects of the organisation which often don't get much profile.
- The millennials reported how impressed they were by the work KPMG was doing to drive a world-class people experience and suggested that this could be showcased throughout the organisation to drive engagement and support.

- They reinforced the idea that technological advancements are an opportunity to enable a better work-life balance (versus an 'always on' culture) and that this should be a continued focus for member firms.
- They conducted a deeper dive into the feedback process, debating such issues as transparency, frequency, selection of those invited to provide feedback, and the functionality of enabling technologies. This work was taken forward and fed into the development of the feedback system and performance development strategy.

The benefits

One of the key benefits of the event is that it enabled senior HR leaders to gain a deeper insight into the views of our millennial workforce and gain valuable input to the development of HR initiatives. The information gained also serves as a useful strategic tool for KPMG as it encourages diversity of thought and enables a more informed and relevant view of the people experience that needs to be created at KPMG. The points that the millennials raised directly contributed to various work activities underway, specifically, the feedback module of the human capital management system has been adapted in response to their comments, and the dialogue with this group has continued, with their invitation to be part of a user test group going forward.

Moreover, by choosing Silicon Valley as the location – the millennials and Heads of HR were given a unique opportunity to see inside the workplaces of some of the most innovative and successful organisations and institutions in the world. Not only was this a learning opportunity, it also gave them the chance to see what life might be like working for these organisations. KPMG need not worry, however. The Heads of HR were delighted to hear that, despite the attractive campuses and incredible brand of these leading technology firms, the millennials would rather be working at KPMG due to the varied and stimulating work opportunities and, above all, the great people they worked with.

What can we learn from this project?

By creating a non-hierarchical dynamic, whereby those in a junior positions are afforded the psychological safety to candidly articulate constructive feedback to those in more senior positions, junior employees can feel more confident in having a strategic-based dialogue with those in the higher echelons of the corporate hierarchy. Thus, one key takeaway from events of this nature is that they help to build trust, empathy and transparency within the organisation, alongside creating an environment that fosters the diversity of thought required to cultivate solutions that address the issues faced by those in both junior and senior positions.

Company background

KPMG is a global network of professional services firms providing Audit, Tax and Advisory services. They operate in 154 countries and territories and have 200,000 people working in member firms around the world. The independent member firms of the KPMG network are affiliated with KPMG International Cooperative ("KPMG International"), a Swiss entity. Each KPMG firm is a legally distinct and separate entity and describes itself as such.

Robot Programmers: Automating Job Roles at Rabobank

Overview

It is now four years since the University of Oxford published a study predicting that 35 percent of jobs in the UK could be rendered obsolete by new technology. Since then, anxiety about the impact of automation and potential job losses has only become more acute. Conversely, however, it also opens exciting opportunities to embrace new technologies. Rabobank, a forward-thinking Dutch multinational banking and financial services company has taken steps to grasp such opportunities by training internal staff members to automate elements of their role by becoming Robot Programmers. Currently operating as a project-based role, approximately 60 people at Rabobank have taken up the challenge of incorporating the role of Robot Programmer into their remit; offering a unique opportunity for employees to be equipped with new specialist skills. For example, since the implementation of RPA (Robot Process Automation) in 2016, the HR department at Rabobank has been able to migrate 100,000 HR profiles from their local banks to their central organisation using one robot in two runs.



Rabobank

The Aim

Rabobank wanted to ensure that those who are at risk of losing their jobs to technology are trained in new specialist skills that can enable them to thrive and adapt to structural changes within the company. Upskilling people to become Robot Programmers aligns closely with Rabobank's philosophy of striving to create a workplace that offers vitality, variation and a craftsmanship that encompasses a diverse range of skills.

Ultimately, the rationale for training internal people to become Robot Programmers was not completely change their job role, but, instead, to enhance their existing capabilities. With potentially hundreds of people at risk of losing their jobs to automation, there is a broad consensus within Rabobank that embracing uncertainty and upskilling is a necessary step to take if they wish to remain relevant in an industry that is believed to be at a high risk of automation. Training was handled externally at first but has subsequently been taken over by internal coaches.

How it works

Rabobank does not target specific people to become Robot Programmers. Instead, they raise awareness on such roles through local internal HR procedures. Thus, the onus is on the individual to take advantage of the opportunity to upskill. Those selected for the training and role do need to have a knack for technology but don't need an IT background. In turn, this helps strengthen the cooperation between business and IT since employees on the business side of the organisation are trained in IT skills. Thus far, the role has become available in a number of departments and international branch offices. It therefore provides a great opportunity to develop an entirely new skillset that will make employees more adaptable and agile.

The benefits and what we can learn from this project

The opportunity to develop a uniquely futuristic skill set has largely been greeted with enthusiasm by people at Rabobank. There is a collective acknowledgement that, in an era characterised by unprecedented change and uncertainty, unless one embraces this uncertainty they potentially find themselves taken out of the equation. Upskilling is therefore beneficial to both employer and employee as it cuts down on the cost and time of external recruiting while simultaneously equipping internal people with another dimension to their existing skillset. As such, what we learn from this project is that it is not always necessary to hire external people for RPA development but instead to consider it as an opportunity for internal employees to upskill and become more future proof.

Company background

Based in Utrecht, Netherlands, Rabobank is an international financial services provider, active in the areas of banking, capital management, leasing, insurance and real estate. They are also a cooperative bank with agricultural roots. Rabobank Group is comprised of independent local Rabobanks, international offices plus Rabobank Nederland, fulfilling centralised functions. Overall, Rabobank Group has approximately 38,000 employees (in FTEs), who serve about 10 million customers in 47 countries.

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