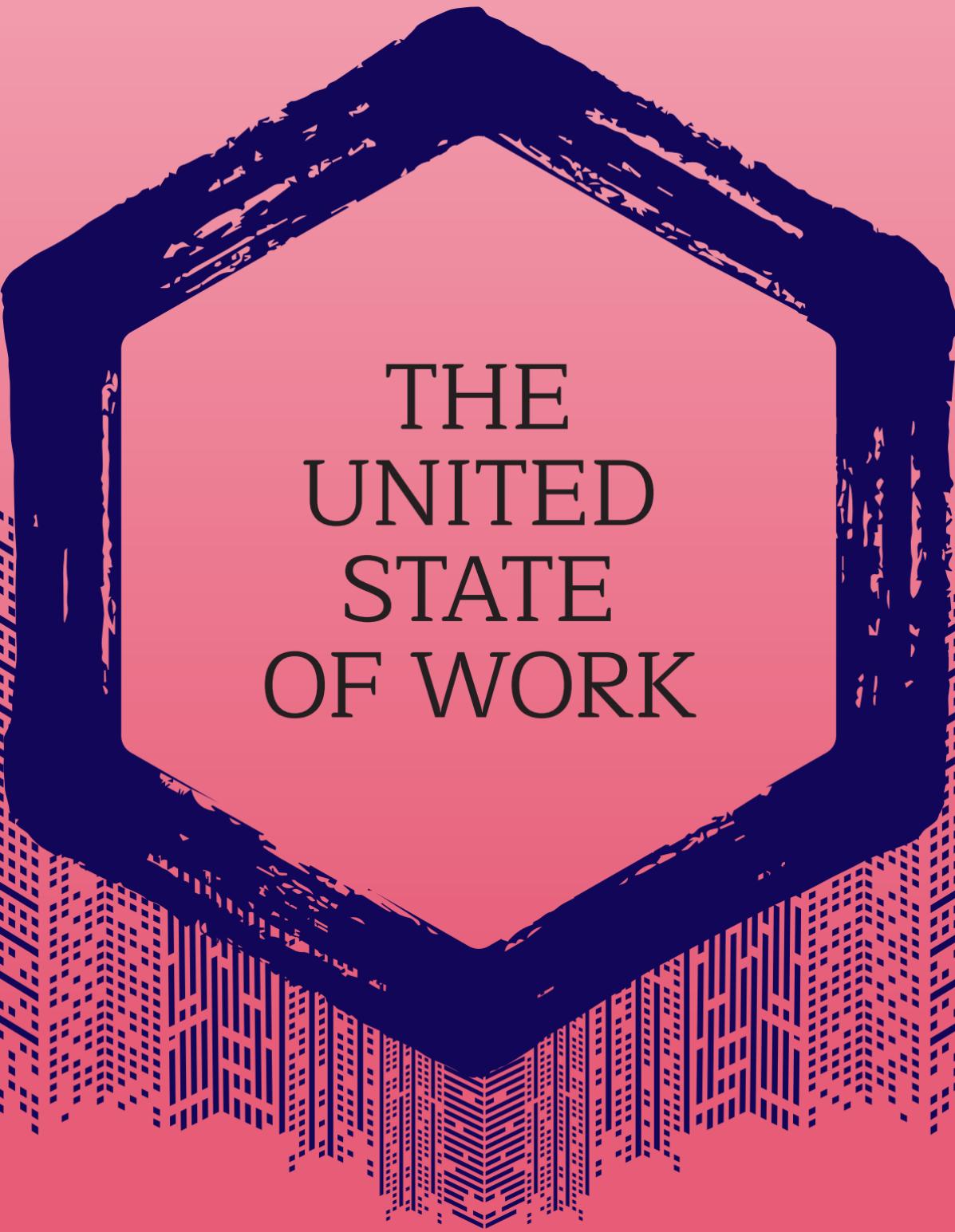


A Workathon report 5 years after Covid-19 edited by

JULIA HOBBSBAWM



THE
UNITED
STATE
OF WORK

How Working Life's Changed –
and What's Coming Next

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The United State of Work Report Team:

Editor

Julia Hobsbawm

Designer

Hayden Brown

Head of Research

William Corke

Senior Adviser

Melissa Fisher

Lead Researcher

Katy Scott

Editorial Checks

Sophie Radice and Gerrard Cowan

Contracts

Michelle Game

Back Office

Karen Persad

Foundational Partner:

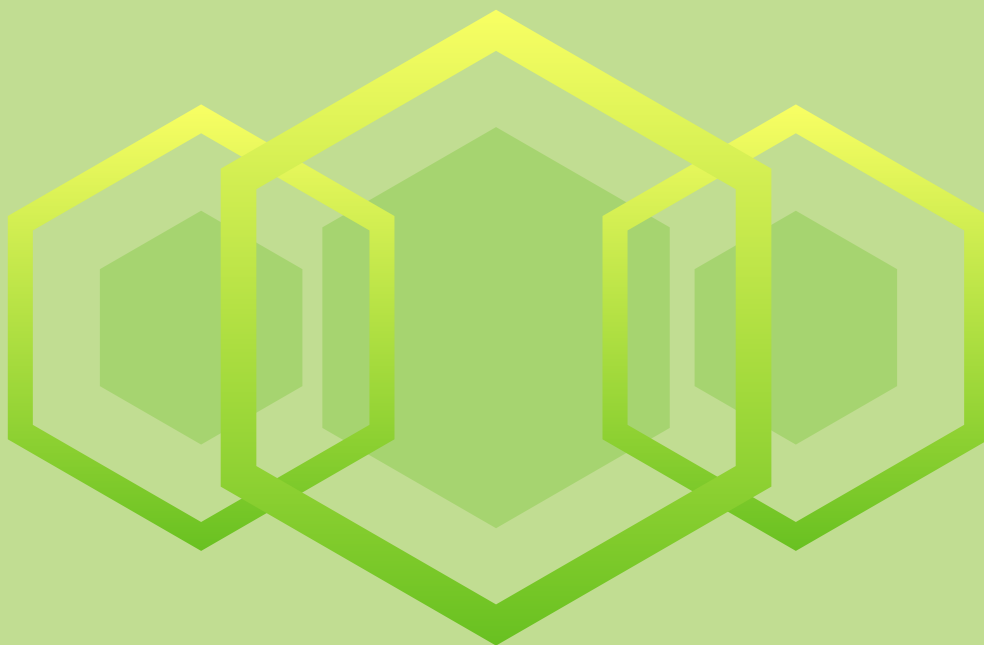


THE UNITED STATE OF WORK

How Working Life's Changed –
and What's Coming Next

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JULIA HOBBSBAWM



About this Report

Welcome to Workathon's first 'work'.

We publish this report in March 2025 to mark the fifth anniversary of Covid-19 and to look at how work has changed since the month when the historical clock stopped on working life in a way not seen since the Second World War.

Italy, the first and most affected country in Europe, locked down on 9th March. On 19th March, California became the first US state to issue a 'Stay Home Order'.

As the world experienced what the late Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman called "a situation we're simply not equipped to understand"¹ the UK stopped on 23 March, followed on the 25th by India, the most populated sovereign state in the world.

Country after country united to pull a similar set of levers to try and protect civilian and economic life: *Furlough; Lockdown; Vaccine; Work From Home*.

Inevitably there was no going back, no business as usual. AI arrived immediately after the pandemic and coincided with nothing short of a revolution in the way workers think about what work they want - and when and where they want to do it.

We've called this report *The United State of Work* because the challenges crossing the desk of every corporate and policy leader the world over are remarkably similar. We want to look at the common themes in work which apply - albeit in different degrees - from Italy to India to the UK.

The report is in two distinct parts. The first section contains reflections on what happened in March 2020 and what came next from a series of distinguished corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, academics, journalists, trailblazers and campaigners.

Secondly, we present research developed by Workathon to look globally and cross-sectorally at different aspects of work with a snapshot study of twelve nations which all locked down to a degree in March 2020. This is followed by the findings of the first Workathon White Collar survey. The report closes with a call to action from Julia Hobsbawm, Workathon's Founder and CEO, for a new global body to address the united state of work: the World Work Organisation.

¹ New Yorker podcast with Daniel Kahneman in April 2020: <https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/political-scene/why-we-underestimated-covid-19>

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to each contributor to this report. Their time and energy have been matched by their generosity.

Special thanks to Workathon's Foundational Partner JLL and in particular Peter Miscovich and Christian Beaudoin for believing in and supporting Workathon from its inception. This report would not be possible without them.

To the following for their wisdom and support, we are jolly grateful:
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Work's new Language 2020-2025

LLM Key Workers Generative AI Furlough Binge-watching
Economically Inactive Toggle OpenAI
Workation Grok3 Vaccine Hybrid Winter Perplexity
Flexetariat Work From Anywhere Asynchronous DEI Hot Desk
ChatGPT Mute & Unmute Shirking From Home
Hybrid-Haves-and-Have-Nots WFH Lockdown Co-Pilot Agentic
Remote Work 4-Day Week DeepSeek Badge Swiping
RTO
Quiet Quitting Deskless Worker Insecure Worker
Digital Nomad Coffee Badging Anxious Generation

WORKATHON WORK CLOUD

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Framing

[Nick Bloom](#) is the William Eberle Professor of Economics at Stanford University. He previously worked at the UK Treasury and McKinsey & Company. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the recipient of the Guggenheim and Sloan Fellowships, the Frisch Medal and a National Science Foundation Career Award.



Foreword

Nick Bloom

The economic impact of 60 months of change since March 2020 has been profound. The world has been busy surviving the biggest pandemic in a century: geopolitical shocks, supply chain shocks, climate change shocks, and now trade war shocks. Generative AI has interrupted any effort to get ‘back’ to normal as every organisation on the planet is united in having to adapt to it. The global spend on AI alone is likely to double by 2028 and reach over \$500 billion.¹

It is smart to locate the analysis of the last five years, as this report does, in a global context, because our interdependency on other nations in how we live has never been greater. Covid-19 showed us this and all events since then have too.

Yet one topic endures despite all of this other activity and is something of a metaphor for all the disruption put together: the changing patterns and places in working life. There is an acronym contest between a push for 'RTO' – Return to Office – and 'WFH' – Work from Home.

Since May 2020, when my colleagues and I from Stanford launched wfhresearch.com and the monthly Survey of Working Arrangements & Attitudes along with colleagues from ITAM, University of Chicago and MIT, we have consistently tracked favourable attitudes and outcomes from new models of work which reflect factors ranging from commute times to childcare, and of course productivity.

I had studied different economic models of remote and hybrid work for several years before Covid-19, notably [a working paper](#)² first announced at Stanford in 2013 and published in the [Quarterly Journal of Economics in 2015](#).³ Our data showed the positive impact on productivity and morale amongst call centre workers at Ctrip, a Chinese 16,000-person travel agency in a WFH experiment.

The future of work seemed to be showing itself in unexpected ways if you chose to look. Covid-19 has forced the whole world to look more closely.

In a 2024 paper I co-authored and published in [Nature](#) we studied another Chinese company, this time a technology one, and again found no drop in productivity or promotion. As one of the contributors to this collection of essays, Brian Elliott, noted in a paper published by Sloan Management Review,⁴ and echoed by findings of papers presented at our latest conference⁵ hosted by Hoover Institution at Stanford University, there is a trade-off when managers impose RTO mandates: high-performing employees leave.

You could argue this is a trade war of work: a fight to force workers to work to an outdated idea of presenteeism; a war around head count versus automated technological solutions.

This collection, edited by Julia Hobsbawm and published by her new organisation Workathon to bring all sides of the debates together all over the world, is timely and welcome. It brings emphasis to the data we have – and raises the prospect of global research which is much needed.

Let the work continue!

¹ Worldwide Spending on Artificial Intelligence Forecast to Reach \$632 Billion in 2028, According to a New IDC Spending Guide: www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prUS52530724

² Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment: www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/working-papers/does-working-home-work-evidence-chinese-experiment

³ Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment: academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/130/1/165/2337855

⁴ Return-to-Office Mandates: How to Lose Your Best Performers: sloanreview.mit.edu/article/return-to-office-mandates-how-to-lose-your-best-performers

⁵ www.remoteworkconference.org



[Julia Hobsbawm](#) is the Founder and CEO of Workathon and Founder of the nascent World Work Organisation. Her books address the way we live and work today and include *Fully Connected*; *The Simplicity Principle*; *The Nowhere Office* and *Working Assumptions*. She co-hosts the podcast *The Nowhere Office*.



Reframing Work

Julia Hobsbawm

Although we can chart the history of work's progress in the world by land, road, sea, sky, the internet, the cloud, and today's immersive 'agentic AI'¹, a good shortcut is to look at culture and popular culture's journey through the ages.

The Story of Work is Changing

Work has manifestly not worked for so many people for so long. Although the AI era may indeed pose a greater threat than opportunity to humans, it doesn't have to. What the art and literature of work provides me with is inspiration to think creatively about something all too often regarded as dull but which is anything but: how to design, build, operate and manage systems of work which make work better.

Leaders who communicate well about work have always possessed a poetic simplicity which we can identify with and which propels us to think differently, and do better: Charles Handy; Airlie Russell Hochschild; Margaret Heffernan; Steve Jobs.

Their words on work are no less poetic or significant to me than those of Knut Hamsun, Haruki Murakami, Colson Whitehead, Elif Shafak or Laline Paull, or my childhood favourite, Laura Ingalls Wilder. Work is embedded in so much of their stories too. Of course it is.

To depict work well is to be able to look failings and virtues in the eye. This helps us to frame - and to reposition it.

Works of art about work tell the story of what we feel as much as what we do, and we should pay attention, because it gives us permission to reframe the way we create, design and make work ourselves.

Go back: Edgar Degas began painting his series *Women Ironing* 150 years ago and his beautiful depiction of the backbreaking toil of working class Parisien laundresses is not just art, but the *art of work*. **Go forward:** The scene in *Modern Times* (1936) when Charlie Chaplin becomes a human product on a conveyor belt perfectly capturing the desperation of The Great Depression in a newly industrialised world. **Go forward again:** Beyoncé's hit song *Break My Soul* reached #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 when it was released in 2022; Tik Tok's #WorkLife has had over 30 billion views.

TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* captured the loss, shock and renewal following the First World War but resonates with the mood today. "The human engine": how prescient in an age of robotics and co-pilots!



*At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human
engine waits*

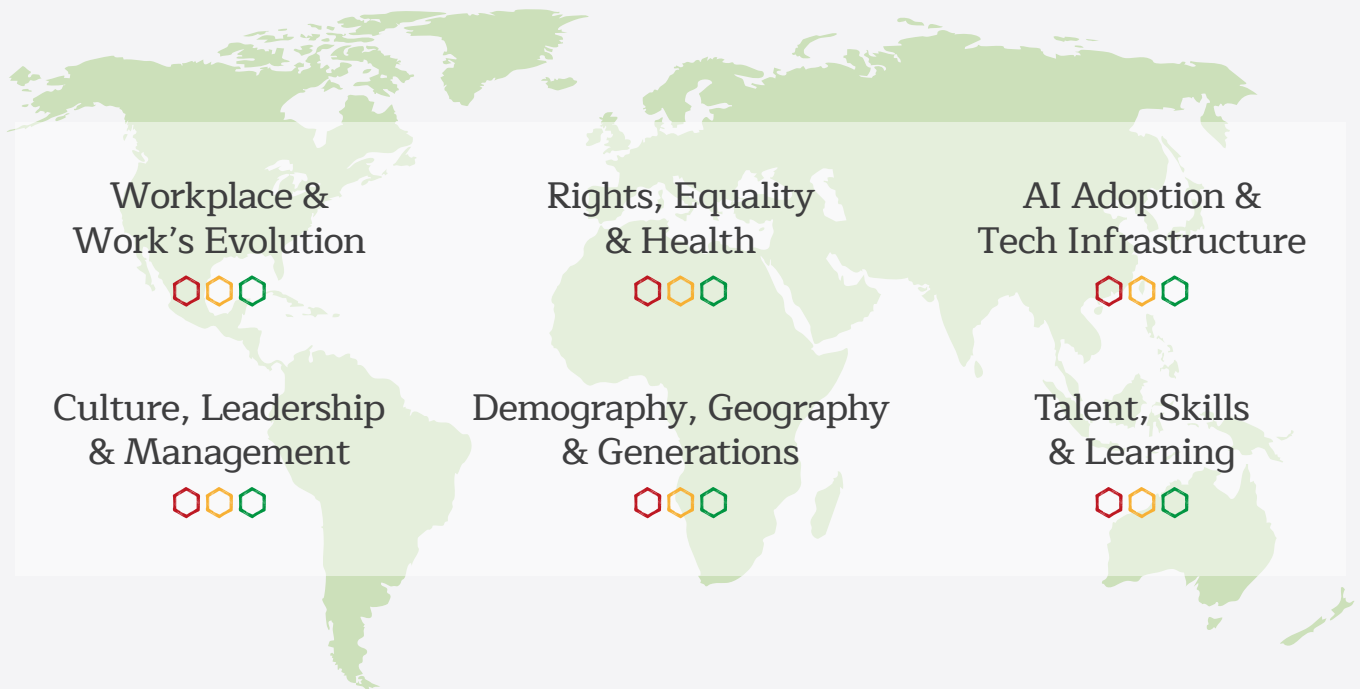
Like a taxi throbbing waiting

TS Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922

Workathon Frame

How do you frame work's issues – and how do you do so in a total, global context? With caution, but you have to start somewhere. At Workathon we looked but could not find any framework which fully spans or captures the multidimensional nature of work today.

'Super Six' global priority areas of work



WORKATHON WORK FRAME

The United State of Work Report © Workathon 2025

 **workathon.io**

This was the impetus behind developing our own Workathon Frame - the need to synthesise global information looking at people and data and patterns in a new way. Workathon Frame is designed to also become a starting point in the context of how a World Work Organisation may be structured, something I look at later in this report.

'Frame' is a good term to use - coined for us by [Melissa Fisher](#), Workathon's Chief Cultural Anthropologist – because we're trying to get the full picture of work, when all too often only a partial one is available.

The handful of words spread across the map in the six areas of the Workathon Frame are designed to help leaders in any country and company, anywhere in the world, take a leap of faith into a fresh depiction of work by looking at the whole picture – not a partial one. To create their own cultural take on what each issue means, whilst knowing that there is a universality of human experience which runs inside of work always: people and what they feel and what is fair.

¹ Nvidia CEO ushers in the 'agentic AI' era: www.telecomtv.com/content/digital-platforms-services/nvidia-ceo-ushers-in-the-agentic-ai-era-52058

[Peter Miscovich](#) is Global Future of Work Leader of JLL who develops workplace transformation solutions for Fortune 100 organisations. As co-author of *The Workplace You Need Now*, he maintains academic affiliations with Columbia, Harvard, MIT and Stanford Universities and serves on the Accenture Technology Vision Board and World Economic Forum.

[Flore Pradere](#) is Research Director in the Global Work Dynamics Research team at JLL. She has spent 14 years decoding employees' life and work aspirations and assessing key office and workplace scenarios. Her latest releases deal with [*The Future of Work*](#) and [*Future Vision, the possible futures of Real Estate*](#).



The Transformation of Work: A Global Perspective 2020-2025

Peter Miscovich & Flore Pradere

Five years after the Covid-19 pandemic upended our world, the landscape of work has undergone a permanent seismic shift. As we reflect on the changes that have occurred between March 2020 and March 2025, it's clear that we need new innovative thinking as to how we approach work, how we redesign office space and how we reimagine 'the future workplace'. The reinvention of work and the workplace applies to every organisation globally.

The Great Office Exodus and the Return-to-Office: A Growing Power Struggle

In March 2020, offices emptied overnight as the pandemic required lockdowns that swept across the globe and over 1 billion people globally adopted new remote work behaviours in a matter of weeks.

What began as a temporary preventive measure has evolved into a prolonged experiment in hybrid and remote work during the past five years.

The global pandemic event was a horrific world event that served as an 'accelerant' to promote new ways of hybrid and remote working across the global workforce at scale. This accelerant pushed workers into the future five to ten years ahead of where we were, fully equipped and prepared to adapt and adopt many of these new workplace practices and behaviours at scale.

The office's role has fundamentally changed in many respects and so has the power dynamic between employers and their employees, with a desire for flexibility amongst employees becoming the norm.

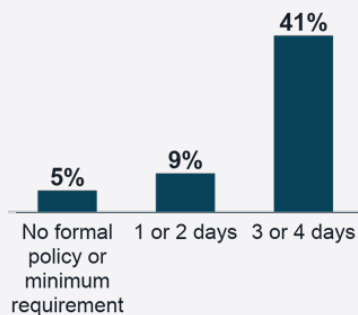
As employees have grown accustomed to having greater autonomy and flexibility, the shift back to a more rigid in-office mandated structure is causing an increase in leadership/employer versus workforce/employee tension and conflict.

Great Office Exodus & Return-to-Office: A Growing Power Struggle

More Employers would like to see their Employees in the Office more often today compared to 2022

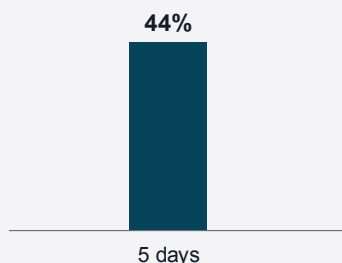
Hybrid Adopters: **56%**

Allow for some hybrid working today –
i.e. at least one day a week from home



Office Advocates: **44%**

Expect staff fully on site



2022 benchmark

34% of employees were working in the office 5 days a week on average.
Source: JLL, Workforce Preference barometer 2022

2030 horizon

43% expect the number of office days to increase between now and 2030

Source: JLL Future of Work Research, 2024

Source: JLL Future of Work Research, 2024

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The Hybrid Winter

By 2024, 85% of organisations were implementing a policy of at least three days of office per week attendance, as our JLL 2024 Future of Work research highlights.

Yet times change – and do so quickly. During the early months of 2025 we are now witnessing the beginning of an emergent ‘Hybrid Winter’ trend amongst many large corporate firms. It is becoming increasingly common amongst senior leaders today to push for a complete five-day per week RTO, making this a compulsory mandate. But demanding in-office presence, especially as a reversion of previous more flexible policies, looks like a leadership desire to regain greater command and control management dominance over the workforce, especially as employers are shifting their focus from the present to the future, and preparing for a return to growth.

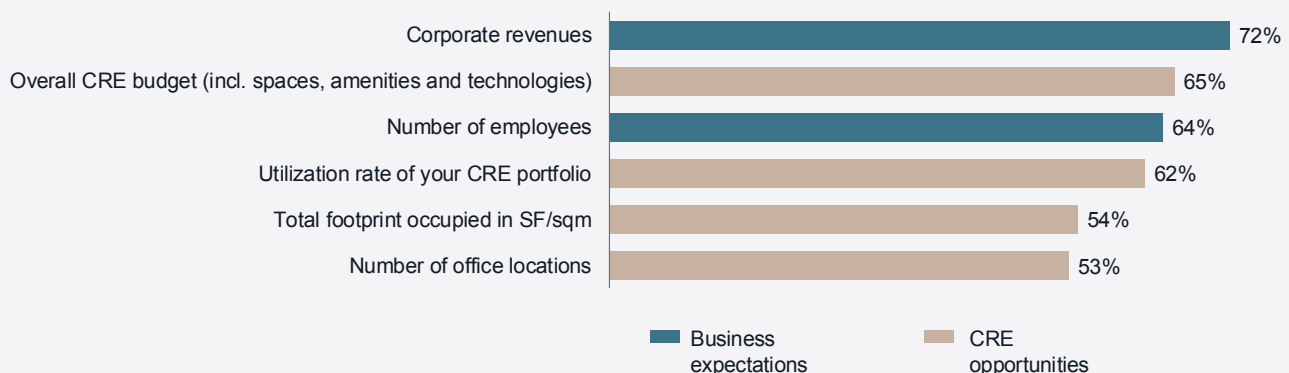
According to JLL’s Global 2024 Future of Work survey, 64% of organisations will expect their organisational headcount to increase by 2030, with 54% anticipating an increase in their total office footprint over the next five years.¹

This in turn raises serious questions about employee satisfaction, enhanced talent attraction and long-term workforce retention. The challenge therefore lies in finding the right balance between compulsory RTO mandates and flexible work arrangements which will satisfy both executive leadership expectations as well as meeting important individual human-centric employee preferences.

Behind the Emerging ‘Hybrid Winter’ Trend: Optimism for Growth and New Opportunities for Real Estate

From Real Estate Footprint Expansion to Workplace Transformation – New Opportunities for Better Use of Spaces and Buildings

Business factors and Corporate Real Estate factors most likely to increase from now to 2030



Source : JLL Future of Work Research, 2024

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The Complex Tapestry of Hybrid Work Globally

The adoption of hybrid work models has been perhaps the most significant workplace behavioural shift over the past five years. JLL research shows that 56% of organisations were still characterised as ‘Hybrid Adopters’ in 2024, embracing various strategies from fully remote to a maximum of four days a week in the office.

Even if the Hybrid Winter turns into Spring again, there is likely to remain what our research shows, namely a notable split between these ‘Hybrid Adopters’ and ‘Office Advocates’, who prefer full-time in-office attendance. However, this divide isn’t uniform across the globe, highlighting the fact that every organisation’s workplace policy and practices are unique to them and that every client’s situation is unique across diverse global regions.

Organisations within EMEA are more likely to adopt hybrid work models, viewing hybrid work as essential to their employee value proposition and as an important workforce attraction and retention competitive advantage.

In contrast, companies both in APAC and the Americas often lean more towards full-time in-office attendance, especially in more traditional industry sectors that have always had historical on-site workforce presence and related workplace norms and behaviours.

Furthermore, workplace norms, needs, challenges and practices change, in many cases becoming more diverse and dynamic over time. Therefore, global future of work programmes must become more tailored, with bespoke strategies to meet the unique regional, cultural and industry-specific factors of the organisation and to meet the diverse employee cohort needs within each organisation.

The disparity in geographic approaches underscores what a complex tapestry of issues there are and prompts the glaring observation that the global workforce may be united in change but divided in strategy and execution.

Rise of Hybrid Work with Global Variations: A Complex Tapestry

Every Client Workplace Policy and Workplace Practices are Unique and Individual to Each Organization

Hybrid Adopters: 56% globally

Allow for Hybrid working today – i.e.
at least one day a week from home

A higher Hybrid proportion of respondents in:

- UK (79%), France (75%), Germany (73%), Italy (72%)
- EMEA (65%)
- E-commerce (73%), Energy & renewables (68%), Tech industry (62%), Life Sciences (61%)
- Big corporates (10,000 employees) (65%)

Office Advocates: 44% globally

Expect staff to be fully on-site

A higher Office proportion of respondents in:

- Peru (80%), Colombia (72%), China (61%), Brazil (60%), Saudi Arabia (58%), India (56%)
- APAC (49%) and Americas (47%)
- The Healthcare industry (54%), Retail (49%), Manufacturing (47%)
- Medium-size companies (1,000-9,999) (47%)

Reimagining Office Design and Purpose: Beyond Physical Spaces

Will the AI world of work of tomorrow become a place-based world, or will the future AI world of work further redefine the workplace to provide greater human collaboration through greater digital, virtual and immersive technologies (spatial computing) and further birth alternative, innovative and completely new ways of working?²

Certainly, the return-to-office drift has catalysed a full and complete reimagining of workplace design.

Reimagining Office Design & Purpose: The Workplace Experience



Source: JLL Future of Work Research, 2024

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With 60% of organisations expecting a much higher spend on space design and fit-out by 2030, there is much more focus upon creating ‘destination workspaces’ that will provide employees with in-office ‘peak workplace experiences’.³

These post-pandemic office spaces are designed to attract talent, foster collaboration and enhance productivity in ways that remote work cannot always equal in terms of performance.

However, it’s crucial to recognise that place is not the only factor that matters in the modern work environment. As we move into an AI-driven world, the concept of ‘place’ may well extend beyond purely ‘physical’ work locations.

Virtual spaces, digital collaboration environments enabled by spatial immersive technologies as digital work platforms will become increasingly more important and pervasive as these 'digital workplace experiences' will grow in relevance during the coming years.

Beyond Physical Spaces...Tech-enabled Workplace Behaviors

As we move into an AI-driven World, the concept of "Place" may extend far beyond purely Physical Work Locations. Organizations will need to explore and develop future AI-enabled Immersive and Spatial Computing Work Practices

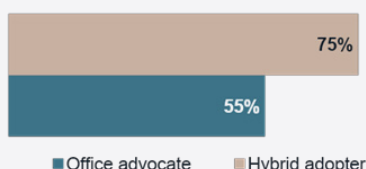
Technology Integration with Flexible Workplace Design are important, regardless of the company workstyle:

By 2030 - Our Offices will...

Our offices will be equipped with the latest AI technology



Our office spaces will be adaptable and tech-enabled to support different needs throughout the week or day



■ Office advocate ■ Hybrid adopter

Source: JLL Future of Work Survey 2024
Q. What is your company policy on hybrid working?

Source: JLL Future of Work Survey 2024
Q. How likely do you see these scenarios in 2030? Proportion who report scenario as likely.

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A vital question as human and machine ecosystems (comprising humans + Generative AI Human + Agentic AI) grow in scope and scale is going to be whether these AI-enabled collaborative work ecosystems will become place-based or highly distributed (ie remote or hybrid). We do predict greater virtual and digital enablement for AI-enabled work ecosystems regardless of office-centric place-based work locations driven by RTO mandates.

The Evolving Role of CBDs and Satellite Offices: Adapting to New Realities

Central Business Districts (CBDs) have faced challenges in the wake of post-pandemic remote work trends, but CBDs and urban locations remain far from obsolete.

In fact, 57% of organisations anticipate greater investment in CBD locations by 2030 as per JLL Research. However, the nature of these CBD investments will continue to evolve within the post-pandemic world.

Some companies are exploring more distributed work models, combining central CBD offices with satellite locations in closer proximity to where employees live, organised within the nearby suburbs and extended exurbs.

This 'hub and spoke' workforce location approach aims to provide flexibility while maintaining a strong central 'hub' organisational core with more radiating distributed 'spoke' locations.

This approach is in response to the growing importance of work-life balance and the desire to reduce long-distance commute times as these factors become increasingly crucial to improve employee satisfaction and to enable greater talent retention.⁴

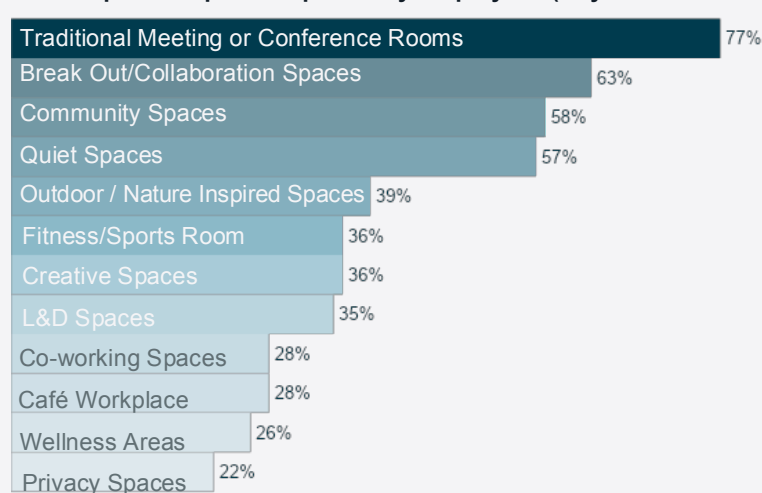
Building Culture Through Distributed Work Systems: A New Organizational Challenge

As organisations grapple with evolving hybrid and distributed work models, a significant key challenge emerges: how to build and maintain a strong corporate culture when employees are physically distributed and not consistently in the same physical space.

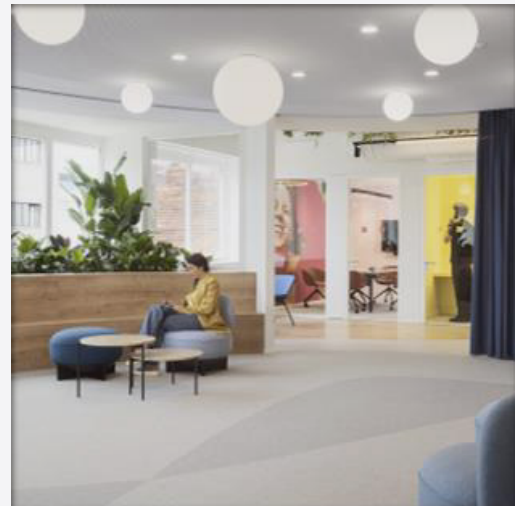
Building Culture through Distributed Work Systems

Space for Collaboration and Social Connection in High Demand within the Workplace Ecosystem

Most Impactful Spaces reported by Employees (Beyond Individual Workstations)



Source: JLL Global Pulse Survey 2024.
Q. How important are the following spaces for you? (Select top 3)



PLUXEE WORKPLACE
MILAN, ITALY

This challenge requires a reimagining of culture-building activities and initiatives by leveraging distributed work leading practices and technology. Companies have been experimenting with various approaches, from virtual team-building exercises to periodic in-person retreats with greater immersive experiential 'on-site' socialisation activities.

Some organisations are leveraging advanced technology to create greater community and a sense of cultural connection, focusing upon outcome-based business performance measures rather than time spent in the office as the measure for work performance.

The primary goal of leading organisations is to foster a sense of belonging and create a greater shared sense of purpose, regardless of where employees are located to build successful high-performing work cultures.

Distributed work leading practices can and will play an important role in culture building for the future if companies make the necessary investments in leadership practices and technology enablement that create greater belonging and inclusion.

Changing Workforce Behaviour Patterns: The Human Component

One of the most significant hurdles in the adoption of new work models is the structural staying power of established workplace behavioural patterns.

Employees who have grown accustomed to hybrid and remote work may resist returning to the office, while those who thrive on in-person interaction may struggle with more flexible and evolving hybrid models.⁵

Changing human workplace behaviour requires a comprehensive, focused and multi-faceted change management approach:

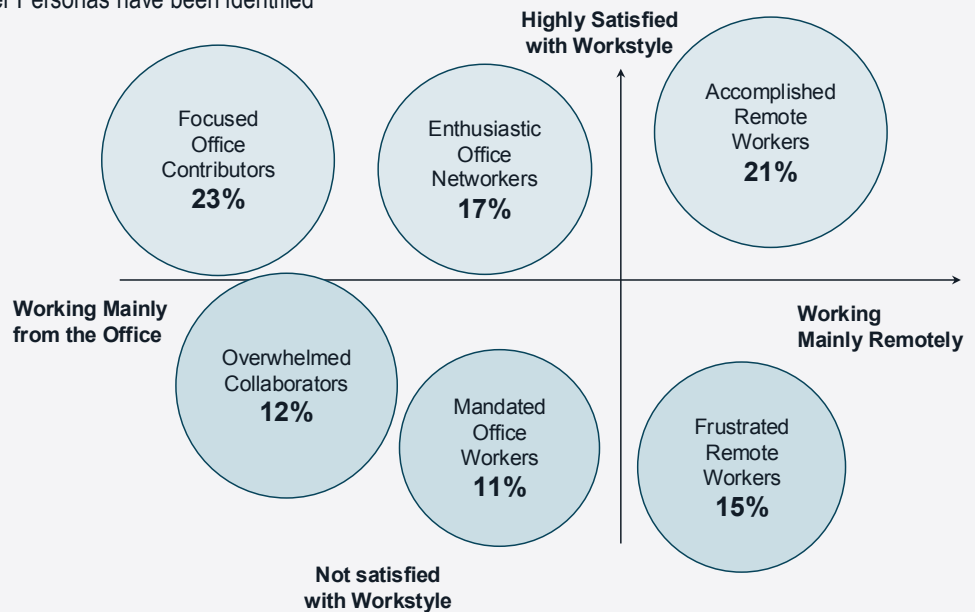
1. Clear communication of the rationale behind new workplace policies and workplace practices.
2. Gradual implementation of workplace changes with strong change management support.
3. Flexibility to accommodate individual employee needs whenever possible.
4. Ongoing feedback and adjustment of policies and practices over time.

Employee Buy-in Crucial for Office Attendance Policies to Succeed

Workstyle vs Satisfaction: Six Worker Personas have been identified

There is no significant correlation between Job Satisfaction and Workstyle(s)

Aligning Employer Expectations with Employee Expectations to have a full Understanding of the Company Work and Workplace Policies is key for Future Success



Source: Human Experience Survey, 2024

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Conclusion: Embracing Complexity with Multiple Perspectives

As we look to the future, it's clear that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges of the modern workplace.

The world of work will continue to evolve, shaped by accelerating technological advancements, changing employee expectations, and 'unpredictable' disruptive business demands.

Organisations must be prepared to embrace complexity while remaining agile in their approach to adapt to complexity over time.⁶ The successful Transformation of Work for 2025 and beyond will require the following:

1. Developing flexible workforce and workplace policies that can adapt to changing business and workforce demands.
2. Investing in advanced technology that supports both in-office and hybrid/remote work performance and practices.
3. Regularly reassessing the balance between employee autonomy and management/organisational control.
4. Focusing upon outcomes rather than upon physical-only presence for business performance.
5. Creating a strong workplace culture of 'belonging' that transcends physical locations over time.

The global workforce, while diverse in its approaches, is united in its journey towards a more flexible, technology-enabled and human-centric work environment.⁷

To navigate this challenging and dynamic work landscape, our ability to adapt, innovate and to collaborate across multiple boundaries – both physical and digital – will define the future of work.

Embracing Workplace Complexity with New Perspectives

As we look to the Future – It's clear that there is No One-Size-fits-All Solution to the challenges of the Modern Workplace



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As we look beyond 2025, we have identified six 'Global Future of Work Trends' to focus upon in terms of future impact over the five years to 2030:

1. Human + machine (Gen AI + Agentic AI) ecosystems will grow in size, scale and importance across all sectors.
2. Distributed/digital talent attraction/retention with global workforce upskilling will become top enterprise priorities.
3. Outcome-based organizational models including agile/blended/liquid talent models will create tremendous value.
4. Human-centred/personalised workplace efficacy will become our 'next new normal' for all knowledge workers.
5. Digital 'peak' employee experiences within high-quality work environments/buildings/locations will matter more.
6. Global resilient sustainability practices will become critical must-haves for our collective future societal survival.

In this complex and evolving environment, the role of global real estate and workplace transformation becomes even more critical to serve as an enabler for business success and to facilitate the delicate balance between organisational demands and individual human-centric employee preferences.

For the future, we must create agile and flexible workplace policies and practices – within both the physical and virtual realms – that will enable the highest levels of human performance in order to meet the growing complex business and societal challenges of tomorrow.

We welcome being part of the Workathon contribution to this ongoing dialogue, debate and evolving landscape.

To learn more about JLL's Research:

- [The Future of Work survey 2024](#)
- [The Future of Work 2024: The future of office design](#)
- [The Future of Work 2024: Get set for the 5th Industrial Revolution](#)
- [Cityscape Experience Catalysts](#)
- [A new employee value proposition for a new world of work](#)

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¹ [The Future of Work survey 2024](#)

² [The Future of Work 2024: Get set for the 5th Industrial Revolution](#)

³ [The Future of Work 2024: The future of office design](#)

⁴ [A new employee value proposition for a new world of work](#)

⁵ [A new employee value proposition for a new world of work](#)

⁶ [The Future of Work 2024: Corporate real estate must transform to deliver enterprise value](#)

⁷ [Cityscape Experience Catalysts](#)

Digital Nomads

35 million digital nomads around the world Mauritius
Namibia Malta 66 countries offer remote work visas
Panama VITEM XIV Nomad Residence Permit Greece Latvia
Czech Republic Uruguay Rentista Visa Taiwan
Portugal Estonia Thailand Unique Permit
UAE Greece Predicts 100,000 digital nomads for six-month Albania
stays is equivalent to the impact of 2.5 million tourists Zivno Spain
White Card Japan Premium Visa Ecuador Costa Rica

WORKATHON WORK CLOUD

The United State of Work Report © Workathon 2025



PART ONE

Then and Now

[Stefan Stern](#) co-hosts *The Nowhere Office* podcast and is a columnist (*FT*, *The Guardian*, *Prospect*) and author. His latest book is *Fair or Foul – the Lady Macbeth Guide to Ambition*. Stefan is a Visiting Professor at Bayes Business School, City St. George's, University of London



From Nowhere to Somewhere

Stefan Stern

Five years ago, in March 2020, business as usual ceased to be an option. This applied to media industries as much as anyone. Crowded studio discussions would no longer be possible in a time of Covid lockdowns. Newsrooms would fall weirdly quiet.

Whatever else was happening, work had become ‘the story’. Five years later it still is. But how to give it, as they say in journalism, ‘legs’ at this strange time when people were not working as they had before ‘out there’ on the ground as much?

The voice, that most resilient of media ingredients, came to the fore and to the rescue. The podcast format barged its way to the front of the media queue, supported by the recording capabilities of the already existing but (at that point) disregarded technology of Zoom and Teams.

The Nowhere Office podcast started broadcasting in April 2021. It was – and seven series later still is – an improvised experiment to capture and describe the changes happening in the world of work. We started by interviewing an old friend and mentor – the management guru Charles Handy. Speaking to us from his Norfolk home (where he had worked remotely for many years), Charles offered calm wisdom from his nine decades and perspective on the still unfolding crisis. He was confident that humanity would prevail, that health would be restored, and that life (and work) would go on. He was right.

Charles reminded us that the best businesses and organisations retain something of the spirit of a village or a club, where people know and value each other. Mealtimes matter a lot. It was a heartening intervention at a difficult time of isolation and worry. He rightly predicted that cultural cohesion would become a priority for teams.

Duly encouraged, *The Nowhere Office* sought out more wisdom. We spoke to Nick Bloom at Stanford (whose Foreword is in this collection), who explained how hybrid working was taking shape and how it would likely continue. We spoke to Professor Lynda Gratton of London Business School, whose finger is never far from the pulse of working life. She told us that imagination and flexibility would be required to make hybrid working work.

Once it was possible again, we hit the road. Julia Hobsbawm confirmed her frequent flyer status on several trips to the US and especially her beloved New York City. Together we went to Vienna to the Global Peter Drucker Forum, the ‘Davos of management’ as it is sometimes called. Here we heard from Roger Martin, Professor Amy Edmondson and Gary Hamel, among others, and we went to nearby Davos to produce a trio of programmes with The World Economic Forum, including a revealing interview with His Excellency Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, the UAE’s Education Minister.

The Length and Breadth of Work

Over the course of 60 programmes in the 60 months since Covid-19 we have spoken to office management businesses, property firms and trade unions. We have interviewed leaders and those they lead. And workers of all collars, blue and white alike, from Amazon drivers in New York to air stewards mid-air.

We have worked with big consultancies such as PwC, producing AI-focused specials, capturing the thoughts of experts such as Azeem Azhar and Professor Gina Neff and have learned from some of the best HR and workplace leaders, including Professor Binna Kandola, Josh Bersin, KeyAnna Schmiedel of Workhuman and Syreeta Brown of Virgin Money.

We’ve also heard from journalists covering the world of work, including Bloomberg’s Matt Boyle and Jo Constanza; the Washington Post’s career advice columnist Karla L. Miller; Indrani Sen of Fortune; Kevin J. Delaney of Charter; and an array of *Financial Times* luminaries – Emma Jacobs, Isabel Berwick, Pilita Clark and Andrew Hill.

A People-Based Activity

What have we learned? That making work actually work is neither easy nor fixed. That those bosses who are now clicking their fingers and demanding everybody back in for five days a week are making a mistake ... probably a big mistake.

2025 looks likely to be a year in which businesses test the potential and application of much-vaunted and fast-developing AI technology. This need not be bad news for human beings. But as we finally get our breath back after five years of disruption, a new disruption looms large, something Terence Mauri addresses in these pages.

Above all, we've learned that work remains a people-based activity, no matter how clever the technology becomes. It is the complementarity that counts. That is where the magic and the value can be found.

“*Charles Handy reminded us that the best businesses and organisations retain something of the spirit of a village or club, where people know and value each other.*”

[Vicky Pryce](#) is Chief Economic Adviser at the UK Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR), Chair of Fellows at RadixBigTent and Visiting Professor at King's College, London. She was previously Joint Head of the UK Government Economic Service and a partner at KPMG. Her recent books include *Women vs Capitalism*.



An Economist in Lockdown

Vicky Pryce

As a mother of adult children, I was able to adjust more easily to the Covid shock. The young Greek relatives who had been staying with me in London since the devastation of the Eurozone crisis of the 2010s at home had to face a different devastation and managed to get on one of the last planes back to Athens.

I was left with one niece who had to stay here for work reasons. Working in HR in the City, she was able to seamlessly transfer her office into her bedroom.

As an economist it was extraordinary to see the sharp drop in demand and economic activity. At some point in the middle of lockdown in 2020 an oil trader neighbour explained how it was that oil prices had in fact turned substantially negative, with oil producers having to pay tanker owners to just keep the oil there until someone may one day want it again. The fear of a new era of depression like the one in the interwar period was very real.

Since then, of course, much of the discourse has been whether the huge relaxation in both monetary and fiscal policy to avoid a severe and permanent contraction in GDP was justified.

Would other interventions perhaps have prevented the rise in inflation and cost of living issues we have all experienced in the years following Covid, albeit exaggerated by the energy crisis following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022? Epic variables!

The extra NHS spending and the huge fiscal stimulus in the form of the furlough scheme, which paid businesses to keep employees on the payroll even if they were not working, contributed to a massive rise in borrowing and debt levels, here and elsewhere.

Debate Still Rages

The debate still rages on whether it was right to cut rates to almost zero and allow huge expansion of liquidity through Bank of England operations, particularly Quantitative Easing (QE). Ditto whether the subsequent response when inflation started to rise was strong enough.

So, from that viewpoint, Covid was almost like a live experiment in economic crisis management, evolving and analysed in real time. Unlike the so-called 'Conservative Effect' of austerity which began in 2010, this shock resulted in the opposite of austerity: it was considered dangerous enough that caution was thrown to the wind and we are only now finally returning to some form of normality.

But there was inequality of treatment in the Covid measures. Those on payroll had the luxury of possible furlough while others had to go to work while the rest of us hid. Most self-employed people also fared badly, getting very little support. I fall into that category but could easily survive.

In practical terms, communications from the organisations where I have been a trustee or NED board member started being done increasingly online, which suited me fine. Some furloughed a number of their employees, got rid of some, and also acquired soft loans backed by the government. One of my academic charities completely abandoned the idea of having a proper office, cutting costs permanently. Another did the same but just reopened a much smaller one in a more central part of London.

My niece now works a hybrid schedule. Her office space downsized considerably and was unable to accommodate everyone coming in at the same time. Productivity appears to not have suffered in the process.

The habits that have endured from the early part of Covid have been a godsend. Yes, they have made tech billionaires even richer. But for me attending board meetings, briefings, and doing media interviews have all become much easier as being in a meeting room or a studio is no longer absolutely necessary. It has greatly increased the number of speaking gigs I can do.

But my overwhelming memories will be from year one, when lockdown restrictions were in operation. I used to venture out towards the park every night by myself, and deliberately walked in the middle of the dual carriageway without worrying that I would be struck down by a lorry.

And then during the first lockdown I was asked to go physically to BBC Television studios and talk about the economic impact of all this. They offered a cab but worried about infection, I suggested instead that I drive myself.

Remembering Ghost Town

Anyone who knows London traffic now will share my wistful memory of driving past the Houses of Parliament, Whitehall, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly and Oxford Circus and finally parking by the BBC's Broadcasting House. Passing through a still brightly lit city, I encountered no car, no bus, no police vehicle, no pedestrian. It was just like the rather disturbing video of the song *Ghost Town* by the Specials which I often play when thinking of that day.

I realised early on in this extraordinary time that working lives were changing fundamentally. Despite efforts by many firms and the public sector since to reset the dial, it seems the dial has done the reset all by itself in a new way economists had not predicted.

“Covid was almost
like a live experiment
in economic crisis
management, evolving
in real time.

¹ ifs.org.uk/publications/conservatives-and-economy-2010-24

[Kevin J. Delaney](#) is CEO and editor-in-chief of [Charter](#), a leading future-of-work media and research company. He was editor-in-chief of *Quartz* and had senior roles at *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. Kevin is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations board and board chair at global media nonprofit [Internews](#).

How America Works Today

Kevin J. Delaney

The state of work in the United States at the start of 2025 is one of discordant messages and contradictory pressures:

- Workers trust their employers more than other institutions. But [that trust has decayed](#) amid worries that business leaders lie and exaggerate.
- The attacks by the Trump administration and conservative critics against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes are meeting limited public opposition. But [private employers are quietly persisting](#) in efforts to make workforces diverse and workplaces inclusive, even if they shed the DEI label.
- Workers [are excited by the potential](#) of artificial intelligence. But [they're anxious](#) that AI will destroy their jobs.
- [Demographic pressures](#), including lower birth rates and restricted immigration, will tighten the labour market. But the use of AI threatens to dampen hiring for some roles.
- Businesses aren't hiring aggressively. But they're [not shedding jobs](#) at a significant pace.
- Workers [aren't voluntarily quitting jobs](#) either. But [they're frustrated](#) with their employers and eager to hop to other companies.
- Some CEOs and the White House are [firing workers](#) who don't come to an office five days a week. But the portion of days worked remotely [has remained relatively stable](#).
- Workers who earn higher incomes [are optimistic](#) they will be better off in five years. Rank-and-file workers are pessimistic and don't believe that will be likely.
- Income gaps by race [have narrowed](#). But income gaps by class have widened.
- AI has the potential to [significantly boost productivity](#). But companies haven't committed to sharing the rewards for such output gains with workers.
- Federal protections for workers and unions will decrease under the Trump administration. But [state-level initiatives](#) will shore up some worker rights.

Today's state of affairs does seem more favourable to employers, some of which are smug about throwing off the '[yoke of woke](#)' and delighted to have permission to fire workers who don't sit in a cubicle from 9am to 5pm every day. The dream of pay equality and proportional representation of women and people of colour in executive ranks is deferred. In this climate, I'm not holding my breath for the spread in the US of four-day workweeks, subsidised child-care, or other human-centric approaches to managing.

But what happens from here is likely more determined by supply and demand in the labour market than any culture war or political contest. When the labour market tightened after the pandemic, employers increased salaries and benefits and invested more in inclusion and organisational culture. If labour is hard to come by – and executives do worry that they won't be able to hire for certain roles over the coming year – then they seem to take a more human-centric approach.

Limited immigration and a low birth rate will pressure the US labour market, driving up demand for the workers available. People have come off the sidelines to join the formal labour force over the past decade, resulting in [a limited supply of workers 'on the bench'](#) to draw on. These signs point to a swinging of the pendulum back in the direction of worker power.

The main unknown is the impact that AI will have on the quantity and quality of jobs. If AI can start performing white-collar roles, as tech companies market AI 'agents' as capable of doing, then employers' upper hand will persist. Given the lure of short-term profits and leaner workforces, if AI can be used to reduce headcount it's too much to expect the US to lead the way in government protections for workers or worker-friendly behaviour by companies.

Sustainable business performance

Such short-sightedness is obviously a mistake. Research [shows a direct link](#) between human-centric management approaches and sustainable business performance. [When workers are engaged](#), they're more productive, there's less turnover, and customer service is better. That's not to mention the positive spillover into families, communities, and society more broadly.

Anti-worker and anti-diversity forces are ascendant and emboldened in the US, and the rise of AI threatens to increase employers' and the wealthiest Americans' leverage over labour. But the situation is not stable, the forces are contrary, and a human-centric approach surely will retain its place as the smartest path to business success over time.

“Some CEOs and the White House are firing workers who don’t come to an office five days a week. But the portion of days worked remotely has remained relatively stable.

[Paul Brannen](#) is the author of *Timber! How Wood Can Help Save the World from Climate Breakdown*. A former Member of the European Parliament, he is Director of Public Affairs for the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois) and the European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS).



The Wooden Workplace

Paul Brannen

As a Member of the European Parliament from 2014 to 2019, I developed the knack of working in a multitude of settings: offices in Newcastle, Brussels, Strasbourg; buses, trains, planes; coffee shops, restaurants, even pubs. My office was everywhere and nowhere.

But Brexit (when British MEPs became extinct) and the Covid lockdowns suddenly put the brakes on my peripatetic existence. I now found myself working in the same small room at home in Newcastle every day. The contrast was extreme.

What did I learn from this enforced solitary confinement? Well, I learnt that I was a lot more productive if I had the right temperature, a degree of peace and quiet, not too many interruptions and ... a pleasant view over trees.

That productivity can go up or down depending on your working environment is hardly rocket science. But our understanding of how to create the best working environment is surprisingly hazy, which is odd because it is hardly of niche relevance.

As it happens, I inadvertently stumbled across some useful pointers while an MEP. In this role, I developed an interest in how an increased use of wood in construction could help reduce carbon emissions from the built environment. Since then, [I have written a book on the subject](#) and during this process I kept coming across references to the 'biophilic' benefits of wood. Simply put, people indoors can connect with nature via wood and this promotes their well-being and quality of life.

For instance, a 2010 study by Holzcluster Steiermark in Austria [compared the behaviour of four different school classes](#): two in classrooms made from timber with wooden furniture; two in rooms built using traditional (mostly non-wooden) materials. Over one school year, 32 pupils were closely monitored, revealing that those in the timber classrooms were more relaxed, slept better and experienced a significant drop in heart rates.

In contrast, the students in the standard classrooms saw an increase in heart rate. Crucially, those in the timber classrooms made fewer concentration errors. This study strongly suggested that timber can help reduce stress levels and create healthy educational environments.

Soften the Feeling Internally

In the UK, Maggie's Charity runs a series of centres providing free practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer and to their families. And [the architecture and design of each Maggie's centre](#) is vital to the care offered. Their centres in Oxford and Manchester have been built with wood because, according to architect Sohrab Rustomjee: "Our desire was to create an uplifting environment and the exposure of the natural timber superstructure in the communal area has helped soften the feeling internally and eliminate some of the negatives naturally associated with clinical environments."

What then of the generic working environment – the office? In 2010, the University of Columbia in Vancouver took 119 students and divided them into four different working environments: wood and plants; wood and no plants; no wood and plants; no wood and no plants. The ensuing academic paper, [Wood in the Human Environment: Restorative Properties of Wood in the Built Indoor Environment](#) concluded:

"This study provides evidence that wood provides stress-reducing effects similar to the well-studied effect of exposure to nature in the field of environmental psychology.

The practical implication of this effect is that wood may be able to be applied indoors to provide stress reduction as a part of the evidence-based and biophilic designs of hospitals, **offices**, schools, and other built environments.”

The business world is slowly but surely taking note, realising that the use of wood in the office is not just about aesthetics. It also boosts health, productivity and profits.

[Bloomberg’s 2017 European HQ in London](#) contains a significant amount of wood, specifically because the architect Foster + Partners wanted to create “an inspiring, innovative, dynamic and collaborative workplace” intended to “provide the highest standards of sustainability and wellbeing for its occupants”.

Wood’s Wellbeing Dividend

Meanwhile, I was recently informed that Google’s California campus has a relatively new office building constructed from wood and the absenteeism figures for the last year show a 14% lower rate for the wooden building than for all the other steel and/or concrete offices. Google’s conclusion: wooden working environments are more conducive to staff wellbeing.

Let us conclude with a final word from Andrew Waugh, of Waugh Thistleton, one of the UK’s pioneering timber architects:

“We’re getting a really clear understanding of the biophilic benefits of natural environments, beyond the carbon savings. People sleep better in timber homes, study better in timber schools, heal faster in timber hospitals and have less stress in timber offices.”

Wood you believe it!

“*The business world is slowly but surely taking note, realising that the use of wood in the office is not just about aesthetics. It also boosts health, productivity and profits.*”

[Virginie Raphael](#) is the Founder of FullCircle, a perpetual early-stage venture fund dedicated to making work more accessible, rewarding and adaptable. Virginie started her career as a banker at Lehman Brothers and helped launch Tusk Ventures, where she advised and invested in founders operating in highly regulated industries.



New Ways to Invest in Work

Virginie Raphael

I never intended to become a venture capitalist (VC). I didn't know what venture capital was during college and wasn't exposed to it until much later in my career. It certainly wasn't always on my career roadmap to launch my own fund or to consider work itself as an investment opportunity.

How Did It Happen?

Like many others, Covid-19 was the catalyst for a big change in my investing thesis. Clearly the boundaries between personal life and work were becoming increasingly porous, not necessarily in a bad way. It became clear to me that technology doesn't just have to make us more productive or automate humans out of jobs. Rather we must leverage technology to amplify human potential and unlock the qualities that make us uniquely human.

When the pandemic hit and we all found ourselves forced to experiment with assumption-shifting and fundamentally new ways to utilise our time and space, I thought there was no better time to quit my job. I set out to explore the possibility of creating a new fund model, reflecting how I wanted to invest and solving the issues that had at last become blatantly obvious, even though they most certainly existed well before Covid.

I launched my fund, [FullCircle](#), in 2021 to create a better workforce by investing in start-up founders with a vision to make work more accessible, fulfilling and adaptable to workers' needs.

Our growing portfolio of start-ups are capturing massive market opportunities by tackling inescapable shifts around work and the workplace. Today's workforce seeks jobs aligned with their values and purpose; they want access to transparent information about what's available, are acquiring skills and showcasing their capabilities; and they approach their career as a portfolio that includes time for volunteering and fulfilling their caring responsibilities.

Just a few examples: [Tough Day](#) addresses workplace conflict and employee resilience – on the rise and a drag on productivity and wellbeing; [SquarePeg](#) leverages the latest LLM technology to make candidate evaluation faster, more accurate and more intelligent and drive better job-candidate fit. Meanwhile, [Tendercare](#) directly tackles something every worker and workplace is facing directly or indirectly: the complexity of elder care and the need to support family caregivers to meet both their professional and personal responsibilities.

I did not only want to invest in new models for a changing world of work, I also wanted to create a new venture fund model to match the innovative, game-changing companies we would finance. FullCircle has an intentionally and markedly different long-term horizon and an unconventional fee structure that is not based on the amount of capital under my management (as is industry standard), but rather one driving stronger incentive alignment and better suited to how start-ups often do best: capital-efficiently and iteratively.

Doing Your Best Work in an AI Era

Yet when we launched, investors inevitably sought to assign it to a category. FullCircle became a *future of work* fund, a term that has remained just as vague and elusive today as when it surfaced during the pandemic. To us it means investing in people doing their best work in the AI era with the chance to improve their work-life integration and the freedom to design work they will do best.

Looking at my own career history, my life-long, insatiable curiosity about different fields of work, cultures and languages has often attracted me to the path less travelled and resulted in a non-linear career journey from diplomacy to banking, consulting and now venture. No amount of time spent polishing my resume and LinkedIn profile could possibly help uncover a logical thread through my experiences to date or properly highlight the transferability of my skillset and unique contributions.

As the pace of change continues to accelerate, the temptation to take shortcuts, assign old labels and rely on convenient stereotypes for fast thinking is at best limiting. Our physical infrastructure, our education, financial and health systems, together with our lived experiences and cultural expectations, often lead us to make seemingly pre-deterministic choices with limited imagination. We feel constrained and bound by our own expectations and what we believe is possible.

Change is hard and daunting. Yet change has never been more possible. In fact, it is imperative and urgent. The future of a human-centric, prosperous, equitable and sustainable world depends upon it.

“*Today’s workforce seeks jobs aligned with their values and purpose; they want access to transparent information about what’s available, are acquiring skills and showcasing their capabilities; and they approach their career as a portfolio that includes time for volunteering and fulfilling their caring responsibilities.*”

Melis Abacıoğlu is a serial entrepreneur, keynote speaker and wellbeing advocate. She founded Wellbees, a US-based employee wellbeing platform supporting 200K+ employees. A Columbia graduate in Mathematics and Art History, she is also a *Harvard Business Review* contributor, a Tiny Habits coach, and a dedicated mother to Mila and Kerem.



The Manager's Lifejacket

Melis Abacioğlu

As we mark the fifth anniversary of the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on the workplace, we also reflect on how the global health crisis transformed our understanding of wellbeing. Before the pandemic, wellbeing in the workplace was often seen as a 'nice-to-have', focused on things like beanbags and mindfulness apps. Covid changed that perception entirely, bringing wellness to the core of organisational culture.

For this, we can be thankful. Employee wellbeing is no longer a fringe benefit or side project; it has become a fundamental part of organisational strategy. With good reason: the global healthcare sector is valued at \$21 trillion, and the wellbeing industry is worth \$6 trillion. Deloitte predicts that by 2040, wellbeing will account for 70% of the healthcare market, doubling in size over the next 15 years.

Employers are seeing the strong case for investing in wellbeing, driven by rising healthcare costs, increasing employee stress, and shifting post-Covid priorities. [Gallup data](#) shows a 40% rise in daily stress levels over the past 15 years.

Cumulative change in consumer prices for healthcare costs shows it is trending 30% higher than the real inflation. Meanwhile, [MetLife](#) reports that flexibility and wellbeing are now top employee expectations, and the [World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025](#) highlights that 64% of companies view wellbeing as a critical strategy for attracting and retaining talent – surpassing even upskilling, reskilling, and raising wages. Mind-blowing, right?

Medicine to WellTech

My path to wellbeing came through medicine. When I graduated from Columbia University in New York, US in 2009, I decided to follow my parents – both doctors – into healthcare. Joining a hospital chain, I loved helping people recover and improve their lives. But after five years, a question kept me awake at night: why were we profiting only when people got sick?

Around that time, Fitbits were the hot new trend. Everyone was talking about them –everyone, except in Türkiye, where I was living. Eager to be part of this pedometer revolution, I emailed Fitbit, only to learn that becoming a distributor would require a million-dollar investment. Undeterred, I sold my car and bought around 2,000 off-brand pedometers from China. They weren't Fitbits, but they counted steps.

I remember the day I listed them on an e-commerce site. Convinced they'd sell out instantly, I clicked 'publish' and waited for the website to crash from demand. Minutes passed, then hours, then days. The inventory still read 2,000. The screen didn't change. So I refreshed. And refreshed again. You can guess my timing on this one right here. Impeccably early. As Bill Gross famously discusses in his TEDx talk, timing is everything for startups.

The Rise of MedTech

Of course, today the [MedTech market](#) is roughly at \$600 billion, with 20% growth expected in the next five years, all the way until 2029. Why this growth? Covid played a significant role in shifting habits. With the pandemic, self-diagnosis became a new norm. Both the [World Economic Forum](#) and [Harvard University research](#) show the same result: Covid made us more health-conscious and now we are using the internet to check on our health more than visiting our GP's office. This rise in self-diagnosis contributed to a marked increase in diagnoses: 37% more cases of depression, 36% more cases of severe pain and 11% more high blood pressure cases than the year before Covid. Does that mean we're sicker now that a global pandemic happened? Not necessarily. It just means we're more aware of our health conditions now. And this increased awareness explains the rapid growth in the MedTech market.

The Importance of Wellbeing

What stands out to me now, five years after Covid-19, is that a healthy workplace understands how universal the desire for Wellbeing is and how to benefit from strong Wellbeing strategies. Our data shows that good Wellbeing practices reduce turnover by up to 52%, lower healthcare spending by 62% and save about \$6 for every dollar spent on Well-being programs. A well workforce can do so much more than an unwell one.

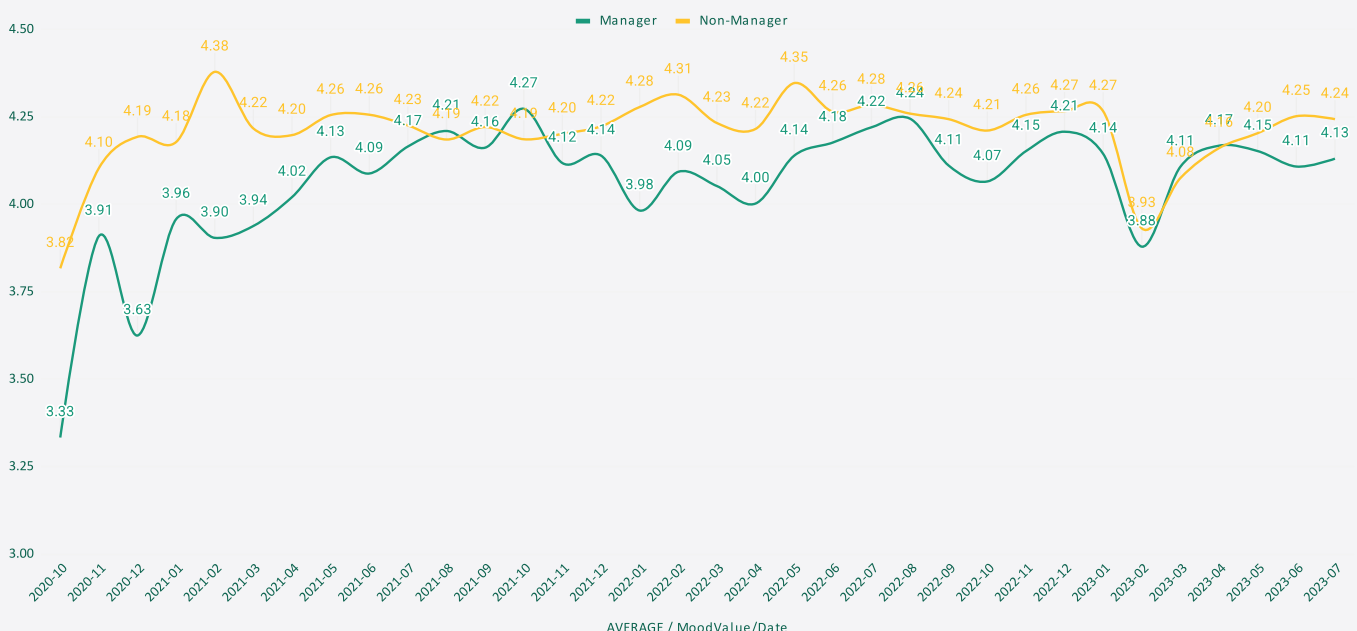
Wellbeing Starts at the Top

Today, the journey has taught me that wellbeing isn't about apps or trendy practices like goat Pilates. While such initiatives can be beneficial for some, they don't define workplace wellbeing. Most employers still expect discussions about exotic practices, but the reality is simpler and more impactful. Wellbeing starts at the top.

Research we did at Wellbees with [PwC](#) shows that how managers feel has a contagious effect on their teams. Our pulse-check shows that managers feel roughly 20% worse than their teams. When we checked this information by company, focusing on single teams, we saw a repeated result where the company might be feeling better or worse, but the team's mood mirrored that of their manager – just with a 5% difference. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. The reason? There's one word that managers keep repeating: “toast.” Managers say they are “toast” between needing to deliver faster, better, more with less, while their teams want empathy, flexibility, and wellbeing.

In other words: that phrase “put your own life jacket on first before you take care of others” is key. When managers prioritise their own wellbeing and champion it within their organisations, it becomes a cultural priority. Otherwise, it gets lost amid daily crises, meetings and targets.

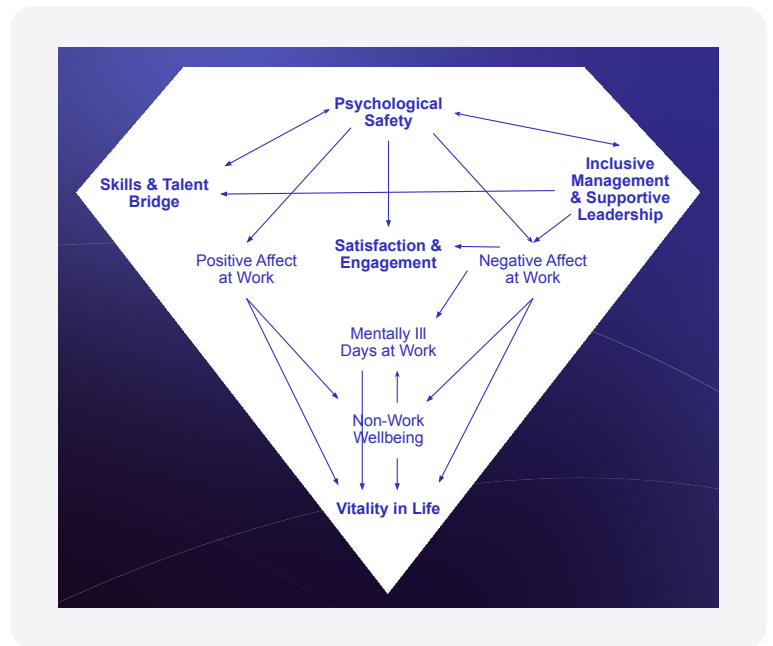
Mood



Psychological Safety

Managers also play a critical role in fostering psychological safety: the ability to speak up at work without fear of negative consequences. We also did research with [PwC](#) which found that psychological safety is the number one predictor of workplace wellbeing, leading to positive outcomes 80% of the time. We are not the only ones arriving at this conclusion. The famous Google research on 5% of its top-performing teams, [Project Aristotle](#), as well as Harvard Business School professor [Amy Edmondson's](#) research, show that outstanding results have one thing in common: psychological safety.

How does psychological safety come about? We would need a whole new article on that one, but roughly speaking, you need open communication and vulnerability – showing that you can also make mistakes. Our work, again, with [PwC](#) showed that you do not need to go out to picnics with your team, but spending time outside of work or talking about things outside of work promotes psychological safety within teams. [Microsoft Teams' 2024 data](#) shows we spent 70% of our time in meetings and emails. This means we spend more time talking about work than doing the actual work itself. This results in scrappy work or secondary and tertiary shifts. What does that do to our picnics? We have very little time for that watercooler conversation and most of the interactions happen in a very transactional way. Psychological safety starts, in a way, in front of a watercooler, and we are not standing in front of it today.



“Did we know what we know now in March 2020? Maybe. But it wasn't until we truly embraced it, acted on it and made it part of our daily lives that the change became real.

What's Next

Some clients find it surprising when I say, despite running a digital wellbeing business, that you don't need an app for workplace wellbeing. Let me repeat that: **you don't need an app**. 80% of success lies in a company's culture, managers and teams. Wellbeing vendors can support this journey, but the heavy lifting happens internally. With AI, forward-thinking clients integrate wellbeing into the flow of work rather than treating it as a standalone. This approach leads to transformative results, with some clients achieving 98% adoption rates for their wellbeing programs. I am talking about generative AI agents supporting managers and employees alike for practices that would not only support their own wellbeing but the wellbeing of the entire workforce – as we have seen, everything is interconnected.

Did we know what we know now in March 2020? Maybe. But it wasn't until we truly embraced it, acted on it and made it part of our daily lives that the change became real. The road to wellbeing may have started with my missteps in the pedometer business, but it's clear: the journey is about progress, not perfection. It begins with one small step – and often, that step is taken by a single manager leading the way.

Resources:

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[Harriet Pellereau](#) is Co-founder and CEO of Mind over Tech, which helps organisations build successful digital cultures by changing how their people think about and use their digital tools. Formerly Teaching Director at leading tech education company Decoded, Harriet now speaks to global audiences on how digital habits influence performance.



Intentional Digital Habits

Harriet Pellereau

On March 20th, 2020, I brought together my team of 40+ data science teachers in central London for a training offsite. The atmosphere was tense, with whispers about Covid-19 rippling through the room.

At the time, I was Teaching Director at Decoded, a leading tech education company that specialised in corporate digital, data, and AI training. Little did I know that by the following Monday, a national lockdown would prevent me from seeing some of my team in person for the rest of the year.

Up until that point, all our corporate workshops were delivered in-person, and as lockdown arrived, we had to shift everything to virtual.

Our transition went fairly smoothly thanks to the high technical aptitude of the team, and as we settled into a fully remote working environment, I remember feeling vaguely optimistic about how this could benefit my teachers.

Without the need for in-person workshops, we could avoid hours of travel, nights away from home, and the stress of a missing HDMI cable!

I remember thinking, “Will we ever go back to in-person teaching?”

However, it soon became clear that virtual teaching was not plain sailing. Engaging learners remotely was a challenge, and it was harder to tell if someone was struggling. Learners became more quickly fatigued in a digital environment, and despite the benefits of teaching at home, many teachers found delivering virtual workshops emotionally draining.

As time passed, we redesigned our lessons with a flipped-classroom approach, where students completed exercises independently and the virtual session became a space to ask questions and reinforce learning. We started to use tools like Mentimeter and Miro to engage and connect with our learners, and steadily we adjusted to the new teaching 'normal'.

What I hadn't anticipated was the other ways working from home would impact my team. Some struggled to set boundaries between work and rest, while others needed support to create a work environment that supported their productivity and focus.

Personally, I was experiencing similar challenges. As someone who loves technology and works in a digital environment, the way I was using my devices meant that my productivity and wellbeing were both being negatively impacted. It was also impacting my connection with my children. As I navigated working at home with two toddlers charging around, I was struggling to pay them attention amid all the digital distractions.

Make Every Minute Online Count

Mind over Tech was born out of an awareness that the way we use our technology – our digital habits – is critical for success in the modern workplace, and life in general.

Ongoing research¹ from consumer insights company GWI shows that the typical internet user now spends 6 hours and 40 minutes online each day. Our goal is to make every minute spent online count, because not all screen time is equal.

I remain very pro-technology, particularly as a busy parent, and am grateful for how my digital tools can supercharge my productivity, entertain me, and help me to unwind and connect with loved ones and colleagues across vast distances. However, I know that if I don't use them wisely, my digital habits can cause me to be distracted, anxious, and have a negative impact on my performance overall.

As professionals, we develop digital habits organically – often without realising their impact on our performance. Many of us are unaware of how these habits shape our productivity or how to adjust them effectively.

The rise of AI presents an opportunity to rethink workplace digital habits. While companies recognise the need to adopt AI tools to remain competitive, many face resistance from employees due to trust concerns. According to Deloitte's *Now Decides Next* report,² 49% of executives cite trust issues as the biggest barrier to AI adoption. Employees worry about data privacy, job security and the broader implications of automation.

AI is not just another workplace tool – it fundamentally changes how we interact with technology. Research³ from Carnegie Mellon University highlights that AI is reshaping job roles, demanding new skill sets and ways of working.

The challenge is ensuring that AI augments rather than overwhelms. Just as we needed to be intentional about how we worked remotely, we now need to be intentional about how we integrate AI into our workflows. Training and upskilling must go beyond technical AI skills to include digital habit strategies, helping employees manage the impact of working in an AI-augmented world.

The Struggle with Workplace Distraction

In 2018, Udemy conducted a study⁴ into workplace distraction and found that of the 1,000+ professionals asked, 70% agreed that training can help people block out distractions. The same study also found that 66% of those who struggled with workplace distraction had never talked to a manager about it.

If we fail to address these challenges, AI risks becoming just another source of digital noise rather than a tool that truly enhances performance. The organisations that will thrive are those that balance cutting-edge technology with mindful digital habits, ensuring employees remain empowered rather than overwhelmed.

Our clients at Mind over Tech know that success isn't just about adopting new tools – it's about using them with intention. By fostering a culture of digital habit awareness and adaptability, we can harness AI's potential to transform the way we work for the better.

“66% of those who struggled with workplace distraction had never talked to a manager about it.”

¹ www.gwi.com/connecting-the-dots

² www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/consulting/us-state-of-gen-ai-report-q2.pdf

³ www.cmu.edu/news/stories/archives/2024/november/report-investigates-workforce-implications-of-ai

⁴ research.udemy.com/research_report/udemy-depth-2018-workplace-distraction-report/

[Brian Elliott](#), CEO of [Work Forward](#), is a leadership advisor and future of work expert. After 25 years as startup CEO and executive at Google and Slack, Brian co-founded [Future Forum](#). He's the author of [*How the Future Works*](#), Senior Advisor with BCG, and on *Forbes'* [*Future of Work 50*](#).



From Presence to Performance

Brian Elliott

I've had a front-row seat to the biggest transformation in how we work in decades: the shift to flexible work. Leading [Future Forum](#) and serving as senior advisor to [Flex Index](#), I've helped executives at hundreds of firms wrestle with a fundamental question: what's best for both organisations and people?

I grew up in a world of work rooted in place. The office was where work happened: showing early and staying late got you ahead. It worked for me, a white male who wasn't the primary caregiver. But I figured out the benefits of flexibility in my startup days through a great salesperson named Shelly. Her 'deal' was simple – give her flexibility, and she'd deliver results. That light bulb moment taught me that when you give people goals and autonomy, they do great things.

For the next two decades, even though I led teams distributed across cities and across oceans, I still considered the office to be the central hub for work. Even at Slack, my Denver-based engineering partner flew to San Francisco 23 times in 2019 to be 'in the room where it happens'. It took a pandemic to open all of our eyes to the fact that our digital infrastructure, not physical space, was our primary collaboration tool.

That realisation unlocks massive potential. Most firms beyond minimum scale are already distributed, and scaling requires mastering distributed leadership. Flexibility brings clear advantages: more [diverse talent pools](#), [higher productivity](#), [lower attrition](#), and contrary to some executives' fears, [higher engagement](#) and [better culture scores](#).

Don't Measure: Reward

The key to unlocking this potential? Shifting from measuring activity to rewarding outcomes; results over hustle culture signals. Firms like [Synchrony Financial](#) have improved firm performance by pairing flexibility with accountability, and as [Airbnb CEO Brian Cheskey put it](#): "If you want a team to work harder, don't make them come to the office, give them a crazy deadline and check on their progress every week."

While headlines fixate on the extremes of fully remote versus full office work, reality tells a different story. [Future Forum research](#) shows only 15% of global office workers want to be fully remote, and 20% need an office to be effective. The vast majority want regular time together. Making that work isn't one-size-fits-all – it depends on whether teams are co-located or distributed, and [what moments truly matter](#) for in-person collaboration.

The bigger opportunity lies in how we work, not where. Reducing meeting hours to provide more focus time [boosts productivity scores by over 30%](#). Yet we continue arguing about days per week in the office while ignoring that executives and employees agree [half our meetings are a waste of time](#).

Flex in Flux

In 2024, Flex Index data showed that flexible work, specifically some form of hybrid, became the norm: [68% of US-based firms have a flexible work policy](#). At the same time, we've made work more accessible for many: employment of [women with children](#) and [people with disabilities](#) reached all-time highs in the US. The latest round of US-based CEOs demanding a return to five days a week in the office shows we're not at a point where this is settled.

Flex Index data shows industry variations that point to some of the driving factors. Firms in industries like restaurants and retail are becoming more flexible, while industries with investments in commercial real estate (such as financial services) and those rife with layoffs (media, for example) are increasing full-time return to office demands.

“*Even at Slack, my Denver-based engineering partner flew to San Francisco 23 times in 2019 to be ‘in the room where it happens’.*”

Ego and Control

Will we see continued backsliding? Yes, temporarily. But for every CEO loudly mandating five days in office, two others are quietly attracting their top talent. Companies using office mandates to drive staff reductions without severance might seem clever, but they're [three times more likely to lose women than men, and top performers are the first to leave](#).

[Research](#) and my conversations with executives reveal a bigger truth: resistance isn't just about firm-level factors – it's about ego and control.

You can't command-and-control your way to future success. We're five years into a major shift enabled by technology – from broadband access to consumer-grade collaboration tools. Organisations resisting the modest changes that ensure success in flexible work will struggle even more with the fundamental enterprise rewiring that AI demands.

The path forward isn't backward. The winners will be those who adapt to the future of work, not those who cling to its past.

[Tom Redmayne](#) works at Industrious, one of the largest flexible office providers in the world, as Head of Europe & Global Sales. Prior to Industrious he spent eight years in a variety of roles overseeing corporate development, global sales and the North American business at the real estate technology company WiredScore.



The Emotional Self and the Work Self

Tom Redmayne

The month of March 2020 is the moment when everything changed for me, personally and professionally. My first child was born in New York on Wednesday, 11th March. Distracted, I don't think I kept up with the news that this was the day that Dr Anthony Fauci told the House Committee on Oversight and Reform that the coronavirus "was about to get worse".

We went into the hospital on the Upper East Side in Manhattan and three days later, New York went into lockdown. The whole city was empty. The world we came out to was not just different for us, but for everyone. People say your life changes when you have kids, but this had an added dimension. It was a sliding doors moment in my life.

My work life had changed radically too: I'd just been promoted to run the North American part of the company I worked for at the time, a building technology company, and we had great growth ambitions. Suddenly the whole business had to go remote overnight. We had to totally restructure how we worked as a team. This was the epitome of a 'Black Swan Event'.

Having meant to be on paternity leave for six weeks, I was back working within 48 hours. Meanwhile, all around us in Brooklyn and Manhattan, the world turned upside down.

Despite all the sadness and worry around us, we tried to make the best of the situation. Personally, I spent the first 18 months of my daughter's life seeing her every single day, in the same place, and it defined what I think fatherhood is. I'm so grateful for that. Covid-19 solidified in my mind a really strong view that you should focus on output-based work, so the location becomes relative to what you're trying to achieve.

Perspective Shift

Today I work in flexible workplace provision around the world. Covid-19 made me see that the idea of having to be somewhere all of the time or that one size fits all is dead. The essay question today is not 'how do we get the team back into the office?' but 'what environment do we need to maximise productivity in the medium-long term?'

I realised something else about work and life too. The personalisation of consumer products, one of the great meta trends that goes from the trainers to the t-shirt, also applies to the working environment that you want to be in. My perspective shifted from a professional approach to buildings, real estate and workplace environments to one which understands what a big part personalisation plays for our tenant companies that want to attract and retain the best talent. It's much bigger than just how they look.

What I learned is that how we feel is central to performance at work – and that starts with what happens in the building when you do go in.

At Industrious, which I joined in 2024, we focus on the experience of what happens in one of our offices, but we are heavily data-led and iterate constantly.

So, for example, our data led us to shift to a network strategy from focusing on Central Business Districts (CBD) in cities (we're currently in nine countries in 250 locations) to areas that members might not have considered before, where people want to live, work and play. So instead of focusing our growth on expanding in

downtown Houston, we started looking at areas like Coconut Grove in Miami. We've also seen that the importance of our global network has grown, as people increasingly want the flexibility to work from multiple locations, knowing they can expect the same consistent high-quality office experience wherever they go.

Oat Milk or Whole Milk?

Delivering a personalised experience for our members is at the heart of everything we do. In Seattle, for instance, we ran different experiences in different buildings. At the beginning of the experiment, we had 65% of our members who came in on average three days or more a week. We were able to drive that up to 85% by actually really focusing on the experiences people wanted to have. And the key thing here is that 70% of our customers are introverts, not extroverts! They don't want some big all singing, all dancing, beer pong, Ted Talk extravaganza. They want someone to know their name. They want someone to understand that they like oat milk rather than whole milk. They want someone to welcome their guests.

The pandemic blurred the boundary between work and life, between home and workplace. It blurred the boundary between the emotional self and the work self. It stands to reason that this fusing of feeling with performance is reflected in how we work, when we work and of course, where we work too.

“*What I learned is that how we feel is central to performance at work – and that starts with what happens in the building when you do go in.*”

[Phil Kirschner](#) is the Founder of PK Consulting. He has 20+ years of expertise at the intersection of real estate, employee experience, and technology and a passion for helping organisations thrive in times of change. Phil is a LinkedIn ‘Top Voice’, a *Forbes* contributor, and keynote speaker.



The Change Agent

Phil Kirschner

Change is no longer a one-time event – it's a constant state of evolution. I think I knew that before March 2020, but it was the moment I could no longer ignore it, either personally or professionally.

Like many people, my family and I sat out Covid-19 as best we could. I thanked whoever it is up there that we survived when so many did not: New York, where I live, lost 45,000 people during the pandemic. More than 800 people died in a single day in the city, on 1st April.

Had I switched on Zoom more than twice before then? Not that I recall. Had I been in a boardroom with a cute [Meeting Owl](#) teleconferencing tech creature which swivelled cutely to catch whoever was talking and project them onto the screen in a more inclusive way? Nope. Zoom had been around for a decade and Owl Labs had launched in 2017, but the times had not changed yet.

Pre-pandemic, if you worked and wore a white collar, so to speak, you worked in buildings. A lot. Even when I worked at WeWork, which epitomised the shift to flexible working in so many ways, I was always-in and always-on.

Then came 'After'. Everyone back to work? Kind of. Sort of.

By late 2020, through 2021 and 2022, going into any office was like being in a very bad traffic queue which was on stop-start. Suddenly, how many times you swiped a turnstile was a metric we were all paying close attention to. Suddenly corporate work wasn't about getting from A to B in a physical sense – from one meeting to another, in a commute of some kind – but something else: getting from one headspace to another.

That's complex for any large organisation. What I do now is work with executives and teams to figure out: "What's your new route? What's your new A-B?" The answer is always that the destination matters less than the process. If you're developing a continuous cycle of adaptation, resilience and innovation: tick.

If you're not, what's holding you back?

Corporate Change has Changed

When I started working in this space, change management was primarily seen as a transactional process – launching a new system, reshaping a team, introducing a new workplace model, and expecting people to adjust accordingly.

Traditionally, strategy and tactics revolved around top-down communication: executives would announce a shift, town halls would be held, emails would be sent out and perhaps a few workshops would be scheduled.

We're seeing that approach happen again in some institutions. It tends to fail because if you overlook how people experience and resist change, you misunderstand that resistance is usually about fear – of losing control, becoming irrelevant or not understanding the new expectations.

At McKinsey, I worked on a survey testing best-in-class workplace experience practices. One of the most interesting findings was how rare organisations were to have an authentic 'test-and-learn' culture. Many leaders feared failure, particularly in industries where change has historically been slow-moving. Yet those who embraced iteration – who treated workplace transformation as an ongoing learning process – were far more successful in their change efforts.

Real change requires leaders to model new behaviours themselves. The leader who wants everyone in the office five days but works from the Hamptons Friday and Monday, for instance. The boss who won't use their own collaboration tools or engage in the undoubtedly more complex new work culture dynamics.

People notice. Teams take note. Resentment is not a productivity driver.

Another critical lesson I've learned is that change is deeply personal. At its core, change is about people – how they work, feel and adapt. The pandemic was a perfect example of how change affects people differently. Some employees thrived in remote work, while others struggled with isolation. Some leaders found new ways to empower their teams, while others resisted relinquishing control. Navigating these human complexities requires a thoughtful approach that prioritises communication, empathy and co-creation rather than rigid top-down mandates.

“*Another critical lesson I've learned is that change is deeply personal. At its core, change is about people – how they work, feel and adapt.*”

Zooms and Owls

Then there's the role of technology: back to those Zooms and Owls, but more. Technology is now playing a growing role in change management. AI and digital tools are now used to predict where resistance will emerge, automate administrative tasks and provide more personalised change interventions. For example, AI can analyse employee sentiment through communication platforms. Leaders can learn new cues from new data – and respond accordingly.

Ultimately, the future of change management lies in personalisation and employee-centric approaches. Organisations that successfully implement change don't force employees into rigid structures: they empower them with choices, resources and support systems that adapt and feel natural.

We've had five years of change and that's just the start. We may be out of lockdown but any leader who thinks they can lock in processes of their own choosing without managing that change will not succeed as fast as the one who connects.

I see and work with plenty of great executives. We need more of you. Let's do this.

[Emma Thwaites](#) is Director of Global Policy and Corporate Affairs at the Open Data Institute (ODI). She has held senior roles at the BBC and UK Cabinet Office. She sits on the ODI's Executive Leadership Team, is a board member of the [Diversity Economics Institute](#) and Executive Chair of [Allegory](#).



Technology's Shadow

Emma Thwaites

Four years before the pandemic, in an article inspired by watching Werner Herzog's documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*¹, I considered the handprints left by an ancient ancestor in France. "Our cold but creative ice-age friend had to wait a long time for their message to be heard (or seen) by millions," I wrote. "Today, it takes milliseconds to potentially reach the same number of people."² Where this prehistoric forbearer waited millennia for their message to achieve global reach, today's digital tools promise near-instant worldwide connection.

Revisiting that piece eight years later, the observation now seems incomplete. As Director of Global Policy at the Open Data Institute (ODI), I now see how our digital age both reveals and conceals. The same technology that enables voices to be heard from Aotearoa/New Zealand to Zimbabwe also obscures the labour of those who maintain our digital infrastructure. Five years after Covid-19 transformed how we work, we must look beyond the polished interfaces of our connected world to understand its global foundations. The question isn't simply how technology has changed work but whose labour remains invisible in this transformation.

Profound Inequalities

Digital technology has enabled unprecedented knowledge sharing across borders, allowing diverse perspectives to contribute to conversations about our collective tech-enabled future. Through my work at the ODI, I've witnessed how digital platforms can amplify previously marginalised voices in crucial discussions about technology and society. Yet this masks profound inequalities in how digital infrastructure shapes global labour markets.

Last autumn, at an ODI event, a former African content moderator shared her experience working for a social media platform. Her testimony lifted a veil on the hidden human infrastructure of our digital world. She explained that employees in the Global South earn a fraction of the wages of those in the Global North who are engaged in the same work. They are often involved in reviewing deeply traumatic content while bound by strict non-disclosure agreements about both the terms of their contracts and the type of work they are required to perform. These agreements, carrying penalties of thousands of dollars and potential jail terms, prevent workers from even naming the platforms they work for. When local authorities attempt to strengthen workers' rights, companies relocate their operations to countries and regions with weaker labour protections. Despite their essential role in platform safety and identifying criminal activities that have led to investigations and convictions, these workers remain largely invisible to the users they protect.

The environmental cost of our digital infrastructure is also often obscured. While we can verify that data centres consume approximately 1% of global electricity³ and that training a single large AI model can emit as much carbon as five cars over their lifetimes,⁴ many environmental impacts remain hard to measure.

“Looking forward, we must acknowledge technology's tremendous potential and its hidden costs. Artificial intelligence can enhance human capability when thoughtfully deployed. However, seeing the diminishing space for civil society voices in technological discourse is concerning.

Digital's True Cost

This opacity reveals another troubling aspect of our digital economy – the challenge of fully understanding its actual cost. The minerals required for our digital infrastructure, from lithium to cobalt,⁵ are often extracted under conditions that devastate local environments and communities, particularly in the Global South. As we have said at the ODI: “The mines that provide material for our technologies are connected to systemic human rights and labour abuses ... cloud infrastructures from above directly require deep scars in the ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chile and Brazil.”⁶ Precise data about these impacts remains elusive, suggesting that what we can measure may only be the tip of the iceberg.

Looking forward, we must acknowledge technology's tremendous potential and its hidden costs. Through my work at the ODI and as founder of a specialist communications agency, Allegory, I've observed how artificial intelligence can enhance human capability when thoughtfully deployed. However, we should be purposeful in its implementation. So, seeing the diminishing space for civil society voices in technological discourse is concerning. Recent job losses and closures in the non-profit tech sector highlight this issue. Yet these organisations are crucial advocates for ethical technology and represent citizens and workers in a conversation increasingly shaped by corporations. Their diminution risks leaving critical decisions about our technological future primarily in the hands of profit-driven entities.

Three Priorities

As we envision the next phase of digital transformation, three priorities stand out: maintaining diverse voices in technological governance; ensuring transparent documentation of labour conditions globally; and developing frameworks for measuring technology's true impact on the environment, the working world and our communities.

The future of digital rights depends on our ability to make visible what has been hidden, whether that's working conditions, environmental costs or the erosion of civil society's voice in technological development. Without purposeful intervention and strong governance frameworks, we risk creating a global digital economy that, while appearing to connect us all, actually deepens existing inequalities and environmental challenges. The question isn't whether technology will transform work – it already has – but whether we can ensure this transformation serves humanity equitably and sustainably.

¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave_of_Forgotten_Dreams

² allegoryagency.co.uk/blog/social-media-across-millennia/

³ www.iea.org/energy-system/buildings/data-centres-and-data-transmission-networks

⁴ www.technologyreview.com/2019/06/06/239031/training-a-single-ai-model-can-emit-as-much-carbon-as-five-cars-in-their-lifetimes/

⁵ theodi.org/news-and-events/blog/data-centres-cloud-infrastructures-and-the-tangibility-of-internet-power/

⁶ Ibid.

[Ben Page](#) is Chief Executive of Ipsos, one of the world's largest research companies, covering 90 countries. A Visiting Professor at King's College London, he is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He also serves on the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at UKRI.



Geography Still Matters

Ben Page

The day in 2020 we stayed at home – and stayed there – was surreal. But it also tapped into the best of humanity. In a crisis, many of our 5,000 clients rallied to support their people. At Ipsos, we did too. Across every one of our 90 countries, Ipsos took action to enable employees to work from home – and to be there for them financially and emotionally.

Individuals also rallied around each other, with a huge upswell of organic, mutual learning and ‘checking in’ to make sure colleagues were well. A crisis can bring out the worst or best in both businesses and individuals. I saw nothing but the best in the people I worked with; we were if anything more connected in a crisis, as I started weekly calls with thousands on the state of the pandemic and the business.

Since then, the global increase in hybrid working has helped many and engendered greater trust, engagement and empowerment among those who work flexibly from home. No wonder that by 2021, nearly 7 out of 10 workers across all the countries we surveyed wanted to work a hybrid pattern.¹

Good and Bad Hybrid Working

This is complemented by our [Global Trends report](#), which finds that in a world (and employment landscape) reshaped by the pandemic, the right to make our own decisions about how to live our lives, define our success and balance ourselves and communities is globalising. Hybrid working has given back control to millions.

Of course, there is good and bad hybrid working – it looks different by demographic. Our research suggests more office working for younger employees, more time at home for parents.

At the same time, business leaders and others are challenging the efficacy of home working. A common concern is falling workforce productivity, though there has been no definitive data to prove the case either way.

My own experience is that many of us miss the camaraderie of the office, consciously or unconsciously. Some 53% of 18-24-year-olds who spend less than four days a week in the office report feeling lonely.² I find it much easier to solve complex problems or develop new ideas face to face. I worry about the lack of opportunities for younger colleagues to pick things up via tacit knowledge. At Ipsos we have noticed – as have larger professional service firms – that those who joined during the pandemic took longer to get up to speed and be productive. All these things tell me as a leader to champion the office.

Of course, home working saves employees time and money commuting. Our data also shows that when the job market is favourable – as it was in the post-pandemic boom – employees will job-hop for the flexibility they want. Some 41% of UK workers say flexibility is the most important factor when considering a new job.³

This dilemma has drawn some to binary solutions. A clamour can be heard for ‘everyone back to the office, always’. But for two years in a row (2022 and 2023) Ipsos studies have shown that a blended approach is best. Three days a week (or, for some groups, four) is best for employer and employee alike. That is what I am asking for – our colleagues spending three days at least with clients or each other, face to face.

AI's Transformation of White-Collar Work

Our groundbreaking 2023 study showed that employees working a 3:2 model of office and home were more likely to have regular career development discussions with their manager, to experience faster decision making, and more likely to recommend their employer as a great place to work than those either totally remote or full time in the office.

While AI is now gradually transforming white-collar work, the debate about where and how we work will rumble on. It has become something that divides rather than unites us: our Chinese colleagues are all in the office, our Europeans are mostly in offices, and a large part of our US workforce are entirely remote.

We are not in a fixed final point at Ipsos, and neither are employers generally, but one thing is clear: the world is unlikely to return to 9-5, five days a week in offices in the near term. The question we should be asking ourselves is what work culture is best for our sector and how to deliver it, not just where to deliver it. But geography still matters!

“*I worry about the lack of opportunities for younger colleagues to pick things up via tacit knowledge. At Ipsos we have noticed – as have larger professional service firms – that those who joined during the pandemic took longer to get up to speed and be productive. All these things tell me as a leader to champion the office.*”

¹ In the absence of restrictions, where do you want to work in the future? 68% say work hybrid. Source: 175,022 responses from employees to online surveys conducted globally between June 2020 and December 2021.

² Full-time office workers aged 18-24 who reported feeling always or often lonely. Making the case for the office, September 2023.

³ Should I stay or should I go? Ipsos Karian and Box and the IOIC, March 2023

[Terence Mauri](#) is Workathon's Chief Futurist, IE Business School visiting Professor and [Thinkers50](#) author. His award-winning books include *The Upside of Disruption: The Path to Leading & Thriving in the Unknown*.

Mauri has been described as “an original and outspoken thinker on the future of leadership” by Thinkers50 and was recently the recipient of the [Business Insider Global Recognition Award](#) for Thought Leadership.



The Upside of Disruption

Terence Mauri

I typically speak about my work in four or five different countries a month. From Helsinki to Riyadh to New York to Dublin there's a golden thread which runs through all of them, which is how to find the upside of disruption.

Disruption is both the downside and the opportunity of our age. Turning disruption into opportunity is the best skill leaders can learn.

There are two types of clear downside to disruption. The first is that the pace of change, especially technological, can feel almost too fast to respond to. If we look at the last 20 years, we can already see that people are stressed. Over 83% of leaders say they don't have enough time or energy in the day to do the day job. One individual, on average, deals with over 30,000 emails a year, and this is not sustainable. We have Paleolithic brains.

In 2021, when the effects of the pandemic were in people's minds but less so AI, BCG published a study showing that 68% of workers were aware of coming disruptions in their field and were willing to be reskilled, whilst *Harvard Business Review* notes that the half-life of skills is now under five years, so that there needs to be constant re-skilling.

Shocks Upon Shocks

Imagine being a CHRO managing the skills budget in a multinational organisation right now. Yeah: disruption's downsides are clear.

The second kind of disruption is one of control. Politically, we have compounding disruption, shocks upon shocks, rendering many of us helpless observers. The economist Nouriel Roubini calls it the 10 deadly Ds of disruption, including de-globalisation, deflation, a demographic time bomb, deficit, debt, and dualistic rivalry, notably China and the US.

Perhaps now we need a new D too: 'Donald'. President Donald Trump relishes disruption for its own sake. He weaponises it rather than responding to it. Within a fortnight of taking office he had declared Greenland, a Danish protectorate, as American; he had threatened to impose tariffs on China, Canada and Mexico; and he had disrupted the biggest working assumption of any boss of his workers, by publicly sacking or humiliating large numbers of federal workers.

But President Trump campaigned on disruption – and was elected on it. His tactics may not have been desirable, but the outcome relied on the appeal of voters wanting change and prepared to disrupt a lot to get it.

This is where the opportunity of disruption comes in. The need for, desire for, and possibility of change from one unproductive mode to another.

My thesis is, overall, for most leaders and for most organisations, for most people with ordinary levels of power they wish to use wisely in their workplaces, there's an upside to disruption. And here's why.

Firstly, there is clear upside in avoiding the trap of the comfort of certainty. You may be doing well in the market – but what's around the corner? We all know the companies which are obsolete because they failed to modernise, failed to see the upside of disrupting their business models to face the future: Kodak, Xerox, Blockbuster, Motorola. But look at Apple, Google, Amazon, Netflix and Lego: these are brands which faced competition, new challenges, and constantly changing competitors, and disrupted their own models to meet that challenge.

Secondly, the ability to face change and embrace it can produce exhilarating success. There's a frantic dance right now in the automotive industry: legacy brands are having to embrace transitioning to hybrid and now EV and some have been slower than others. Ford, Volkswagen, Honda and Toyota are innovating constantly to fend off new disrupters. Electric cars and autonomous driving, coupled with a climate-conscious consumer, are seeing the rise of not just car brands like Tesla but manufacturers like BYD, the Chinese conglomerate specialising in batteries for both electrics and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

And thirdly, the opportunity for renewal or reimagination which comes with disruption is a skill we need to teach each other, whether that's in our boardrooms or in our teams. With technological and political disruption everywhere, let's not waste one of the biggest reframing moments of our lifetimes.

Mindsets and Choices

The future isn't just about technology or trends. It's about mindsets and choices too. The boxer Mike Tyson famously doubled up as a philosopher when he pointed out: "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face."

We're all at this liminal moment now where all the rules are changing. Everything's going to be turned upside down, including how we work, the workplace and the workforce. I think the workplace has never needed more constructive disruption. We need to move from preservers of the status quo to challengers of the status quo, from checking to coaching, from transactional conversations to transformational conversations.

In health we talk of BMI to mean 'Body Mass Index' and when it's too high, we have to disrupt our habits and bring it down. Well, what about the 'Bureaucratic Misery Index', which slows and decays organisational life for so many?

The word 'disruption' often triggers its own misery, certainly fear. But we should also reframe disruption as an opportunity. Change and risk may be disruptive, but the reward – if twinned with kindness, fairness and intelligence – presents opportunity too.

We always overestimate the risk of doing something new and underestimate the risk of standing still and when sometimes not risking disruption raises your overall risk.

About 15 years ago, I walked into a store and my life changed. I suffered the ultimate life disruption: a car driver lost control, mounted the kerb and drove into the shop, and a number of people got injured that day. Thankfully, nobody died, but I woke up under the car with the wheel burning my leg and suffered some serious injuries that put me in hospital for a number of weeks during that time.

When Covid-19 disrupted the world overnight, I was mentally thrown back to that place. I was thrown back to the time when I realised that up until this horrible accident my whole career, my whole life, had been mapped out in a very linear way. And that actually I wasn't achieving my true purpose. That ultimate life disruption helped me to transition into academia to research, to writing and to speaking, and so I urge us all to embrace disruption – wherever we find ourselves in the world.

“*Perhaps now we need a new D too: 'Donald'. President Donald Trump relishes disruption for its own sake. He weaponises it rather than responding to it.*”



“

ChatGPT now has 400M weekly active users, about 5% of the planet. I think it is underappreciated that AI is one of the most equitably available advanced technologies, which means people in most countries can all access the same advanced models as anyone in the biggest companies in the US.

Ethan Mollick
Associate Professor at The Wharton School
LinkedIn, February 2025

PART TWO

The United State of Work

[William Corke](#) is Head of Research and Client Services at Workathon. He has built a number of digital product and services agencies and has consulted widely for many years across a range of blue-chip and start-ups, working alongside founders to develop key brands, pushing into innovative and original fields.

[Julia Hobsbawm](#) is the Founder and CEO of Workathon and Founder of the nascent World Work Organisation. Her books address the way we live and work today and include *Fully Connected*; *The Simplicity Principle*; *The Nowhere Office* and *Working Assumptions*. She co-hosts the podcast *The Nowhere Office*.



Introducing Workathon Research

William Corke & Julia Hobsbawm

Reports such as this are a way to bring trends to light, especially when they combine the insight from individual essays with datasets which immediately help reveal the big picture. For this reason, we welcome the JLL contribution to this report, written by Peter Miscovich and Flore Pradere, in which no fewer than seven different correlated themes are considered when looking back at the last five years of what we call *The United State of Work*.

In this section we share some workings from global research we've been doing at Workathon to further illustrate how much the world is united by the same issues of work.

We've conducted a 12-country 'snapshot' analysis looking at how three key hot button topics play out in each of them. We have found some surprising results about who is doing what well – or better – than others.

We also conducted some more traditional attitudinal research amongst white collar professionals in the UK and US to look at which issues now dominate concerns five years on. In this case we are also surprised by some very clear results in unexpected areas.

12-country 'snapshot'



WORKATHON COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

Sources include: [Worldometer](#) GDP per capita Rankings World Bank Group
[World Development indicators 2024](#)
[Theglobaleconomy.com](#) World happiness index

The United State of Work Report © Workathon 2025

Make Work Better by Understanding It Better

Our motivation isn't to add to yet more research for its own sake. There has been an explosion in the study of the future of work. The AI chatbot Grok estimates 30-50,000 academic papers have been published on the subject since 2019.¹

As the in-tray of leaders and their teams rise to accommodate digital overload (research published in *Harvard Business Review* in 2022 found a single employee 'toggles' between apps and web windows as many as 3,600 times a day²) the last thing people need is more 'infobesity'.³

At Workathon we want to do something else. We want to help them find needles in haystacks. Because global trends can lie tantalisingly close without being sufficiently explored in depth. Curation of content matters more now than ever. As does synthesis.

Synthesis: The Missing Magic

Synthesis, long the preserve of academia, is coming to the fore. A very large part of AI's appeal is this, from [DeepSeek](#) to ChatGPT's [DeepResearch](#) (which actually says it "uses reasoning to synthesise large amounts of online information"). But whilst Workathon uses AI like everyone else, we acknowledge AI can't synthesise data which hasn't yet been created, or patterns which will only show themselves through ethnographic research.

For this reason we invited the distinguished social anthropologist [Melissa Fisher](#) to become our Chief Cultural Anthropologist, and the award-winning Thinkers50 innovation expert [Terence Mauri](#) to become our Chief Futurist. We know that important patterns, feelings and human data show up with carefully curated questions and conversation. We advocate this 'heritage' technique in many situations, especially in relation to workplace strategies, employee engagement, and leadership.

Small test-and-learn exercises which acknowledge a landscape which shifts so fast and so unpredictably are a vital aspect of any research undertaking today for large organisations. This also applies to data about work. Precisely because you can drown in the data or be focused on a silo without looking at the wider picture, we wanted to focus on a method which factors in having to synthesise increasingly complex and scattered sources into a coherent picture.

The Covid-19 vaccines were developed and delivered in record-quick time by cross-institutional partnerships such as Oxford AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNtech. Our approach to research is similar. Let's marry unusual combinations of established and newer ways of looking and asking and noticing, in a similar quest of urgency, innovation and disruption.

¹ Grok3 prompt - 'How many academic papers and reports about the future of work have been published since 2019': grok.com/share/bGVnYWN5_47de918f-9078-4553-a59d-76f58c77aafd

² Harvard Business Review: How Much Time and Energy Do We Waste Toggling Between Applications?: hbr.org/2022/08/how-much-time-and-energy-do-we-waste-toggling-between-applications

³ It's Time for Social Health: community.thriveglobal.com/it-s-time-for-social-health/

Katy Scott is a global analyst and researcher who has returned to the UK after a period living in Taiwan. An independent producer for podcasts including *The Nowhere Office*, Katy studied at King's College London and City St. George's, University of London.



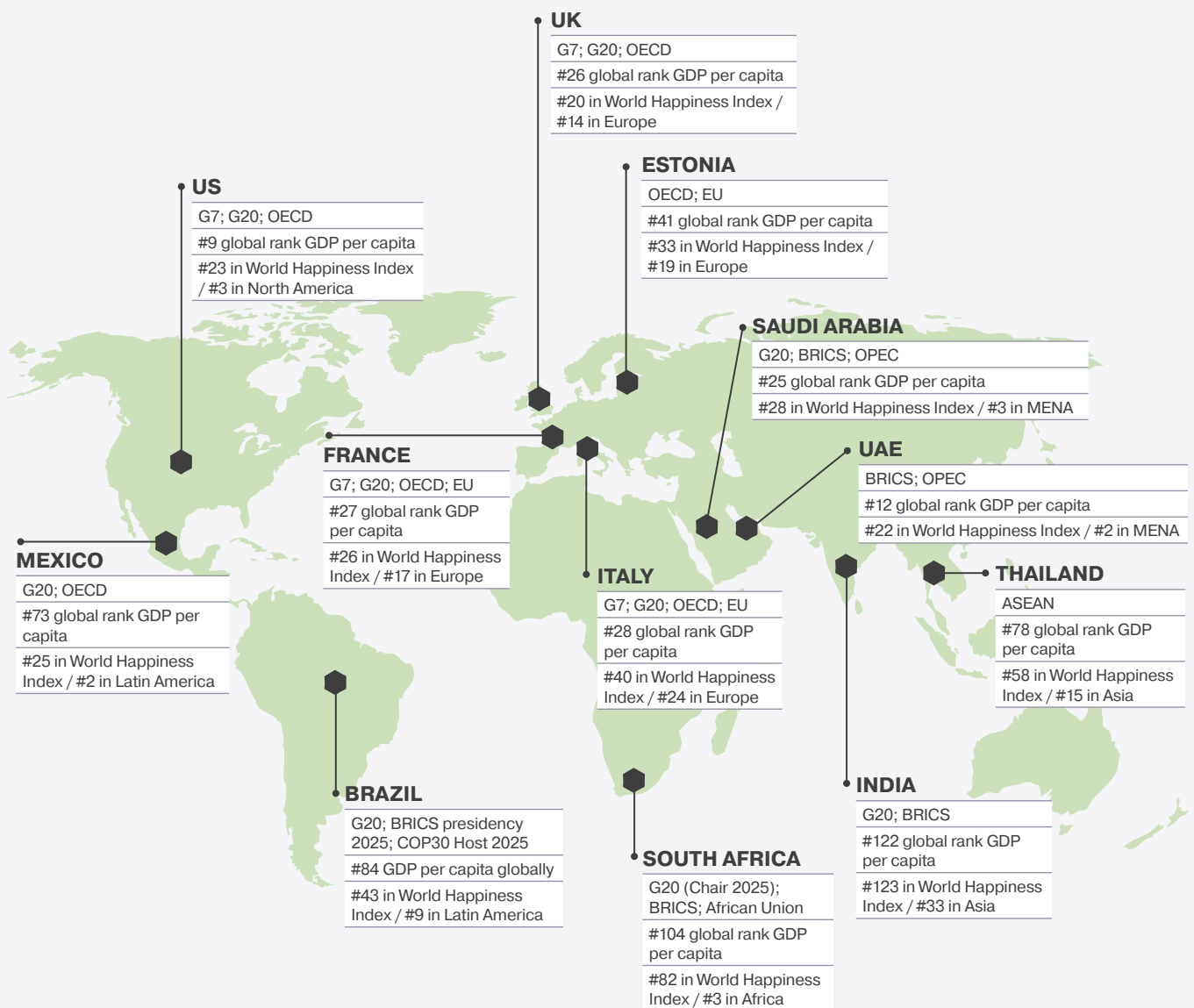
12 Country Workathon Snapshot Study

Katy Scott

Pilots call the air-ground visibility they experience ‘slant range’.¹ This involves a measurement, but also an obvious question: can you see clearly or not? Obviously, we want Workathon’s vantage point to also be as high as a pilot’s and as precise a slant range.

We knew our main question was how to demonstrate how united the world is around work but also to pick up on the variables. We decided to create a ‘Slant Snapshot’ which was also a pilot study. We picked 12 countries which all locked down to some degree in March 2020: Brazil, Estonia, France, India, Italy, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, the UAE, the UK and the US. The Workathon World chart here illustrates how different they are – geographically and in certain key metrics.

12-country ‘snapshot’



WORKATHON COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

Sources include: [Worldometer](#) GDP per capita Rankings World Bank Group
[World Development indicators 2024](#)
[Theglobeconomy.com](#) World happiness index

The United State of Work Report © Workathon 2025

These represent at least one country from the five core regions of Africa, Americas, AsiaPac, Europe and MENA, and have membership ranging across the G20 or OECD or within BRICS in terms of economic status. Our thinking in formulating this mix was to provide as broad a spread as possible within a manageable number of countries, for triangulation purposes. The trade flow between these countries, as expected, is constant: just by way of example, data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity shows India, the UAE and the UK exported \$165 billion of goods to the US, Estonia and South Africa.²

When it comes to looking at work, having identified previously a ‘Super-Six’ frame of issues spanning AI to Generation Alpha (see Julia Hobsbawm’s ‘reframing work’ essay) which are themselves designed for further distillation, we need to use our approach to help focus on what the landscape we’re seeing is really telling us.

What Good Looks Like

We’re searching for the patterns that determine or indicate which countries are ‘good’ in terms of their current situation and their policies for the future of work. Given the turbulence emanating from the United States of America, it felt a particularly interesting moment to take this snapshot. Our research was compiled in January 2025, the month of Donald Trump’s second Inauguration.

We decided to concentrate on three prevalent issues which apply widely to organisations with a global agenda:

1. Talent Mobility

2. AI Adoption & Digital Infrastructure

3. Flexible Working & Statutory Leave (PTO in the US)

We gave each country a ranking per topic, and show some highlights and main findings after the headline charts.

Compare and Contrast

Having chosen three hot-button topics, we decided to dip a toe in the water of actual ranking. Taking a detailed aerial ‘slant’ view of multiple datasets provides a new picture of work: older, larger economies sometimes struggle in areas where new emergent economies are often imaginatively investing for the future.



We assigned a basic three-level ranking across a range of relevant data described in the previous section. These 1/2/3 (poor/average/good) scores were then combined to produce the Green-Amber-Red ‘traffic light’ indicator of performance seen in the results table.

Were we nervous about ranking countries? Yes, it’s a daunting task for several reasons, not least because compiling and cross-referencing the necessary datasets is complex. We’re working on an AI solution for the future, but it was instructive to experience firsthand just how arduous it is to build a picture from scratch!





































The Global North V Global South

Combining rankings for all three issues, our overall top scorers are *Estonia*, *France*, the *United Kingdom*, the *United Arab Emirates* and the *United States*. But no country received full marks – and the drill-down into each section in the next pages will hopefully explain why.

What is striking, though probably unsurprising, is that the Global North dominates the top of the table. So much so that we decided to produce a separate table showing the North/South divide (next page). From this perspective, two things jump out:

1. The UAE is the front-runner among Global South countries. The US is the only other top-rated country for AI Adoption and Digital Infrastructure - a useful reminder that the headline of investment isn’t enough without a robust research environment or decent infrastructure. In addition, radical new flexible working laws come into effect on 1st April in UAE³
2. Italy is the underperformer in the Global North as it lags behind on implementation in both AI⁴ and flexible working (which may explain why it has embraced the Digital Nomad visas).

12 Country Snapshot Study

COUNTRY	Talent Mobility	AI Adoption & Digital Infrastructure	Statutory Leave & Flexible Work
BRAZIL			
ESTONIA			
FRANCE			
INDIA			
ITALY			
MEXICO			
SAUDI ARABIA			
SOUTH AFRICA			
THAILAND			
UAE			
UK			
US			

 Poor  Average  Good

WORKATHON 12 COUNTRY SNAPSHOT STUDY

Methodology © Workathon / Sources Include: The World Bank, OECD, CIA World Factbook, Observatory of Economic Complexity, and various individual country government data.












The United State of Work Report © Workathon 2025



The reason for ranking at all hinged on being able to establish a combination of intention, purpose and delivery which is a valuable measurement, giving us a holistic view of a country's overall effectiveness.

What patterns and clues for future research investigation and the development of new datasets are sparked by the snapshot ranking⁵? Our findings are next – overall and arranged within the three issues we investigated. If the table sparks any thoughts for you, please get in touch, we'd be fascinated to hear: william@workathon.io

12 Country Global North/Global South League Table

ESTONIA	Global North	
UK	Global North	
FRANCE	Global North	
UAE	Global South	
US	Global North	
SAUDI ARABIA	Global South	
ITALY	Global North	
INDIA	Global South	
THAILAND	Global South	
SOUTH AFRICA	Global South	
BRAZIL	Global South	
MEXICO	Global South	

 Poor  Average  Good

WORKATHON 12 COUNTRY SNAPSHOT STUDY

Methodology © Workathon / Sources Include: The World Bank, OECD, CIA World Factbook, Observatory of Economic Complexity, and various individual country government data.

The United State of Work Report © Workathon 2025

“*The reason for ranking at all hinged on being able to establish a combination of intention, purpose and delivery which is a valuable measurement, giving us a holistic view of a country’s overall effectiveness.*”

The next pages provide both context on the three three issues of Talent Mobility, AI Adoption and Infrastructure, and Flexible Working & Statutory Leave across the 12 countries, together with our emergent findings.

Talent Mobility

CONTEXT

“*The new rich are defined not just by money but by freedom – freedom of time, freedom of mobility, and freedom to choose.*

Tim Ferris, The 4-Hour Work Week⁶

Some argue that Covid-19 gave people itchy feet when it ended, or that Gen Z don't have the right work ethic. But the fact is that ever since 2007 and the fully mobile era arrived, it was going to affect work patterns: and it has.

From the OECD's *Talent Attractiveness Index*⁷ to a slew of private corporate data, the trends are clear that workers want mobility (migrant workers, obviously, but white-collar workers too) and that this has become a major strategic issue. Managers and leaders are factoring in more mobility, and workers want it: a Fortune/Deloitte report in 2024 found that 83% of CEOs “believe allowing more flexibility in work times and locations will have the greatest impact on attracting and retaining talent”⁸ and 23% of respondents in BCG/Stepstone Group's study *Decoding Global Talent 2024*⁷ were actively seeking global job opportunities.

It isn't just that workers want to relocate for work. Talent shortage is a huge and variable issue: healthcare worker shortage is present across all the twelve countries, but for some their big gap is IT professionals and for others it's manufacturing workers. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 found that skills shortages are cited almost universally as a key concern in every economy surveyed, so we looked at a range of established and scaled datasets.¹⁰

We looked in part at high-skilled visa programmes (the contested H-1B visa row which Elon Musk got personally involved in).¹¹ But there is also a new development since Covid-19 concerning talent which we wanted to reflect: inbound 'digital nomad' visa schemes which have mushroomed since 2020.

The world's first digital nomad visa was introduced in Estonia in 2020. They are now offered by over 60 countries.¹² Thailand's version is the 'Destination Thailand Visa' which was introduced in July 2024, and nearly 50 embassies and consulates globally had issued only 1,200 by the end of the year.¹³ Only half of our chosen countries offer digital nomad visas: Italy, Estonia, Brazil, Thailand, the UAE and South Africa. However, they serve as a telling indicator of economic and cultural positioning. In our rankings, their presence was weighed against high-skilled visas.

The ranking and scoring process also took account of 'Talent Attractiveness' as assessed by both INSEAD and the OECD¹⁴, now widely understood to be a critical driver of economic growth.

The final dataset we arrived at also included the proportion of foreign nationals within each country's workforce.¹⁵ Measuring this alongside the visas offered gives a fuller picture of how well high-skilled, digital nomad and other visas are working to allow the workforce to grow, fill in shortages and support economic development. The UAE had the greatest number with 88% of its workforce composed of foreign nationals.

EMERGENT TRENDS AND PATTERNS

The wealth of data on the desirability of mobility the strategic importance of this issue, both at a governmental level and for multinational organisations.

In general, there is more initiative being taken by 'challenger' developing economies to introduce measures such as digital nomad visas than by G8 nations.

Foreign student retention (staying in the country of study) post-graduation is highest in the US (60%), the UAE (55%), the UK (35%) and Italy (30%). The UAE's strong performance here seems to demonstrate that younger economies can compete when various conditions (economic and legislative support) combine.

That combination of digital nomad visas, high-skilled visas and high number of foreign workers meant the UAE and Estonia were the highest scorers in our talent mobility workings.

India, Mexico and Brazil fared poorly.

- Despite offering both digital nomad and high skilled visas Brazil and Mexico's low score in foreign workers dragged them down.
- There was a similar picture in India, which offers a high-skilled visa, but which does not fare well in terms of talent mobility and struggles to attract skilled foreign workers.

AI Adoption & Digital Infrastructure

CONTEXT

“*Artificial intelligence, deep learning, machine learning — whatever you’re doing if you don’t understand it — learn it. Because otherwise, you’re going to be a dinosaur within three years.*

Mark Cuban¹⁶

That quote by Mark Cuban is from 2017, predating the mass rollout of generative AI by many years. Was his call to action overstated? Where are all the dinosaurs? Cuban was focusing on the individual’s need to adapt, but what about the global economy?

An influential PwC report into the economic impact of AI was published in 2020, predicting that the global impact of the technology would be larger than China and India’s economies combined. More recent estimates are, unsurprisingly, higher: \$19.9 trillion in an International Data Corporation (IDC) report from September 2024.¹⁷

Whether viewed from a national, corporate, or individual perspective, AI will bring profound changes. We looked for data to help us understand how well our 12 countries were facing up to these challenges.

All 12 governments were in some way engaging with AI and the technology had been assigned to a department, whether that be a broader technology department or even assigned a specific minister as is the case in France where Clara Chappaz was appointed Minister Delegate for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Technologies in 2024.¹⁸

We also looked at announced government AI budgets and investments in secondary infrastructure such as data centres.

What we were looking for was a sign of both intent and delivery, but one which faced up to infrastructure issues as much as investments in products and services. Digital exclusion is at the heart of whether good work exists. As The World Bank Digital Progress and Trends Report noted in 2023: ‘When fast internet becomes available, the probability that an individual is employed increases by up to 13.2%, total employment per firm increases by up to 2%, and firm exports nearly quadruple.’¹⁹

We then combined these findings with the Research & Development and Infrastructure results from the Stanford Global AI Vibrancy Rankings.²⁰ Their methodology considers factors such as the number of supercomputers in each country, AI journal publications, citations, patents, notable machine learning models, and broadband speed data. The broadband speed data is based on live speed test results from Ookla, a global leader in connectivity intelligence. Fast broadband is a key factor in the widescale integration of AI into the economy.

AI R&D investment was considered on a per capita, rather than absolute basis, to reflect the quality of workforce rather than size of economy. We think our readers will be interested in quality of workforce rather than just scale. This meant that India ranked much lower than if we had applied a measure of absolute, rather than per capita, expenditure. Recent developments in AI such as DeepSeek bursting onto the scene on an apparently shoestring budget of \$6 million means we feel less obliged to give precedence for huge infrastructure projects.

EMERGENT TRENDS AND PATTERNS

We found near-universal government commitment to AI as a strategic imperative at least at the level of 'policy optics', with a minister and/or ministry charged with AI responsibilities in all the 12 nations.

The picture for investment (private and public) separates the runners more, as you would expect, with only three of our twelve countries' governments committed to meaningful multibillion dollar amounts in funding.

With an era of trade protectionism likely on the horizon and Generative AI and data access at the forefront of geopolitics, this topic will, in our view, be increasingly in the spotlight.

Overall, the US and the UAE emerged at the top of this ranking.

It's unsurprising the US is a winner here considering the concentration of AI research, development, talent and investment there.

Although the UK has made contributions to AI research and development, there are fears its integration may be held back by slow broadband speeds. As of 2025, the UK had average broadband speeds of 58.01mbps, inching up from 55.17mbps in 2019. Conversely, India - a much poorer, bigger and more rural country - has moved from speeds of 10.13mbps in 2019 to 100.78mbps in 2025.

Flexible Working & Statutory Leave

CONTEXT

“*What we are seeing now is that flexible working is considered by many to be the new norm for any business that is serious about productivity, agility and winning the war for top talent.*

Mark Dixon, CEO and founder of IWG.²¹

The world has changed in the five years since the first lockdown. That's the basis for the timing of this report and the genie that Covid-19 released from the bottle was flexible working.

But lockdowns didn't invent the desire for flexible working, it was already present and well known to those in the flexible working world like IWG. The quote from Mark Dixon is from 2019, when IWG published a study that found 83% of people would choose a job which offered flexible working over a job that didn't.

In this snapshot research, we wanted to look at national differences at a base, legislative level. What differences are there - and what might they mean for employers?

Our research considered the most recently available data by country relating to maternity, paternity and statutory leave as well as flexible/hybrid working legislation.²²

For maternity leave we considered the length of time off, who pays for it (the employer or the state), and at what rate. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) stipulates countries should offer 14 weeks of maternity leave at minimum, at two-thirds of earnings, but recommends 18 weeks. It also recommends it is paid by the state or social security, rather than the employer.²³

We examined government legislation for paternity and family leave: are they offered, paid for and by whom, at what rate and for how long. The ILO supports paternity and family leave but does not have specific length or pay recommendations.

We also considered each country's legislation around minimum annual leave, or holiday time. The ILO recommends that workers are given 15 working days. We tracked how well a country's legislation matched up to that. Did it exceed, meet or fall short?

We looked at the existence and scale of legislation favourable to flexible work by country and whether there had been significant changes since 2020. Institutions like the World Bank have talked about the importance of flexible work and a legislative environment favourable to the creation of strong, modern economies.²⁴

EMERGENT TRENDS AND PATTERNS

In our scoring, we noted some extremes on both ends of the scale. For example, the United States falls well short of ILO guidelines, with no federally mandated holiday allowance. France, Estonia, and the UK lead this ranking with the most generous offerings.


Estonia's leave provisions are noteworthy. Maternity leave is offered for 140 days and is paid for by the state while Paternity leave is also offered for 30 days and also paid by the state. Parents can also access a shared parental benefit for up to 68 weeks, allowing them to divide leave flexibly until the child turns three. Estonia's progressive government, with one of the world's most generous parental leave policies, is adapting to modern families, sharing working and caring responsibilities amongst parents.²⁵

The UK has cutting-edge legislation on flexible working. The UK's new Labour government has introduced an Employment Rights Bill that expands eligibility and increases the rate of sick pay, though payouts remain low compared to much of Europe.

While the UK was scored indifferently due to poor maternity and sick pay, its rating was ultimately boosted by world-leading legislation on flexible working.

A trend can be observed where countries that offer little to no paternity leave and sick leave rights also have very limited or non-existent flexible working rights. This situation is likely influenced by factors such as workplace pressure and, in the case of the US, the complexities of its federal and state constitutional structure.

Despite being a developing economy dominated by blue-collar work, Mexico has brought in legislation to support its hybrid and flexible workers. 2021 laws state if a worker works from home for at least 40% of their working hours, the employer must cover the cost of internet and electricity and provide ergonomic chairs. In an effort to slow the digital creep, the right to disconnect was also granted to remote workers.²⁶



Find out more about
Workathon Research and
how it can help you.

Contact
william@workathon.io



Growing our Own - Workathon's White Collar Survey

William Corke

I hope we've begun to make the case for new models of enquiry. What about older 'heritage' research methods and different qualitative snapshots?

In January 2025 we ran a small 'toe in the water' research project, a 'Workathon White Collar Survey' to try out some of the thinking we're developing.¹

Survey participants were mainly white-collar professionals in the UK (47%) and the US (33%), with the remainder drawn from around the rest of the world. Respondents were recruited through Workathon's network, so many were future of work experts, people not only working in the new world of work but deeply embedded in and invested in studying and understanding its various transformations, particularly since the advent of Covid. The survey's findings must be considered in this context.

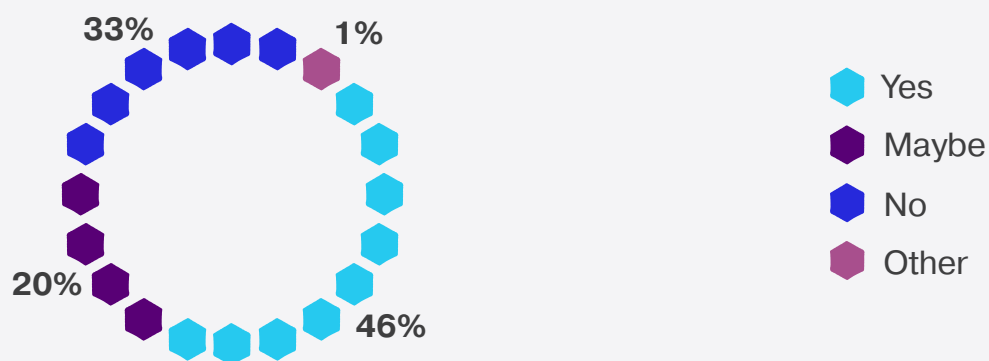
We deliberately asked lots of general attitudinal questions to work and how it had changed since 2020, and we did ask some hot button questions about the four-day week. But even before we analysed the answers, we were looking for insights into four topics in particular:

- Do you feel you have been given the training and support needed to make best use of AI tools?
- Are political and geopolitical issues becoming more present and important in the workplace?
- Do you think that the government of your country is making the policy changes needed to adapt to the current speed of change in the world of work?
- Do you think managers and leaders are doing a good job in these fast-changing, challenging times?

The Rise of Workplace Culture Wars

This question – are cultural divisions and tensions part of your workplace and increasing – is for us one of the most important, because it provides at a glance a context for the feelings of workers, those feelings they bring to work, and which inevitably will affect their work and the work of those around them. This is an area ripe for ethnographic investigation.

Are political and geopolitical issues becoming more present and important in the workplace?



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The answer is a strong 'Yes', with the **US (50% 'Yes', 29% 'No')** marginally ahead of the **UK (46% 'Yes', 33% 'No')** in terms of the increasing presence of issue politics at work.

The cultural issues most cited unsurprisingly varied by geography, e.g. Trump in the US but not the UK.

Were we to overlay these research findings with the proposed global Workathon Frame application the findings would be even more interesting. As it is, a simple word cloud shows two things: the kind of issues that are most cited and controversial but also the very fact of the deepening in the workplace of cultural polarisation and presence of geopolitics.

Political and Geopolitical Issues in the workplace



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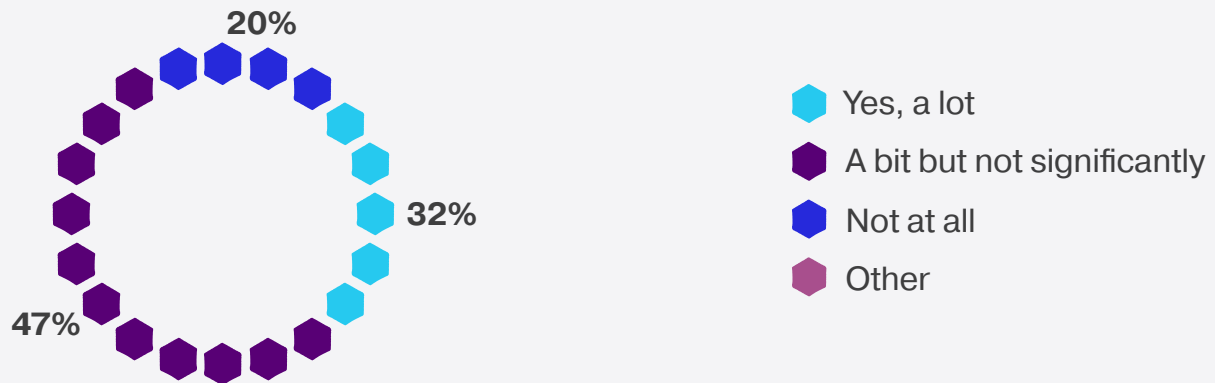
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Generative AI is Mainstream, but People are Having to Teach Themselves to Swim

Back in 2020, AI was part of most people's lives, whether through predictive text in Google search or other less visible forms, but most were not expecting its 'generative' offspring to rocket to the ubiquitous prominence we now see, at the top of the political and news agenda.

Our survey reveals mixed sentiments regarding the impact of Generative AI on work, with **79% of respondents using Generative AI a lot or a bit:**

Do you use Generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT) in your work?



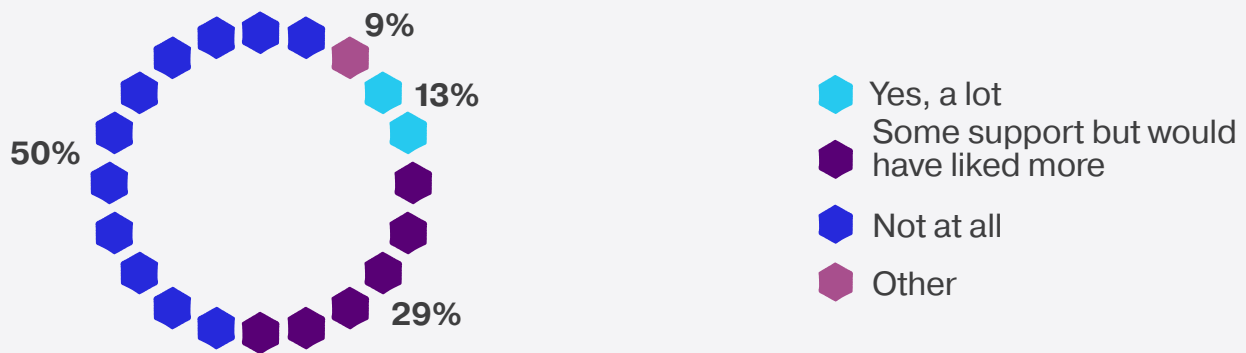
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But only 13% feel they have had adequate training in the use of these new technologies and tools:

Do you feel you have been given the training and support needed to make best use of AI tools?



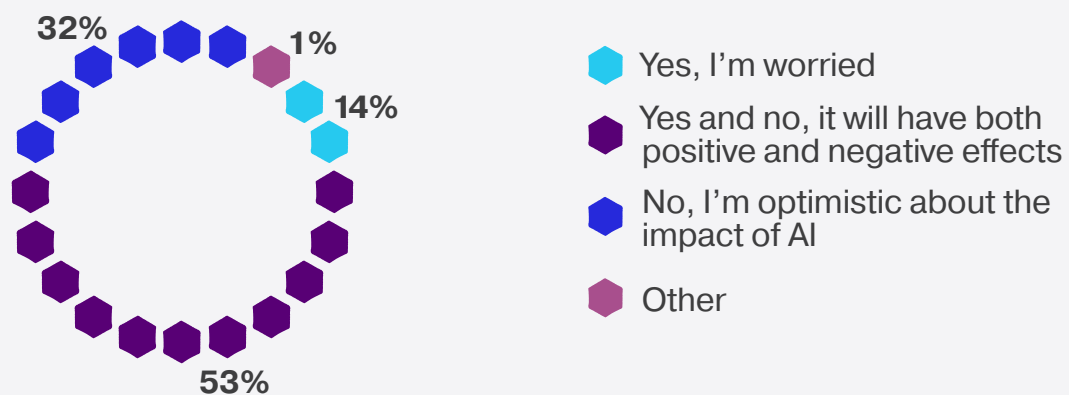
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Despite this, sentiment about the future of AI is significantly positive. **Tech-fear has perhaps been overhyped:**

Are you worried about the impact of Generative AI on your work (and/or the world more generally)?



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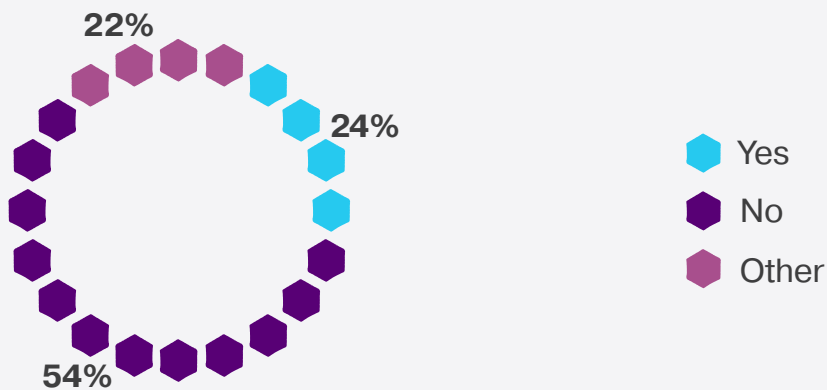


Leadership Needs to Do Better

Our Snapshot survey produced an indifferent-to-bad school report for leaders and managers.

When asked if they think managers and leaders are doing a good job in fast-changing, challenging times, the majority said **no**, with more than twice as many respondents **(54%)** holding this opinion than those who answered yes **(24%)**.

Do you think managers and leaders are doing a good job in these fast-changing, challenging times?



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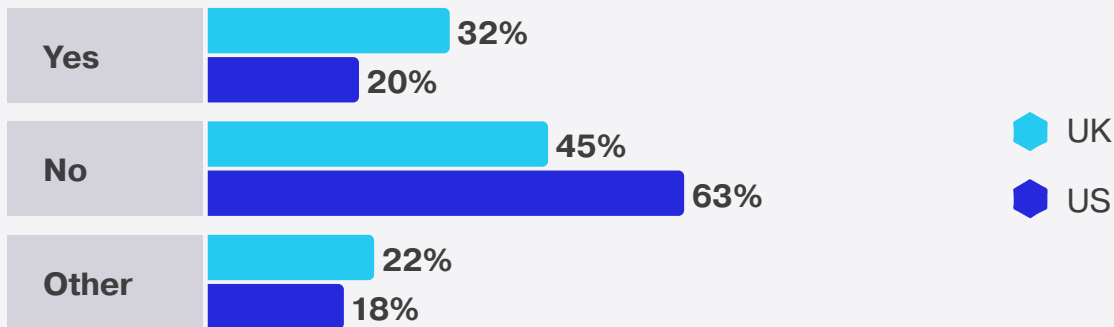
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'Slicing' results by age, country and size of organisation/employer reveals some interesting differences.

Confidence in managers and leaders is significantly lower in the US than the UK.

Confidence in managers and leaders by country



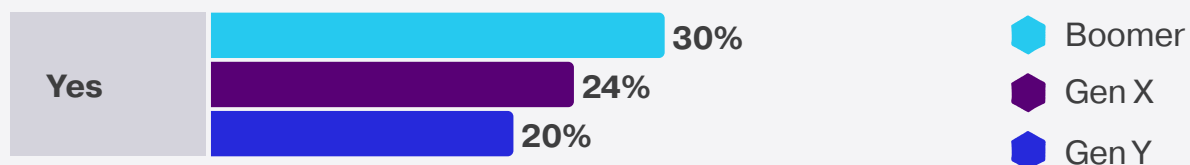
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Younger workers are less likely to have confidence in managers and leaders.

Confidence in managers and leaders by younger workers



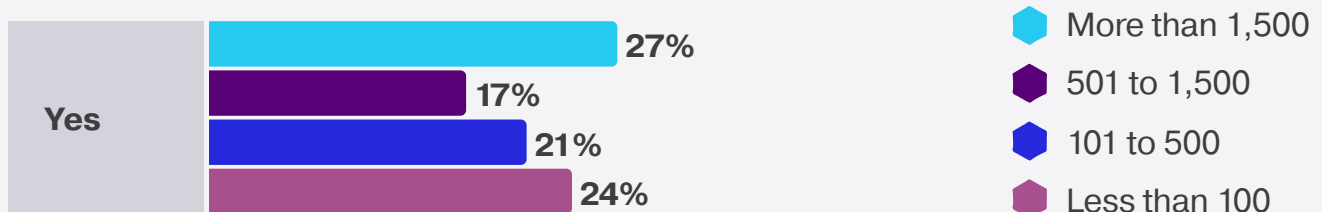
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The largest places of work (1,500+ employees) have the highest level of confidence in their leadership's ability to adapt to changing requirements of work.

Confidence in their leadership's ability to adapt to changing requirements of work



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Government Policies

The 'could do better' report for managers and leaders is flattering compared to the 'F' that our respondents have given to national leadership when asked whether their governments are not doing enough to adapt to the current speed of change in the world of work.

Do you think that the government of your country is making the policy changes needed to adapt to the current speed of change in the world of work?



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White Collar Worries

What our data tells us is the white-collar world is under pressure now in practical ways: how to use and adopt AI, how to lead/manage or be managed. It also faces more existential ways too: how to work alongside people with different views, when views are increasingly expressed so openly and often with hostility in workplaces and on social media?

Our next step is to broaden the survey into more countries. We're planning on doing this with our members and partners. What we then want to do is apply it to some of the principles of the Slant Survey: to ask a set of questions about how these worries and concerns play out on the ground.

Workathon's model – our Hurrah technique – seems to be landing. People are asking us for more information, more connection, more joining of the dots. There is no single place to find everything an executive or decision maker needs about work – and there should be.

We have been lucky enough to attract the interest and involvement of a very senior group of people and some very prominent global brands spanning finance, real estate, retail, employee engagement, technology and the law in a very short period of time. We are grateful for their input to date and their input to come.

This is, after all, new territory for all of us. And we're scoping it and making it better together.

If you're interested in seeing or discussing a more extended set of findings or indeed to get involved in the next phase of the research, please get in touch: william@workathon.io

¹ A representative group of 295 adults aged 25-54, randomly selected from Workathon members and individuals in the wider Workathon network with the research carried out between 7th and 24th January 2025.



“

*Let there be
work, bread, water
and salt for all.*

Nelson Mandela



Why We Need a World Work Organisation

Julia Hobsbawm

Work unites us: 3.5 billion people work or are looking for work each day. Other than being born, dying, or searching on Google, more people work than they do anything else.

2025 has echoes of 1945: A time of rebuild and re-imagination.

The paradigm shift in work and working life, which was accelerated by the ravages of Covid-19 and AI's insurgency, presents an essential and overdue opportunity. It is to reframe work into a unified, generic Work.

For this reason, it's time for a new dedicated global body: The World Work Organisation.

The United Crisis of Work

Work is in crisis. There is either insufficient work or work in the wrong places: A significant strain on resources and a geographical nightmare in the human supply chain of talent. The adoption of AI is so rapid that change management and employee engagement jostle on the agenda alongside education and skills. Massive gaps and opportunities co-exist, and managers struggle to keep up.

Workers of all collars - blue and white and the all-collar Flexetariat¹ who increasingly move from full-time work to part-time, freelance, and “insecure work”², are restless, anxious, and volatile: There has been a notable rise in both strikes and in open aggression between leaders and their workforces.

Has Live-to-Work Flipped the Switch?

The new united state of work (as I’m calling it) is not to be confused with the United States, which led a live-to-work model for a hundred years, and has become the world’s largest economy, through its extraordinary range of products and services.

The 4-day week movement³ is gaining traction in America in spite of President Trump and Elon Musk’s dislike of flexible work on principle, and whilst it is unlikely to become the dominant model of work, may become seen as the symbol of a new American work-to-live mindset.

The timing is significant, because 2026 will be the centenary of Henry Ford’s five-day-week. Our own global Workathon [research](#) already shows that key issues like talent mobility and flexibility policies are becoming cornerstone policies of nations in the race to succeed – and overtake competitors.

“*The US may find itself gradually overtaken by stronger forces in Asia, the Middle East, Africa who are not afraid to innovate in much the same way that Henry Ford did when it came to combining not just the economy of work, the technology of work, but the culture too.*”

The New World Disorder of Work

There is of course, even more. In a world that is experiencing both fertility drops and an aging population⁴, combined with significant hotspots of extreme youth (including large parts of Africa and India)⁵, a one-size-fits-all idea of work clearly has to change.

Automation, robotics and AI are, of course, both opportunities and threats, not least because understanding at scale how humans work alongside digital or robotic co-pilots is in its infancy. Plus, the debate rages about whether AI will create net job growth or loss, and whether a Universal Basic Income will become a dominant discussion topic.

“*All of this requires a new framework to think about how we govern, lead, create, and organise work. Hence the call for a new work-focused global body that is human-centric and within which issues from geopolitics to climate to AI, from leadership and management to demographics and generations, are tightly bound.*”

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

There is obvious inspiration from the bold vision and spirit that led to the formation of dedicated global institutions for Finance (The IMF and World Bank) and Health (The World Health Organization) immediately after the Second World War – and indeed, the [brilliant International Labour Organisation](#), which became the UN’s first specialised agency in 1946.⁶

It’s important to pay homage to existing international bodies, forums and research organisations which currently address aspects of work, and note that it is perfectly understandable that for eighty years their working models have been regarded as sufficient.

For instance, the ILO has put extraordinary efforts into collating data through its [ILOSTAT](#) resource on Labour Statistics. Although it remains a specialised agency looking fundamentally at inequality in work, it is vital. It has almost as many member countries as the UN.

Then there is the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), set up in 1961, although they only have 38 members it is intergovernmental and influential. It created the excellent [Better Life Index](#) in 2011, spurred by the groundbreaking Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission which followed the financial crash of 2008⁷ and reassessed GDP as insufficient to capture how we live (and work) fully.

The World Economic Forum, established in 1971 (and originally called the European Management Forum), is a forum with 10 distinct centres of collaboration. Whilst none specifically use the term ‘work,’ jobs and skills are part of its [centre for the New Economy and Society](#), set up in 2023, and has been publishing the excellent [Future of Jobs Report](#) since 2016. The influence of the WEF remains substantial.

Some specific datasets from the World Bank, such as [Labor Force Participation](#), are essential. Yet it’s as if work is so embedded as to be somewhat taken for granted: “Work” is also not listed as a single topic (“Science and Technology” is). It’s only since 2014 that the International Development Association, a division of the World Bank, has included “jobs” to recognise “the role played by labour markets in intermediating between growth and inclusion”.⁸

Turning the Wheel of Work Further

Looking ahead to the end of the century, we can see that we are now midway from the point when the last global institutions formed. Something is clearly missing.

The WWO does not need to reinvent the wheel, because duplication is less interesting than innovation. This means not only forming partnerships with the central existing global bodies and forums and bridging gaps but designing a new way to synthesise global data across the economy, technology, and culture of work.

“*Too much of global work data is designed and presented for economists and not people working to lead, manage and design work for the future. Patterns and comparisons should live outside of Excel spreadsheets.*”

Ethno-Data

The approach we advocate is one which combines anthropological and ethnographical deep research with scaled data analysis.

“*We want to reimagine how to interrogate and interpret patterns emerging throughout the increasingly interconnected supply chain of people, systems, services and products which make up work in the world today.*”

This picture is changing so constantly that we must fully present what's relevant from the past and the present, in order to plan successfully for the future.

What could be learned about leadership or outcomes, for instance, by comparing aspects of three of the largest employers in the world - the UK's National Health Service (NHS), the world's largest publicly funded health service, employing (headcount 1.5 million people),⁹ India's Ministry of Defence, the world's largest single employer (nearly 3 million employees), and Walmart (the largest private employer in the world has over 2 million employees)?

Or take countries with an aging population like Japan, which is just introducing a [4-Day-Week in Tokyo](#) as (radically) a way to encourage population growth. Imagine what can be learned by following a 'dashboard' of progress in this city. Can a workforce policy not only enliven work but give birth to a new generation as a result?

Then there's the astonishing increase in female participation in the workforce in [Saudi Arabia by over 10%](#) since 2018. What will the longitudinal effects be of these policy changes? Every country is full of "firsts".

Now, let's put culture into the mix. I'm a big fan of the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede, whose [six Cultural Dimensions](#) framework arose from years of research at IBM to look at how different workers worldwide behave according to culture and custom.

Walmart has been the largest company in the world for most of this century. As 25%¹⁰ of Walmart's 2 million employees work outside of its American borders, including 28,000 at Massmart in Africa and 38,000 in Japan,¹¹ how could they apply the Geert Hofstede lens (or the [Workathon Frame](#)) to their workforce and participate in longitudinal and attitudinal data studies and share the results? The WWO could be the resource for such enquiry. Certainly the catalyst.

What about China's values of *Guanxi*, in which networks play a hugely beneficial role in business growth? China is Sweden's largest trading partner in Asia. How does Sweden's *Fika* tradition of deliberate, community work breaks affect the mindset, productivity, worker interaction, or supply chain process between these countries? Do they discuss *Guanxi* or test it out – and vice versa?

The Culture of Work Around the World in Words

Kurzarbeit Fika Kaisu Ubuntu Wai
 Dharbat mi'allim Wa Kaixen Hygge Chin-wag
 Smoko Ikagi Comida Lobola Guanxi
 Harambee Arbejdsglaede Water Cooler

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For Workathon's pilot [12-country study](#) applying three different criteria, we did indeed find a "united state" of work applied: From Brazil to Estonia, from India to Italy, government-level levers are being pulled in similar ways – policies to attract or accelerate what the economy needs, and cultural influences which have a bearing on it. We traced patterns amongst emerging digital nomad nations; saw the surprising but evident rise of Saudi Arabia and Jordan into offering the kind of progressive, flexible work policies¹² we associate with Nordic nations which led the world before Covid-19.¹³

However, it's insufficient to rely on a data benchmark model of 6% of the world's countries, created by a small start-up when the world needs a global data dashboard powered by a public-private engine of governments, corporations, and NGOs. There's a clear knowledge gap here – and a clear resource gap.

Above all, the data needs to be synthesised and scalable. Existing technology solutions and data troves can feed into the overall picture, but these need to be re-organised and recreated to suit the brief.

Clearly, some of the gaps identified in the way work trends are compiled and interpreted at a global level require an entirely new data model to be designed and built.

“*The ethno-data approach must combine the best of the human and the best of the machine.*”

Think how powerful it could be if the WWO partnered with some innovative technology players to organise and scale our approach to work trends and data from the last hundred years? This is where a dedicated Large Language Model (LLM) created alongside one or more technology partners is vital.

Catch the Wave of Thought Leadership

Here's another gap. Ideas. During the first wave of Covid-19 in 2020, as I researched my book *The Nowhere Office*,¹⁴ it was Nick Bloom's work with his colleagues on work from home experiments in [China from 2013](#) which first caught my attention.¹⁵

“*Another component of the WWO would be to synthesise the literature of work, specifically the management, leadership, and academic research and published non-fiction, which is a growing field, not only in a searchable archive but one which applies lessons from yesterday to today – and models them for tomorrow.*”

The volume and depth of literature and analysis of work about work began to climb steeply from 2020 onwards. In addition to distinguished academics whose papers began to be closely followed, including Prithwiraj Choudhury of Harvard, Juliet Schor of Boston College and Lynda Gratton of London Business School, a plethora of corporate research also began to build into the tsunami it is today: it's completely overwhelming without adequate curation.

“*The volume and depth of literature and analysis of work about work began to climb steeply from 2020 onwards.¹⁸ ...a plethora of corporate research also began to build into the tsunami it is today: it's completely overwhelming without adequate curation.*

[The Microsoft Trends Index](#) has become key, as has monthly economic data from [Linked In](#); A new work ideas canon is emerging which includes **Gallup's** [State of Global Workplace Report](#);¹⁶ **PWC's** [Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Index](#);¹⁷ employee engagement firm [Integral's annual index](#); law firm **Lewis Silkin's** latest Strategic Workforce Priorities Report: [What Matters Most?](#)¹⁸ and **JLL's** 2025 trends report on the [rise of data centres](#) (part of their [existing libraries](#) of global work research relating to trends including corporate real estate and workplace).

On technology company **Asana** publishes [data on innovation](#) across six countries to identify 'hidden taxes'. A report on [AI and business in 2024](#) from global IT firm **Tata Consultancy Services** found that 87% of senior business executives from across 24 countries and 12 industries¹⁹ have already deployed AI to enhance or improve existing revenue streams, and 72% are “reworking or planning on reworking their business strategy or operations” around AI.

Think too how extraordinary it would be to combine a superfast AI-enabled but human-led ethno-data project and partner that with some of the best business schools, companies, libraries, publishing houses and media organisations to do so! A global resource of actionable business education, combined with data analysis applied to your own individual country or organisation's needs.

Take the history of management writing and experiments buried deep in the reading lists of MBA courses, which rarely surface beyond them. Have you heard of Elton Mayo's [Hawthorne Studies](#)? They are incredibly significant to the history of workforce teams and the development of 'people' management. They should be revisited today - and possibly recreated.

Such a system could enable live simulations all over the world – simultaneously translated of course. An estimated five million academic papers are published yearly, and most never see the light of day. What about those Tik-Toks of work? The podcasts and YouTube broadcasts? Tweets and LinkedIn are a library of their own with vast treasures of repeatable and usable insight about work. But blink and you miss them.

At the moment, all of this ultra-relevant work is staying in cyberspace in a static and siloed way. I find it shocking, especially as policymakers and executives badly need new ideas, and especially when so much of what was published can be experimented with, or repurposed.

The World Work Organisation can and should be the world's biggest resource of all content on work.

Key Work Concepts to Keep in Mind

Amy Edmondson's
Psychological Safety

Charles Handy's
Portfolio Career

Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott's
100-Year Life

Claudia Goldin's
Motherhood Penalty

Nassim Nicholas Taleb's
Antifragile

Arpit Gupta's
Doom Loop

Cal Newport's
Deep Work

Martin Seligman's
Learned Optimism

Juliet Schor's
Overworked American

Daron Acemoğlu's
Machine Usefulness

Klaus Schwab's
4th Industrial Revolution

Ethan Mollick's
Jagged Frontier

Barbara Kellerman's
Leaders and Followers

Nick Bloom's
Nike Swoosh

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's
Capabilities Approach

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“*It’s time for new models to understand the connections between people, places, and technologies at the centre of society. But it’s also time for a new global institution which frames this new world of work.*”

Melissa Fisher, Chief Cultural Anthropologist, Workathon

The case has, I hope, been made for why we need a World Work Organisation and why one feels inevitable in these times.

The case has also been made for uniting what currently exists with a new model which combines ethnography and data, in the rich case study tradition of academia, utilising the best of the most powerful capabilities of AI with the best people in the world creating the framework.

Framing is vital, even if working groups morph and change, as they inevitably will - and should. At Workathon, we created [the ‘Super Six’ framework](#) of interlinked challenges that we believe apply universally and belong grouped together: *Workplace & Work’s Evolution; Rights, Equality & Health; AI Adoption & Tech Infrastructure; Talent, Skills & Learning; People, Culture & Leadership; and Demography, Geography & Generations.*

Part of first steps might be to convene a global debate on this, a forum to examine and look at what different countries and industries feel about this organisational opening gambit. Watch this space!

Operating System

Currently, the organisational structure of WWO hovers on paper between being a global forum and being established formally. Ultimately, I prefer (and am planning for) the latter. Workathon intends to undertake the key development phase before a formal governance structure is decided upon.

As befits the times, there will be no single HQ but a series of offices in different cities worldwide and a distributed workforce. There can be different host nations for various aspects of work, but arguably, both America and Europe have had their fair share of headquartered global bodies. Not Washington, Geneva, or Paris as the first opening satellite offices!

Tributes and Tributaries

As of March 2025, the fifth anniversary of Covid-19, the most widespread transformation of work ever is underway. The systems thinking around work and the institutions that look at work should adapt accordingly.

“*I’m mindful of the African proverb ‘only a fool tests the river with two feet,’ but think of the embryonic WWO as a new river. One which has expertise flowing into it from tributaries, which finally gather in an enormous ocean of pooled knowledge.*”

This, in turn, makes a united state of work recognised, brings more voices, countries, experiences, and ideas, and puts them to work for all. Join the conversation about the World Work Organisation: www.wwo-org.org

¹ ‘2024 will see the rise of a new class of worker’ The Flexetariat: fortune.com/2023/12/20/rise-of-flexetariat-worker-2024-prediction/

² Number of people in insecure work reaches record high: www.ier.org.uk/news/number-of-people-in-insecure-work-reaches-record-4-1-million/

³ www.apa.org/monitor/2025/01/rise-of-4-day-workweek#:~:text=Four%2Dday%20workweeks%20are%20growing,reduce%20certain%20costs%20for%20organizations

⁴ www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/longevity-economy-principles-ageing-population/#:~:text=We're%20all%20getting%20older,for%20a%20Financially%20Resilient%20Future

⁵ www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-youngest-populations-in-the-world.html#:~:text=With%20more%20than%20half%20of,strained%20resources%20for%20the%20region

⁶ The decision for the ILO to join the new UN was made in December 1945

⁷ ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf

⁸ World Bank Document

⁹ [www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/data-and-charts/nhs-workforce-nutshell#:~:text=The%20NHS%20in%20England%20currently,time%20equivalent%20\(FTE\)%20basis](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/data-and-charts/nhs-workforce-nutshell#:~:text=The%20NHS%20in%20England%20currently,time%20equivalent%20(FTE)%20basis)

¹⁰ corporate.walmart.com/askwalmart/how-many-people-work-at-walmart

¹¹ careers.walmart.com/locations/international-locations

¹² blogs.worldbank.org/en/jobs/can-flexible-jobs-drive-the-future-of-work--lessons-from-mena#:~:text=This%20year%2C%20Saudi%20Arabia%20and,protection%20through%20social%20insurance%20coverage

¹³ norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1240047/FULLTEXT02.pdf

¹⁴ www.forbes.com/sites/benjaminkomlos/2022/07/25/julia-hobsbawm-on-the-nowhere-office-and-this-fascinating-moment-of-great-re-evaluation

¹⁵ www.nber.org/papers/w18871

¹⁶ www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

¹⁷ www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/workforce/hopes-and-fears.html

¹⁸ www.lewissilkin.com/our-thinking/future-of-work-hub/insights/2025/02/12/strategic-workforce-priorities-what-matters-most-1

¹⁹ <https://www.tcs.com/who-we-are/newsroom/press-release/tcs-global-ai-study-2024>



About Workathon

Workathon is a global trends network for senior corporate executives, policymakers, academics, and thought leaders who want to share and explore the big issues affecting work today.

JLL is Foundational Partner of Workathon. Corporate members in 2025 include **Virgin Money; Dr Martens; Miller Knoll; MS Amlin; Geniant; Integral** and **Lewis Silkin**.

Workathon Works is Workathon's global content and events programme. This includes tightly curated small salons and meet-ups all over the world, plus, bespoke conferences and published papers - the first of which is [The United State of Work](#). Our weekly podcast about office politics and working life, [The Nowhere Office](#) is on Spotify and all main platforms.

Senior Advisers in Workathon include **Melissa Fisher**, Chief Culture of Work Anthropologist of Workathon who teaches ethnography and design at Parson's The New School in New York; **Brian Elliott**, CEO at Work Forward; **Melis Abacioğlu**, Founder of Wellbees; **Sally Osman**, a former Director of Communications at Buckingham Palace who advises on institutional regeneration; **Henry Mason**, AI global speaker and author of *The Future Normal*; the smart working author and government adviser **Andy Lake**; change management leader **Phil Kirschner**, and *Thinkers50* thought leader **Terence Mauri**, who is Workathon's Chief Futurist.

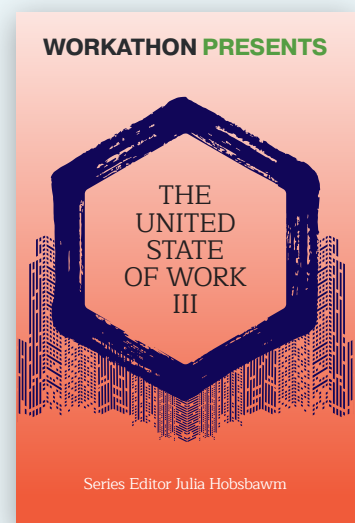
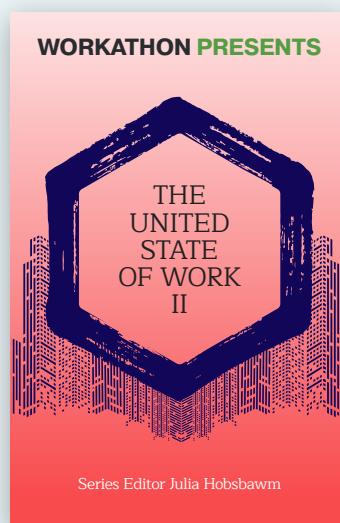
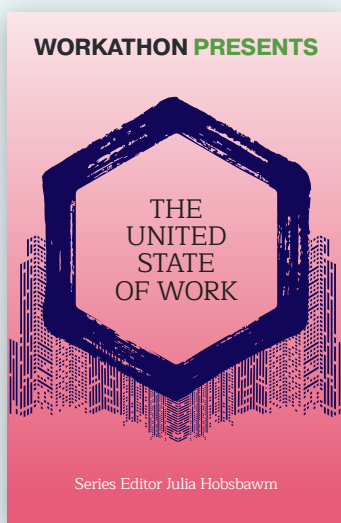
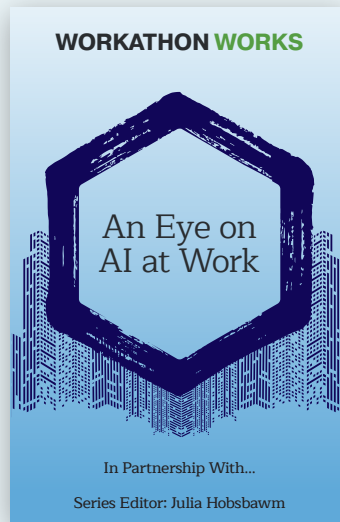
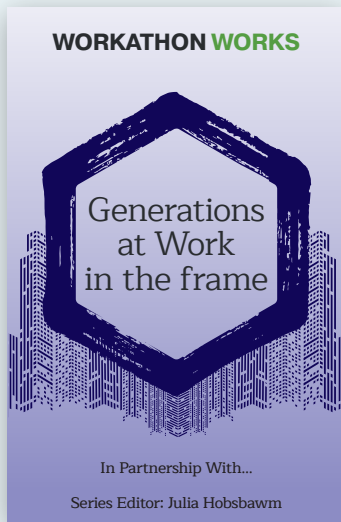
Honorary members of Workathon include the global talent and workplace thought leader **Josh Bersin**; economist and work researcher **Professor Nick Bloom**; future of work and technology academic **Professor Carl Benedikt-Frey** of the University of Oxford; **Gustavo Sèngès**, Country Leader, HireRight, Brazil; and **Rory Sutherland**, Vice-Chairman of Advertising firm Ogilvy UK (and Tik Tok's popular behaviour and marketing guru).

Workathon's Founder and CEO is **Julia Hobsbawm OBE** an award-winning networking entrepreneur and author who has become a vocal advocate for improving work and working life.

Please note that Workathon's thought leadership content reflects individual views only.

Foundational Partner:





Find out more about getting involved in the next Workathon Works projects, The Nowhere Office podcast and the next in the United State of Work series: william@workathon.io

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Further information
assist@workathon.io

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