
IoIC Future of Work Trends Report

Working the future 

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1. INTRODUCTION



Our work landscapes are in the midst of profound and unprecedented change. The first two decades of the 21st century have seen rapid acceleration in the advancement of communications technologies. Most notable are the rise of the smartphone and its ever-increasing computational power¹, and the ongoing and rapid expansion of the Internet².

The continuous and unprecedented availability of information via our smartphones significantly impacts how we behave as humans, as communities, as societies and as nations. Information ubiquity also creates profound shifts in the way we run our organisations.

In parallel, the make-up of the UK's working demographic is shifting. As older generations retire and new generations embark on their working lives, attitudes and behaviours shift. Shaped by the environments they grew up in, younger people at work today are far more digitally dextrous by default – as a generational cohort, they have a significantly different communication style.

To add further complexity, our wider political, economic and environmental backdrop is in turmoil. In the next decade we'll need to reconfigure both our political and economic frameworks if we stand any chance at all of repairing the ecological damage humans have caused.

What does all of this mean for the internal communication profession?

Effective internal communication has the power to transform working lives by helping people feel engaged, connected and purposeful – that they *matter* at work – ultimately making for better organisations and, by extension, enhancing society.

At IoIC, we believe that effective internal communication is the lifeblood of an organisation, enabling all stakeholders to know, at any given point in time, what's happening within the organisation and what's expected of them.

In his 2019 bestseller, *What You Do Is Who You Are*, Silicon Valley investor Ben Horowitz describes the link between communication and trust. He writes: "In any human interaction, the required amount of communication is inversely proportional to the level of trust [...] As an organisation grows, communication becomes its biggest challenge."

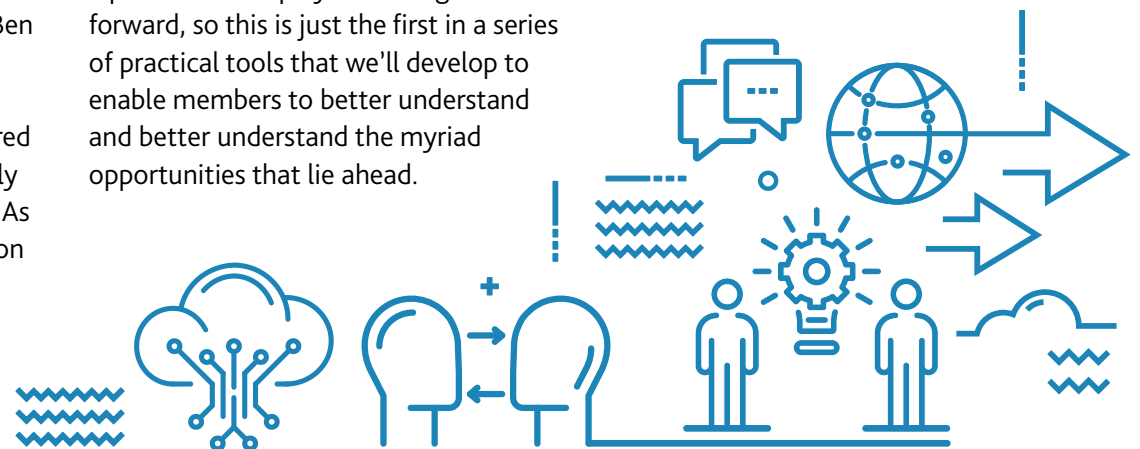
As the places in which we work continue their journey of disruption and transformation, the need for robust, clear and cohesive communication has never been more critical.

As the only dedicated professional body for internal communication, we want you to feel empowered to influence change positively, as it's happening.

This is why we've created this report. We believe that an enhanced understanding of the convergent forces shifting the very nature of work will ease the way for smoother transitions into new working landscapes. Internal communication has a pivotal role to play in moving all of this forward, so this is just the first in a series of practical tools that we'll develop to enable members to better understand and better understand the myriad opportunities that lie ahead.



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The trends listed in this report are intended as “food for thought”, rather than an exhaustive analysis. There are myriad factors driving change at work, of course – many more than we can include here.

These are headlines, supported by expert analysis and distillation, of the most relevant insights – a snapshot of some of the pivotal emerging trends affecting the world of work, if you like. The report provides an overview of some of the overarching shifts, undercurrents and key predictions pertaining to work’s evolving future, reflecting a range of trends, viewpoints and potential outcomes.

It’s not designed to be prescriptive – when looking at emerging and future sociocultural trends through a relatively broad lens, invariably contradictions and counter-arguments arise. Also, it’s worth pointing out that you do gain and lose in summary; without the luxury of a more granular “deep-dive” into each meta-trend, you’ll always get more of a top-line view.

However, the report is designed specifically to give you, as internal communication professionals, an accelerated understanding of the central themes, so that you can further strengthen the positioning of internal communication as the critical partner of transformation within your organisations.

With that in mind, we hope it helps you to build a clearer picture of some of the mercurial ways in which the world of work is changing.



ABOUT WORKING THE FUTURE

Working the Future is a boutique management consultancy, whose mission is to help UK businesses understand and successfully prepare for the convergent workplace trends driving commercial transformation in the 21st century. Its overarching goal is to help SME and mid-tier business owners leverage human potential in parallel with technological advances.

Working the Future analyses emerging developments in technology innovation, demographic shifts, employment behaviours, and socio-cultural meta-trends – in addition to the other myriad shifts and undercurrents – impacting the ways in which people work.

It uses this analysis to provide future-focused market and business intelligence to business leaders, enabling the rapid deployment of strategies and solutions that leverage competitive advantage, and ensure organisational resilience in the 21st century.

2.

THE PRIMARY TRENDS IMPACTING PEOPLE AT WORK IN THE 2020S



“What we are witnessing now is a break with the past as significant as that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when parts of the world began the long process of industrialisation.”
– Professor Lynda Gratton, *The Shift*

2.1



TECHNOLOGY'S IMPACT ON WORK

"Software is eating the world," claimed US technology entrepreneur and investor Marc Andreessen in an article³ originally published in the Wall Street Journal in 2011. A statement written nine years ago would usually bear little relevance to the world we live in today, given the fast-paced nature of the modern world. Yet this sentence still holds true.

The rate and scale of technology innovation in our personal and work lives is unprecedented, and only set to accelerate. Across many media outlets, there's fierce debate about the future of work and, indeed, the types of work that will be left for humans to do by midway through the 21st century. Software automation, artificial intelligence and robotics all hold the potential to seismically simplify work. But right now, the end of work is a far-flung notion, and a concept that would need to be very deliberately engineered.

For now, let's agree that technology will radically alter the make-up of work, in most industry sectors.

In its 2017 Global Artificial Intelligence Study⁴, PwC estimated that AI could potentially contribute US\$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030. The same report suggests that AI will enhance labour productivity and that the largest initial gains will come from humans leveraging technology to improve work outcomes. In the near to medium term, this anticipated productivity gain will require massive investment in learning and development, as humans, particularly those in knowledge-based industry sectors, reskill and upskill to learn new digital competencies to complement existing skillsets and specialisms.



While we will all need to adapt to increasingly digital working environments, in parallel we'll need to focus on "human" skills. These are skills that can't easily be automated and that, when leveraged, give our organisations stand-out advantage.



Routine and repetitive tasks are ripe for automation, allowing humans to take on new and different tasks. While we will all need to adapt to increasingly digital working environments, in parallel we'll need to focus on "human" skills. These are skills that can't easily be automated and that, when leveraged, give our organisations stand-out advantage. More on this later.

There's a strong chance we'll see the emergence of "hybrid jobs", as the routine and repetitive elements of two job functions are automated, and the less automatable aspects of each job are merged into one role. Individual roles and responsibilities will be prone to continuous shape-shift.

Organisations across all industry sectors must embrace digital if they are to survive the 21st century. This necessity drives the requirement for continuous innovation, as organisations reinvent and upgrade both their core products and services and their internal operating systems and processes. Once again, the requirement for continuous learning sits at the heart of innovation capability.

The World Economic Forum estimates that no less than 54% of all people at work will require significant re- and up-skilling by 2022⁵. It says: "Of these, about 35% are expected to require additional training of up to six months, 9% will require reskilling lasting six to 12 months, while 10% will require additional skills training of more than a year."

As continuous learning fast becomes the norm, the pace of change at work will further amplify. Strong, effective, consistent and cohesive internal communication will never be more critical, to facilitate smooth and rapid organisational evolution.

Lastly, let's not forget that the continued march of technology has a profound effect on communication itself.

We've already seen the introduction of multiple diverse communication channels in the last decade, and this too is only set to amplify. With younger cohorts starting their working lives and bringing with them an entirely different approach to communication, underpinned by their native digital fluency, the tools and methods we use for effective internal communication will also be subject to continuous evolution.

54%

of all employees will require significant re- and up-skilling by 2025.

World Economic Forum

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9% will require reskilling lasting six to 12 months.

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2.2



GLOBALISATION AND GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

Technological progress and globalisation are, to a large extent, inextricably linked. The rise of high-speed communications technology has facilitated global connectivity, smoothing the path for organisations to grow and spread across traditional geographic boundaries.

In tandem, globalisation has facilitated competition in the vast majority of sectors. The cost of technology itself has fallen dramatically, and continues to fall, fuelled by challenger organisations offering lower prices as a consequence of reduced operating costs.



As consumers, we've never had more choice than we have today. For the modern organisation, globalisation means that competitive threat is continuously amplified; it's undoubtedly added fuel to the fire of already uncertain and volatile markets



As the cost of both technology hardware and access to communications networks continue to fall, anyone anywhere can become a producer. The GSMA, the mobile communications industry body, estimates there will be 5.8 billion unique mobile subscribers and 5 billion mobile Internet users globally by 2025⁶.

Globalisation and global connectivity mean we're all operating in a single market that provides myriad options. As consumers, we've never had more choice than we have today.

For the modern organisation, globalisation means that competitive threat is continuously amplified; it's undoubtedly added fuel to the fire of already uncertain and volatile markets.



Mobile internet users by 2025.

GSMA

Global competition fundamentally changes the economics of business, and indeed the viability of long-term organisational survival. US innovation consulting firm, Innosight, has predicted that the average lifespan of S&P 500[®] listed organisations will shrink to just 12 years by 2027⁷.

Across all industries, businesses and organisations will need to fight to survive. But again, within this somewhat pessimistic scenario, we know that internal communication is, and will continue to be, an organisation's driving force. Just as robust channels of communication are essential to successful military strategy, so an organisation's ability to facilitate and optimise two-way, information-rich, coherent communication is critical.

While multiple technology options will emerge to facilitate internal communication, human facilitation will also be required – to ensure receipt and correct understanding of information itself, and the right nuance.

2.3



CHANGING HOURS OF WORK

As the type of work we do shifts, so too does the way in which we work.

We've entered the age of the knowledge economy. This is defined as an economic system that leverages knowledge and intellectual capital, rather than physical goods and products. In May 2019, *The Telegraph* published an article about the UK's knowledge economy. It cited ONS research that suggests its size has grown to represent 39% of the overall UK economy, a trend that is set to continue⁸.

The nature of the work we do significantly alters how we work. If those working in knowledge-based sectors can, increasingly, deliver their work from anywhere, why do they need to be confined to an office? If they can safely and securely access the files and systems of their employers pretty much wherever they are, why do they need to spend hours of their lives on the daily commute?

In parallel, as more businesses compete in a globalised landscape, offering goods and services internationally, the traditional construct of keeping strict and regular nine-to-five office hours becomes challenged by the need to offer instant response to customers, wherever they are in the world.

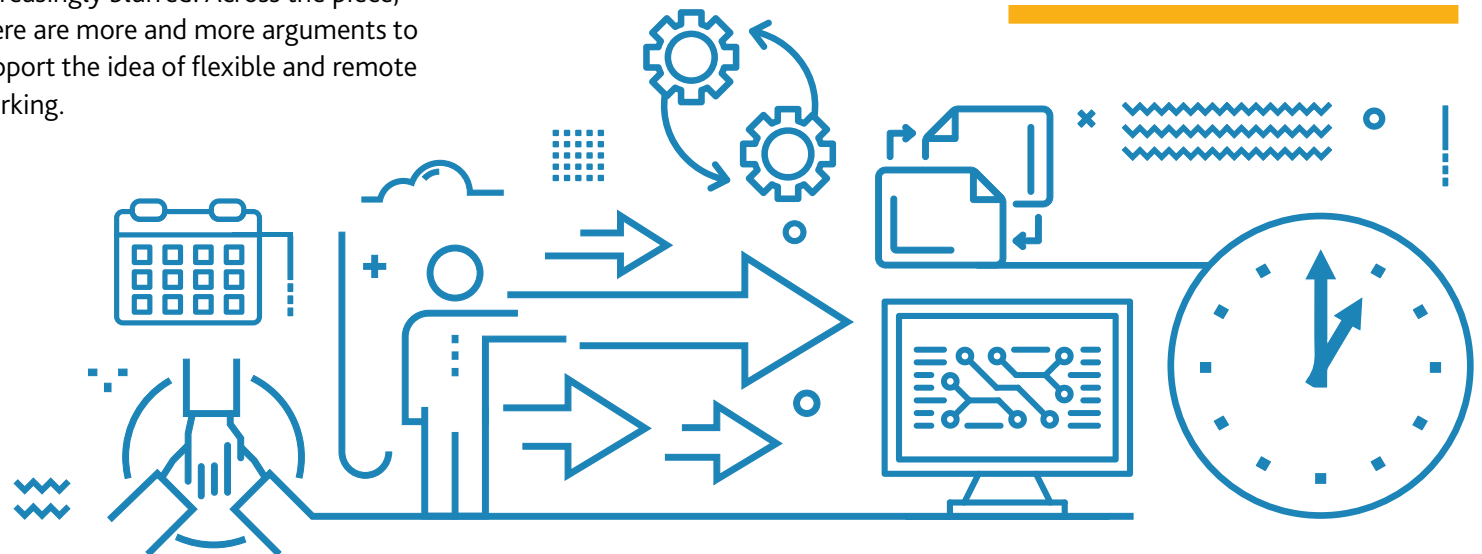
Our smart devices increasingly carry bursts of work-related information, regardless of time of day; in a few short years, the boundaries between work and our non-working lives have become increasingly blurred. Across the piece, there are more and more arguments to support the idea of flexible and remote working.

Flexible working covers a multitude of sins, and refers to any work type that breaks away from the conventional nine-to-five, five-day working week model. It includes the four-day week, part-time work, compressed hours, flexitime, job shares, the nine-day fortnight, remote-working, and more. A Forbes article published in May 2019, reported that 92% of millennials place flexible working as high priority when considering job opportunities⁹. The traditional construct of work is fast eroding.

92%

Millennials who place flexible working as high priority when considering job opportunities.

Forbes



For the ambitious organisation, this means rethinking the entire how, where and when of work, if it wishes to position itself as attractive in the hunt for talent. While some organisations are embracing this, others are more cautious, citing a need for ongoing visibility of productivity. Trust and transparency between employer and employee will define an organisations' ability to embrace work flexibility, and will naturally take a more centre-stage role in successful organisations of the future.

As organisations rethink their approach to work, the requirement to clearly and coherently communicate such revisions will be paramount. It's also worth noting at this stage that in the future of work, a "one-size-fits-all" approach to flexible working is far less likely to succeed.

While this trend won't affect every sector to the same degree (the care professions and hospitality industry may well, for instance, experience fewer flexible working opportunities), knowledge-workers in particular are increasingly likely to insist upon customised work-patterns, and to vote with their feet, if they don't get what they want.

For the internal communication professional, there's a clear-cut case for demonstrating organisational trust and transparency throughout all

communication. How organisations manage far more flexible and geographically dispersed teams will require a whole new level, and style, of communication – something many business leaders may well need help adapting to.



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2.4



CHANGING SOCIO-CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND INTERGENERATIONAL WORKING

Each new generation entering the world of work brings with it a new set of attitudes and behaviours, borne of the environment and landscape in which it grew up.

In 2020, for the first time, we have four – even, at times, five – generations of workers co-existing in the workplace¹⁰. In the UK, where we benefit from a reasonably well-structured welfare state, we're less likely to see the oldest cohort, the Traditionalist Generation, at work. These are people born before 1946. For some, work into old age is a financial necessity; for others, it's a means by which to proactively remain physically and cognitively active.

Next come the boomers – those born between 1946 and 1964. Generation X – those born between 1965 and 1976 – follows. On their heels come the millennials, or Gen Y – probably the most talked about generational cohort in terms of their impact on how people work, and their quest to work differently. Millennials are those born between 1977 and 1997. Finally, enter Generation Z – those born between 1998 and 2012¹¹.

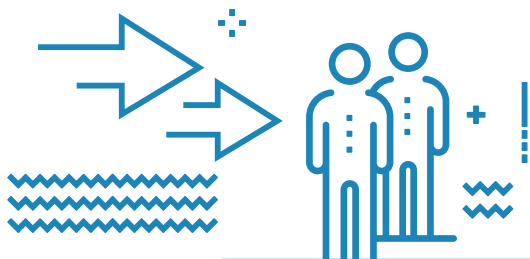
It's important to note that these generational segmentations were created with the intent of helping researchers better categorise attitudes and behaviours across time. Regrettably, in recent times, some of these labels have been seized upon by mainstream media to highlight intergenerational “differences” and propagate somewhat lazy descriptors about entire age-groups, as well as, in some instances, to malign specific cohorts.

So, we should keep some perspective in understanding the differences between diverse age groups, without resorting to stereotypes. These disparities are often more nuanced than first meets the eye, and there's a considerable variety of preferences and value-sets within any of the above cohorts. And while there may be broad generational characteristics attributable to different age-groups, we may, of course, also share traits with people older or younger than us, rather than with some of those closer to our own age.

Depending on life-stage, people often also change over time due to varying priorities, demands, experiences, and physical capacities – so perhaps it's more helpful to approach intergenerational workplaces as being “culturally dynamic”.

Nonetheless, each generation tends to carry differences of opinion and perspective, particularly when it comes to work and how work should be performed. Younger generations bring entirely new expectations, based on a more globalised, peer-mediated world-view and, in parallel, are often more vocal in asking for it.

In September 2019, a Forbes article examined the likely impact of Generation Z on the labour market. The article highlighted that 47% of generation z respondents prioritise work-life balance in job search criteria, with a whopping 90% hoping for significantly more “humanised” work environments¹².



47% of generation Z respondents prioritise work-life balance in job search criteria.

90% hoping for significantly more “humanised” work environments.



As the first post-Internet “always-on” cohort, Generation Z is described as “hyper-connected”. They tend towards an entirely new relationship with technology, a different communication style and an expectation towards immediacy – of wanting and expecting things to appear and happen immediately. This expectation of real-time results is already taking root, with early reports of interview and job offer “ghosting”¹³, where candidates demonstrate the same behaviour towards employers as they do within their social circles. We can expect this new generational cohort to radically influence how we work, just like their older millennial siblings have.

In addition, the ways in which we approach our working lives are more aligned with our behaviour as consumers than ever before. Accordingly, another key shift in socio-cultural attitudes towards work is the increasing emphasis being placed on purpose, meaning, morals and ethics. Of course, remuneration will always be a primary motivator when job-seeking, but, additionally, we’re starting to see that simply having a job isn’t the sole priority for certain cohorts.

As the world becomes more fast-paced and unstable, people want to know that what they’re doing at work actually matters, and that their work in some way leaves the world in a better place. There have been far too many instances of moral bankruptcy in the business world in recent years and, as individuals, we’re fast becoming intolerant of unethical practices outside of the office – so it only stands to reason that this awareness is growing inside it too.



Simply having a job isn't the sole priority for certain cohorts. As the world becomes more fast-paced and unstable, people want to know that what they're doing at work actually matters... The requirement for employers to demonstrate purpose and meaning, and to act responsibly towards both society and the environment, has never been so great.

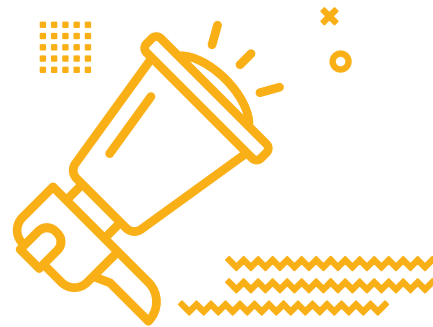


The requirement for employers to demonstrate purpose and meaning, and to act responsibly towards both society and the environment, has never been so great. As we move into the 2020s, an employer’s ability to demonstrate trust will be pivotal. BUPA survey findings in 2018 indicated that a quarter of UK workers have already quit a job due to lack of trust. This figure is surely set to rise¹⁴.

We’re at the end of employer-led labour markets. Skilled workers are infinitely more discerning in who they work for. Trust is an increasing prerequisite – workers want to see authenticity, morals, ethics and values in the boardroom, and beyond. The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report underscores this¹⁵.

Those in the C suite *must* accept this change in market dynamics, and lean into an entirely different form of leadership. It may now be more appropriate to think in terms of knowledge “exchange”, rather than knowledge “transfer”. The transparency required by the modern leader requires significant support from the internal communication professional, in terms of both coaching for this style and creating effective communication feedback loops, so that, in addition to receiving information from the organisation, workers feel listened to and that their individual contribution matters.

92%



Percentage of employees who feel it is important that their CEO speaks out on issues such as training for the future, ethical use of technology, climate change, diversity and immigration.

Edelman Trust Barometer 2020

Also key in this dynamically evolving work landscape is the provision of communication in a way that connects with and motivates all the generational cohorts. Messaging will need to be sensitive to the preferred mediums of each generation to maximise inclusion at work.

Multi-generational work environments have much to offer by way of encouraging diversity of perspective, but only when led and managed in a way that fosters connection and belonging.

Employers increasingly need to provide collaborative, team-friendly environments that nurture positive relationships, with a greater emphasis on shared goals, so that all people at work can see themselves as part of the same team, working toward the same outcome, regardless of their age.

Internal communication has a pivotal part to play in nurturing a variance of communication styles and channels, to connect and optimise increasingly diverse cohorts at work.

2.5



CHANGING EMPLOYMENT MODELS

The last 20 years have seen the traditional labour market fragment into an increasingly diverse set of employment types. This has in turn dramatically altered attitudes towards work and personal risk.

The aftermath of the 2007 global financial collapse caused substantial, and arguably irreversible, damage to the notion of job security, to the extent that increasing numbers of workers – predominantly those in skilled, knowledge-based sectors – are now electing to work for themselves. By building a portfolio of clients, they spread risk and gain access to increased project variety and experience. This trend has given rise to Deloitte, in 2019, reporting on “the Alternative Workforce”¹⁶. It describes alternative work as including: “Work performed by outsourced teams, contractors, freelancers, gig workers (paid for tasks) and the crowd (outsourced networks).”

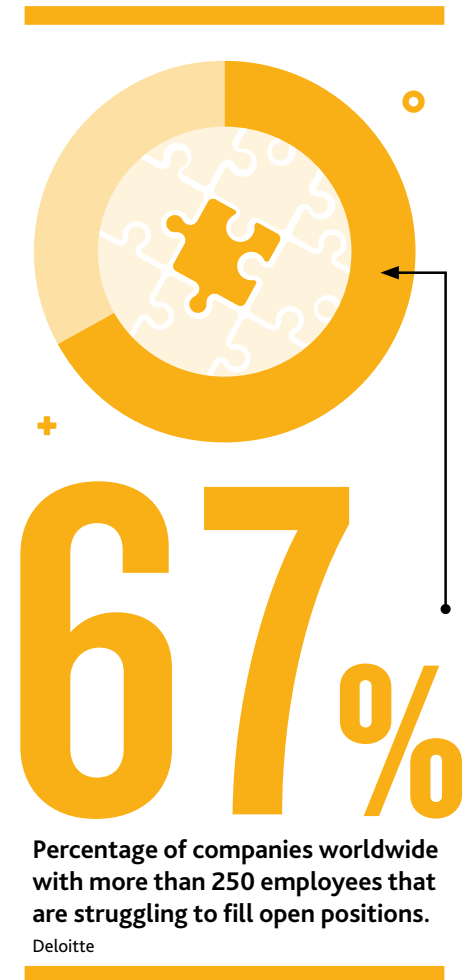
When key skilled talent chooses to work in a non-permanent capacity, organisations have little choice but to open up to exploring alternative employment models, if they have any hope of continuing to access the competencies they need for continued success outcomes. As Deloitte says¹⁷: “For organizations that want to grow and access critical skills, managing alternative forms of employment has become critical.”

One of the most commonly cited barriers to organisational growth, and indeed a key concern expressed by many CEOs in 2019, is the inability to access talent with the right skillsets. This trend is only set to amplify, as the pace and nature of the labour market accelerates. Again, citing Deloitte: “45% of surveyed employers worldwide say they are having trouble filling open positions [...] Among companies with more than 250 employees, the percentage struggling to find qualified candidates rises to 67%.”

Using these alternative types of workers to plug the skills gap is fast becoming a necessity. Multiple think tanks have suggested that, by 2030, more than half of us will be working under self-employed status. In addition to worker preference, it’s also argued that the increasingly fragmented nature of work itself will give rise to far fewer permanent job opportunities. Some business schools have suggested that only those deemed critical to the strategic roadmap of an organisation will be retained on a permanent basis.

All others in the talent ecosystem will be retained on an “on-demand” basis.

This, of course, has huge implications for the ambitious organisation – how it communicates and engages with increasingly fluid sets of working people will become critical. The methods and mediums of internal communication for a business utilising distributed networks of impermanent talent will require continuous nurturing, to ensure the smooth flow of two-way information, and continued alignment around organisational purpose and goals.



2.6



CHANGING OPERATING AND ORGANISATIONAL MODELS

As markets become increasingly dynamic and prone to disruption, the very nature of our organisational structures requires rethinking.

“Agile” is a term we are all now familiar with. Its origins lie in the early 2000s, when a small group of US-based software industry leaders met to explore ways in which software development cycles could run faster, given the accelerating nature of the IT landscape itself. Agile methodology was a means by which to create faster software releases and deployments.

Since then, “Agile” has become big business; its approach appropriated across the multiple functions of business, as a means by which to get things done faster. But “agile” is as much a mindset as it is a methodology. For any organisation looking to survive the uncertainty of modern markets, agility will be key. An organisation’s ability to align workers around temporary projects to meet transient goals and objectives, before shifting focus to new and emergent projects, will be pivotal to survival.

Successful companies of the future will be shape-shifters, continuously morphing and adapting to meet new market needs, as they arise. While we will, of course, need to maintain the various functions that sit within a typical business (sales, marketing, operations, finance, etc.), departments and teams will be infinitely more fluid.



For an organisation to survive increased fragmentation and fluidity, it will need to ensure that each and every participating team-member has access to all the information it needs to fully engage.



World-class internal communication will undoubtedly be the glue that holds these increasingly transient structures together. How we optimally communicate with one another to meet organisational objectives, will be a continuous work in progress. For an organisation to survive increased fragmentation and fluidity, it will need to ensure that each and every participating team-member has access to all the information it needs to fully engage. It will also need the feedback of each and every team member to contribute to organisational sense-making.

21st century market forces are expected to be so dynamic that all observed signs and signals from the front line will need to be communicated, evaluated and, as appropriate, acted upon.

2.7



IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESOURCE DEPLETION ON ORGANISATIONS

It's hard at this stage to anticipate the extent to which organisations and organisational structures will be affected by the twin challenges of climate change and resource depletion, but we can predict with certainty that their combined impact will be significant and unprecedented.

In late November 2019, the EU declared a climate emergency¹⁸. To boot, earlier in 2019, the outgoing Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, issued several warnings that businesses failing to significantly reduce carbon footprint will face eventual bankruptcy¹⁹. In early summer 2019, a consortium of world banks published their report calling for the greening of the global banking sector, warning of dire outcomes of failure to do so²⁰.

Most organisations have yet to wake up to the fact that climate change and resource depletion will fundamentally alter their shape, structure and operating models. If we are to successfully meet carbon emission reduction targets, an entire overhaul of global consumption habits will be required, which will have a significant knock-on impact for goods providers of any denomination. It goes without saying that any organisation operating within a resource-intensive industry sector will need to radically alter its business model.

In addition to the cost of base materials becoming increasingly prohibitive, social stigma around carbon emissions and consumption habits is on the rise. Simply put, consumers and workers alike are increasingly demanding transparency around organisational carbon reduction goals.

The climate crisis will also further disrupt the way in which organisations structure themselves internally. Professors at London Business School have predicted that climate change will dramatically restrict the viability of commuting and business travel, accelerating the rise of remote- and virtual-working, wherever possible.

How teams communicate effectively with one another when distributed geographically will take significant planning and continuous review. How organisations rise to both the challenge of reducing carbon footprint, and the transparency in these activities that's expected by modern consumers and workers, will require thoughtful attention.



Social stigma around carbon emissions and consumption habits is on the rise. Simply put, consumers and workers alike are increasingly demanding transparency around organisational carbon reduction goals.



People are increasingly holding those leading their organisations accountable for sustainability targets, and there is an opportunity for internal communication to facilitate a smooth and truthful flow of information to bring wider cohesion.

Those businesses, and business leaders, who can successfully position themselves as agents of positive change are significantly more likely to thrive in uncertain 21st century markets. Internal communication professionals have a centre-stage opportunity in this regard.

2.8



THE AGE OF HUMAN

21st century work environments are increasingly underpinned by digital technology. Technology brings accuracy, speed and efficiency, eliminating the risk of error.

Yet, in parallel, our digital landscapes threaten our ability and confidence to communicate and connect with one another as humans. Sherry Turkle is a professor at MIT in the USA, and her specialist area of interest is the relationship that humans have with technology²¹. Her 2015 book, *Reclaiming Conversation*, explores the extent to which our increased reliance on digital devices inhibits our ability to socialise as humans. As social creatures, we depend on our human support networks – indeed, research has shown the extent to which loneliness endangers our physical and mental wellbeing²².

As digital technology continues its inexorable march within our organisations, it's anticipated that the spare capacity we regain as workers will be reinvested into regaining our human skills. These include key attributes such as emotional intelligence, the ability to communicate well, creativity, complex problem-solving and critical thinking. We're dependent on the feedback loops within our human networks to hone and nurture all of these skills.

In equal measure, as consumers become deluged by increasing swathes of choice, evidence is emerging that a customised, human-centric, wrap-around experience drives loyalty. Customer-centricity is expected to be a key feature of 21st century commerce. The "Experience Economy" is thriving; Deloitte's 2019 report on the UK's leisure economy underscores this²³. We can deploy all the technology that we like, but, for the foreseeable future, only human skills can provide a competitive edge in this area.



As digital technology continues its inexorable march within our organisations, it's anticipated that the spare capacity we regain as workers will be reinvested into regaining our human skills. These include key attributes such as emotional intelligence, the ability to communicate well, creativity, complex problem-solving and critical thinking.



As mentioned previously, in line with shifts in consumer behaviour, worker behaviour is evolving.

The past five years have seen increased organisational focus on the 'employee experience', and talent churn data indicates that people in some sectors want, and expect, increasingly "customised" careers. Again, there's scant way of providing this without an egalitarian, smooth, two-way flow of communication between employer and employee.

Increasingly diverse and distributed groups of workers require enhanced levels of emotional intelligence to coax social cohesion and drive organisational performance. As experienced communication professionals, we already understand the power and potential of words to foster connection and understanding. The opportunity lies in supporting the business to develop enhanced communication skills that enable high performance.

3. SUMMARY



The places in which people work are evolving at lightning speed – and the pace of change will only continue to increase and will never be as “slow” as it is today. While many business leaders are waking up to the fact that digital transformation is necessary for organisational survival, too few leaders are considering the parallel challenge of workforce transformation.

McKinsey has documented that 70% of “complex, large-scale change programmes don’t reach their stated goals”²⁴. Commonly cited reasons for transformation failure include a lack of engagement and poor or non-existent, intra-company collaboration. The human behaviour aspects of change are all too often ignored, and internal communication is only considered as an after-thought.

Change aside, we’re currently experiencing a global dearth of engagement. Gallup’s recent State of the Global Workplace report²⁵, begins with a stark and sobering data point: “85% of employees worldwide are not engaged or are actively disengaged in their job.”

Worse still, that figure hasn’t particularly shifted in the past ten years. If people are already chronically disengaged at work today, organisations can only expect recruitment and retention figures to worsen if they don’t take proactive steps to improve how they’re perceived internally.

Robust internal communication is one of the four enablers underpinning engagement, according to UK movement Engage for Success²⁶. What it describes as “employee voice” exists when organisations proactively encourage two-way conversation, for organisational improvement, discovery and growth.

For organisations to survive the convergent challenges of the 21st century, leaders must prioritise world-class internal communication at the epicentre of transformation. Those that don’t will simply fail.

We hope this report has successfully consolidated and simplified the central themes of change that are disrupting the work landscape. We haven’t sought to “scare the horses”, or paint a doom-laden picture of a dystopian world we’re all careening towards! Moreover, our aim here is to provide a succinct snapshot of how and why things are changing (in some sectors faster than others), and that it also adequately demonstrates both the opportunity for the internal communication profession, and also the ongoing criticality of the profession itself.



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85%

Employees worldwide who are not engaged or are actively disengaged in their job.

Gallup

As with all things in the 21st century, trends can move at breakneck speed – after all, the future isn’t definitive, it’s constantly evolving. We’ve focused only on the more dominant themes here, so that you can start your own future-proofing efforts within your organisation, if you haven’t already. And as mentioned previously, this is just the start of an exciting journey – we’ll be providing additional tools and practical resources to help internal communication professionals navigate the future world of work as optimally as possible.

Your organisation and, indeed, the UK economy needs you! We wish you the very best of luck with this amazing and challenging endeavour.

4.

FOOTNOTES /
REFERENCES/
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FOOTNOTES/REFERENCES

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