

The changing nature of work

Technologies, new business models, and social changes are reshaping the nature of work. The pandemic has acted as a catalyst to work-related changes. This may lead to fundamental societal changes, affecting leisure time and incomes. This will likely affect when, where, and how people engage in, or with, sport, play, and physical recreation activities.

What we're seeing

Six factors influencing the nature of work

Five factors are changing the nature of work: the economy, the workforce, the workplace, skills and training, and new attitudes about work-life balance. The pandemic has acted as an accelerant to these influences.¹

Economic changes

Many developed economies are shifting further towards service-based work, rather than agricultural and industrial-based ones. This is driven by increasing automation & other digital technologies.²

Workforce changes

In developed countries the workforce is getting older, as well as more diverse (in terms of ethnicity and personal identity). In some sectors there is also an increasing diversity in the types of workers (such as full-time, part-time, freelance, gig, and contingent).³

Manufacturing and some service jobs (like call centres) are moving to countries with lower wages and other costs. But such outsourcing is starting to reverse. Demand for highly skilled staff is growing rapidly, making it harder to attract and retain such employees. There is also a growing divide between low skill low wage jobs, and higher skilled higher wage work.

Workplace and skills changes

More flexible working arrangements are being adopted. Working from home and hybrid working (partly home and partly office-based) arrangements in office jobs were accelerated by the pandemic.⁴ Four day working weeks are also being introduced. These arrangements are largely centred around office work. Many other occupations may not be suited to such flexibility.⁵ Automation is taking over cognitive as well as physical tasks. This is leading to the need for new skills and training in the workplace, with an emphasis on continuous learning.³

New attitudes to work

The pandemic refocused attention on the balance between work and leisure time. There is also an increase in people wanting to work at a place that has similar values and beliefs as themselves. Being valued at work, and having a sense of belonging, may be more appealing than just the salary. At least for some.^{1,4}

Flexible working – fad or the future?

The widespread adoption of more flexible working may not continue. Surveys often show strong support for hybrid working, but these may undervalue the social benefits from shared workplaces. Casual conversations at work can play significant roles in progressing work and generating new ideas. Video meetings & Slack channels don't provide the same benefits as face-to-face interactions. Trust may also decline if co-workers interact with each other less often, and if on-site workers are promoted ahead of those who work away from the office.⁶

Potential implications

Create

- A better balance between work and leisure times
- New opportunities for learning and development

Relate

- Shifts in the nature of social interactions in and outside of work

Consume

- Changes in consumption patterns due to new working arrangements

Degrade

- Opportunities for socio-economic advancement may decline
- Trust may decline in the workplace

Connect

- Potentially more satisfying work if values are shared
- Stronger community connections through more flexible working arrangements

Define

- Redefine what is meaningful and valued human-centred work
- What are appropriate balances between work and the rest of life?

More information (links)

¹ [5 trends driving the post-pandemic workplace](#)

² [At your service?](#)

³ [The changing workforce](#)

⁴ [The new era of hybrid work](#)

⁵ [4 Day Week Global](#)

⁶ [Coronavirus: How the world of work may change forever](#)