



Self Management

Fostering a culture of autonomy, resilience, and connection

Executive Summary

Successful hybrid or remote working will require a self-motivated, empowered, articulate workforce, capable of operating collaboratively and independently. This will involve encouraging and developing a range of skills across every organisation.

The working world may well look very different after the pandemic. The World Economic Forum, in common with other bodies, foresees¹

- More hybrid working and remote collaboration
- Less face-to-face interaction combined with a shift in traditional hierarchies
- Smaller teams collaborating more extensively with one another
- Continued uncertainty and a resulting drain on personal resilience

It's commonly acknowledged that in order to navigate through this difficult environment, we'll need skilled, empathic, flexible leaders². But what's less discussed is the range of skills and attributes their individual team members will have to draw on.

¹ World Economic Forum, 'Resetting the Future of Work Agenda', October 2020
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_NES_Resetting_FOW_Agenda_2020.pdf

² e.g. <https://www2.deloitte.com/nl/nl/pages/human-capital/articles/returning-to-work-in-the-future-of-work.html>

Leaders and managers are under pressure to grow and integrate teams in a very challenging and uncertain environment. They need the support of self-reliant, autonomous team members. And through 2020 and into 2021, we've seen a continued enthusiasm for self-development and learning from people at all levels, keen to drive the culture and values so many of us cherish.³

Working Voices can prepare the hybrid workforce for the challenges ahead, by training them in:

- Resilience, confidence and motivation
- Strong organisational skills coupled with assertiveness and confident decision-making
- Excellent communication skills across a variety of different media (face-to-face and virtual meetings; the spoken and written word)

Outline

Part 1 - What will the new working environment be like?

Part 2 - What will the new working environment demand of the workforce?

Part 3 - Where Working Voices fits in

What Will The New Working Environment Be Like?

Current research envisages a future of work post-COVID in a transformed environment, with more remote and hybrid working, more collaboration across different departments and geographic areas, flatter corporate hierarchies and continued unpredictability⁴.

While some business leaders are keen to accelerate the return to the workplace⁵, surveys suggest that a proportion of their workforce may prefer to work from home⁶. Clearly how much face-to-face or remote working is involved will depend largely on what individual companies and departments actually do; but most authorities anticipate some form of hybrid working.

What kind of work will be done at the office? Deloitte sees the future in a 'phy-gital' workplace – a dynamic mixture of remote, digital working, combined with face-to-face physical meetings to facilitate collaboration⁷. The WEF foresees that 'offices may not be an essential component for all employees' and that they 'can be remodelled to encourage creative and activity-based working'. So, there's a suggestion that the office – if we still need it – should be reconfigured as a setting for meetings and other

³ https://www.glassdoor.com/Award/Best-Places-to-Work-LST_KQ0,19.htm

⁴ WEF, op. cit.

⁵ e.g. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-18/staley-expects-barclays-staff-to-return-to-office-this-year>

⁶ McKinsey, 'Reimagining the office and work life after COVID-19' <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-covid-19>

⁷ Deloitte, From survive to thrive: the future of work in a post-pandemic world <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/HumanCapital/gx-the-future-of-work-post-covid-19-poc.pdf>

collaboration; and that companies will be able to free up this space by reducing desk space and allowing more people to work remotely.

The WEF sees the work-from-home trend increasing post-pandemic, with the pivot to remote working allowing organisations to recruit from diverse global locations. Coupled with this, they envisage 'a shift from the traditional matrix structure to one that is nimbler by bringing together employees from different functions with varying skillsets and experience', and that this may create 'a more fluid environment with less structure and stability in [employees'] roles'⁸. Deloitte suggests that organisations should 'create a network of teams, remove silos, flatten the organisation, simplify collaboration and decision-making processes to allow for agile responses to external and internal forces'⁹.

And there's general agreement that all this will be achieved in the context of continuing change and uncertainty. Roles will continue to disappear as technology advances; companies will have to make difficult decisions as financial and market circumstances compel them to shift their priorities and potentially downsize further.

Drawing these conclusions together, we can see that work in the 2020s may feature

- An agile workforce operating in an environment with less structure and stability
- A flatter hierarchy, with more connections and collaboration across all areas of the organisation
- Some return to office work blended with hybrid or remote working, with team members in different geographic locations
- Continued disruption as economic aftershocks are felt and new patterns of work emerge

What Will The New Working Environment Demand Of The Workforce?

There's general agreement on the role of a more 'human-centric' leadership culture¹⁰, with empathic organisations taking proper responsibility for the wellbeing of their employees. The managers we've worked with over the past year have been acutely mindful of their responsibilities towards their people, and have worked hard to support them.

But leaders can't do everything on their own; and it could be argued that we risk manager burnout by putting so much stress on the role of leadership in the recovery. The general workforce has a critical role to play too. Many of the skills required for the future will have been drawn on during the COVID pandemic by the existing workforce, and will need consolidating. These skills will also need to be imparted to those joining the workforce from 2021 onwards, and actively cultivated.

Remote or hybrid working requires a different degree of **independence and autonomy** from office-based work. If team leaders are no longer on hand for a quick, informal check-in on the project in progress, and the only alternative seems to be a scheduled meeting, then the their team members need to be able to

⁸ WEF, op. cit.

⁹ Deloitte, op. cit.

¹⁰ WEF, op. cit.

make autonomous, **confident decisions**, and be able to **talk or write** about them – and potentially defend them **assertively** – afterwards.

McKinsey, for instance, anticipate more ‘asynchronous brainstorming’ (i.e. independent work carried out by team members at different times and in discrete remote locations) and suggest that this be followed by ‘multi-hour...debate and refinement on an open videoconference’¹¹.

Research indicates that there are benefits to a more hands-off approach that encourages autonomy¹², but it will require a greater degree of **time management, motivation and focus** from individual employees, coupled with **flexibility** (as they adapt to different modes of working, possibly with very little notice).

Working **relationships** remain critical to both workplace efficiency and employee **wellbeing**. Many of our clients have mourned the lack of spontaneity in remote interactions, and Atlassian’s research stresses the potential knock-on effects on effective collaboration and workplace creativity¹³. Hybrid and remote workers will need to adopt a more **intentional and inclusive** approach: more specific, planned focus on **effective communication** with colleagues (management and peers) from diverse locations, using a **variety of different media**.

Wellbeing has rightfully come to the fore while colleagues have been working remotely. As Autonomy puts it, ‘working from anywhere also means working anytime’¹⁴. While organisations should take heart from McKinsey’s research indicating that 41% of Americans felt that they were working more efficiently from home¹⁵, they should also be mindful of the WEF’s figures suggesting that 48% of UK workers reported ‘long and irregular hours’ during lockdown, and 60% ‘said they were showing increased symptoms of fatigue’¹⁶. Coupled with the increased isolation and financial insecurity many workers have experienced in 2020 – 2021, this represents a massive drain on the emotional, physical and mental resources of the average employee. Remote/hybrid workers will need to be more **resilient**; more **assertive** when saying ‘no’ to incoming tasks to avoid overload; better able to draw on their sources of intrinsic **motivation** when faced with setbacks; more strategic in their development of crucial workplace **relationships** as a source of support.

¹¹ McKinsey, op. cit.

¹² <https://phys.org/news/2018-06-employees-self-driven.html>

¹³ Atlassian, Reworking Work: Understanding the rise of work anywhere

https://3klhk1ibq34qk6sp3bhtox1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/executive-summary_reworking-work_atlassian-and-paper-giant.pdf

¹⁴ Autonomy, The New Normal: a blueprint for remote working, October 2020

https://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020_OCT26_RWB.pdf

¹⁵ McKinsey, op. cit.

¹⁶ WEF, op. cit.

Where Working Voices Fits In

We see the needs and priorities of the new hybrid workforce as built on three pillars, based on autonomy, wellbeing and the individual's ability to communicate with clients and colleagues:

- **Purpose and Autonomy**, with people
 - motivated and connected to a sense of purpose;
 - able to manage their priorities, energy and time effectively;
 - able to assert themselves and express their opinions;
 - able to make confident decisions backed up by a consistent, robust thinking process
 - able to collaborate and be part of a team in the hybrid working environment
- **Wellbeing**, with people
 - Conscious of their own responsibility towards self-care and the strategies that will enable them to stay resilient;
 - Able to balance work and home life and avoid burnout;
 - Capable of building and sustaining positive relationships across the organisation
- **Communication**, with people
 - Aware of how to have a positive impact in meetings and convey their brand with confidence
 - Knowing how to structure and present their ideas effectively
 - Capable of writing concisely, engagingly and persuasively.

Our self-management courses fall under three main headings:

- **Purpose and autonomy:** Maintaining Motivation, Boosting Productivity, Making Confident Decisions, Speaking up and being heard
- **Wellness and Resilience:** Thriving Through Change, Hybrid Work Life Balance, Sustaining Relationships Virtually
- **Communication Skills:** Presenting with Impact, Being your best self, Persuasive Business Writing

All the courses are highly interactive, based on real-world examples, and are filled with exercises and techniques for attendees to take away and practice. The syllabus can be delivered to current members of staff and adapted to the needs of new joiners.