

Breaking Stigma to Build Trust in Remote Working Teams

by
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Abstract

This paper explores the current state, biases, and culture surrounding the experience of remote workers now and in the future; it provides insights into how organizations can successfully support leaders and employees within these complex team structures. It also attempts to address the wicked problem facing leaders and employees of large organizations as they work to build the infrastructure to support the growing needs of the blended (remote and colocated worker) workforce: How might we break the stigma of the remote worker and build trust between leaders and remote teams? Several solutions are proposed for consideration, prototyping and development, as well as additional areas of opportunity for further research.

Keywords

Collaboration, future of work, leadership, organizational design, psychological safety, remote work, telecommuting, trust

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OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we stand and create.

Dedication

To every 40-something, working mother who decides that it's time to pursue a Masters degree.
We're proud to say that it can be done.



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Robyn Rucchin King and Ainsley Spry collaborated equally to all elements of this research paper.

Chapter 1: The Future of Work(ers)

Introduction

Two powerful forces disrupting the future of work are automation and talent. It is estimated that by 2022, on average, 58% task hours could be performed by humans and 42% by machines (World Economic Forum, 2018). Roles for machines and human talent will need to be redesigned and rebalanced for organizations to strive and remain competitive. In addition to the reassessment of roles, “augmentation of automation challenges, current talent structures, and practices by pushing them to become more flexible” (Yuen, 2018). The future of work and the work ecosystem (see diagram 1) has been rapidly evolving over the decades and continues to shift to where freelancers, contractors, and gig workers are increasingly tasked with jobs. At one time, the ideal employment scenario was dominated by the coveted full-time position with company benefits, but now there are a variety of ideals that are flexible and embrace scenarios that go even beyond full-time employment, contractors and freelancers. For the first time ever, there are five generations in the workplace who are leveraging multiple technologies (Salzman, 2017) and come with different needs for employment and ideas of organizational culture. As automation through technology provides the opportunity for people to decide how, when, and where to work, gig and crowd workers are on the rise, and remote workers, as part of geographically wide-spread teams, are commonplace.

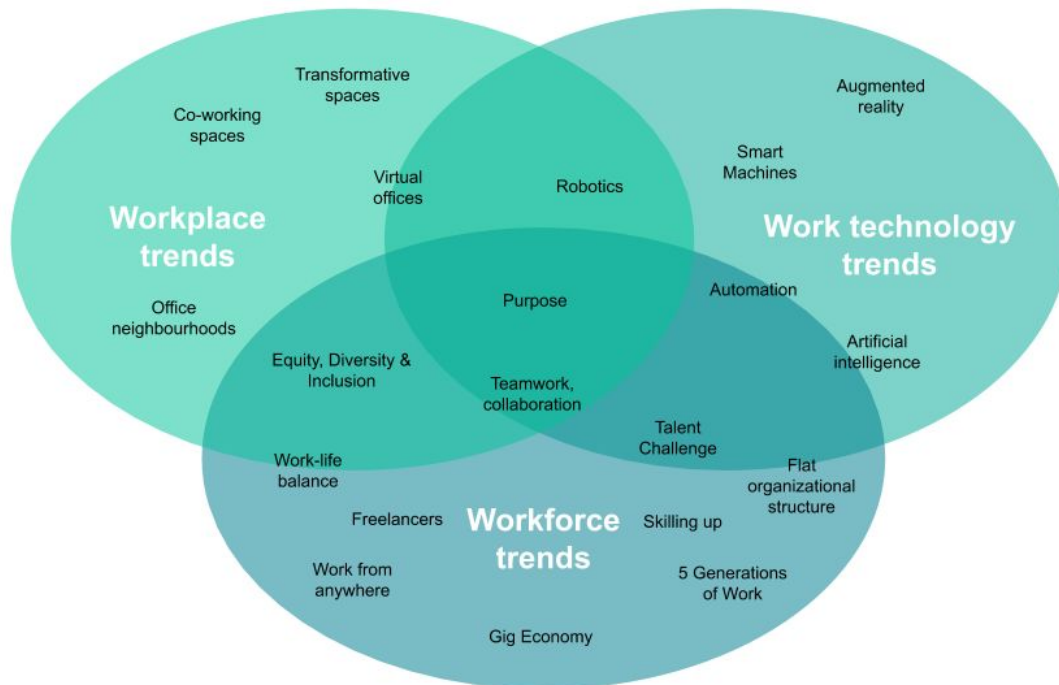


Diagram 1: The Future of Work: Workplace, Workforce, Work Technology

This author derived diagram outlines three trend categories comprising the future of work; workplace (physical space), workforce (people and talent) and work technology (tools and production).

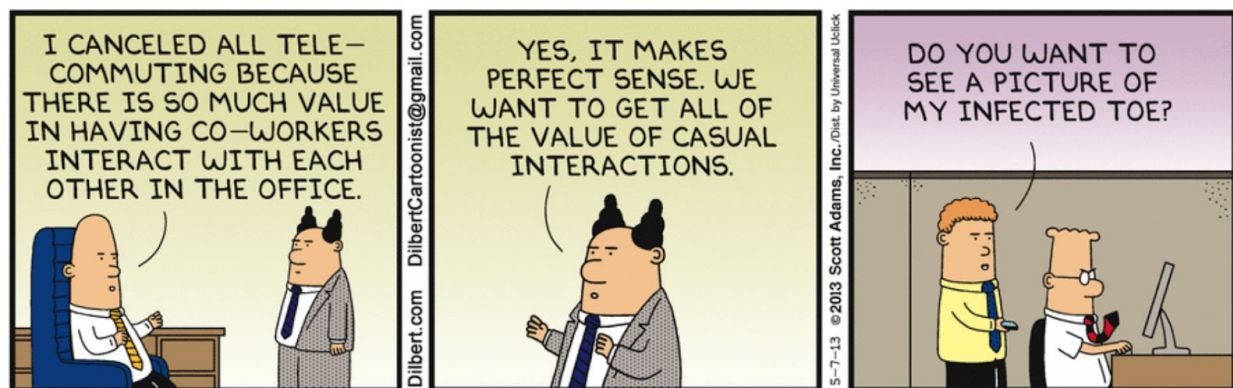
Defining Remote Workers

Remote workers are employees who have permanent work status within a company but do not spend every day working in the head office location. They could work from home or other spaces, such as coworking or satellite offices, and are connected to the head office and colleagues through technology. Nearly half (47%) of Canadian employees work from outside one of their employer's main offices for half a week or more, according to research by Regus Canada (Benefits Canada, 2017). Remote work opportunities provide advantages to individuals (through increased autonomy and flexibility), to organizations (through increased human resource capacity, and savings in office expenses) and to society (a reduction in environmental damage caused by commuting, provides accessibility to special-needs populations, and also results in infrastructure and energy savings) (Harpaz, 2002).

Although reducing overhead costs, increasing productivity, and improving employee morale are results of remote working (Greenbaum, 2019), there is a stigma attached and strong resistance to it. In 2017, Nicholas Bloom, Professor of Economics at Stanford University, presented “Go Ahead, Tell Your Boss You Are Working From Home” at TedXStanford. Bloom says, “no one should be afraid to tell their boss they are working at home” and focuses his talk on the “undeservedly bad reputation” of remote work where he references numerous examples in popular culture – pop songs, transit advertisements, and Internet word searches – where remote workers are depicted as taking advantage of not being in the office by doing things other than work (Bloom, 2017). Scott Adam, a popular American cartoonist, first published *Dilbert* in 1989 and has made a long and successful career based on his comic strip showcasing satirical office humour and narratives about remote working.

Research also shows that there is a solid belief that the best work gets done when facilitated by “relationships and understandings that only happen when people are together physically” (Connelly, 2019). There is no doubt that face-to-face interactions have benefits that will always challenge the notion that online interactions are just as meaningful. The authors of this paper do not deny the benefits of in-person, face-to-face communication. Eye contact and being able to read others’ reactions are two strong arguments for working in the same physical space (Jarrett, 2017). Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT) Human Dynamics Laboratory conducted a study on the most effective means of communication and determined that the most valuable form of communication is still face-to-face (Pentland, 2015). The next most valuable is by phone or videoconference; however, less effective as more people participate in the call or conference. The least valuable forms of communication are email and texting (Pentland, 2015). The mind is a prediction machine and pattern recognizer that hates an open-loop or unresolved pattern. On the web, this trigger is often exploited through headlines and clickbait that beg for closure like: “What happened next will blow your mind.” People are compelled to click on the link to resolve the uncertainty. Similarly, not getting a response to an email can cause significant if unintended

psychological unrest. But in an email-default communication environment, the non-response has become the norm for messages that appear to lack urgency (Van Praet, 2014). These concepts are also aligned to UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian's seminal work on communication theory where he assigned 55% of their weight to the speaker's body language and another 38% to the tone and music of their voice (Van Praet, 2014). A theory that leaders of organizations have subscribed to this notion that face-to-face interactions are critical to the success of teams, projects, and organizational design. In the current landscape of the office environment and the future of work, this face-to-face interaction will not always be possible or plausible.



Dilbert, by Scott Adams, May 2013

Beyond the theories and comfort with face-to-face interactions, professionals with remote working options available to them are also cursed with a flexibility stigma that derives from a “work devotion schema” (Blair-Loy, 2003), that reflects deep cultural assumptions that work demands and deserves undivided and intensive allegiance” (Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). This mindset, however, is counter-intuitive to the trends leading the future of work, where technology, data, and augmentation are challenging the ways in which organizations function and businesses build talent structure. These trends are signals indicating that business leaders need to be accepting and proactive of

new and innovative ways of placing human talent, no matter where they work from, at the centre of their business strategy.

The Purpose

This paper will focus on the current and future state of remote workers and how thought leadership, organizational behaviour, and business design can better foster the requirement to effectively develop and lead remote workers and virtual teams to navigate the disruption to the individual and the workplace caused by these collaborations. As well as individual behaviours, this paper will also explore both leadership-level and remote workers' relationships with technology, and will look to learn from other types of remote collaborations (collaboration meaning the action of two or more individuals working together to produce or create something) that thrive and embrace virtuality, such as online social communities.

The Goal

The goal of this research is to better understand the remote employee experience and determine how organizations can successfully support leaders and employees within these complex team structures in the near future, and be better prepared for years to come. This research will lead to ways to develop and maintain healthy work habits for the remote worker that will not only support an organization's success but also their own work-life balance. It will also explore what is lost when work team collaboration moves from physical to virtual, and the supplement that is required. Our primary research question is:

How might we improve the remote worker experience and encourage leaders to foster virtual teams who are better connected through trust?

Chapter 2: Methodology

The Process

This research project is part of the Strategic Foresight and Innovation graduate program, where designing is conducted from a human perspective. The researchers, therefore, used the design thinking framework (see diagram 2) along with a variety of tools throughout each stage of the process. This project focused on the first three phases of the design thinking methodology: Empathize, Define, and Ideate. The other phases of the methodology – Prototype and Test – will be conducted in future stages of this research.

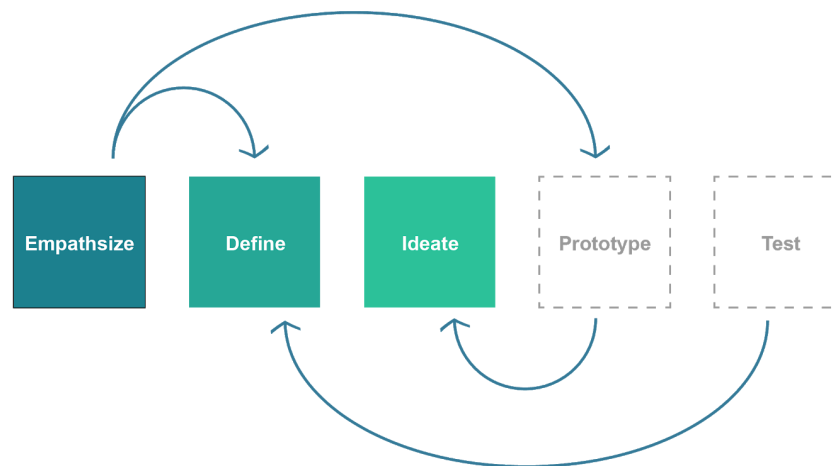


Diagram 2: Design Thinking Process (as referenced and used by the authors)

Stage 1: Empathize

This initial stage of the project was used to problem find. Priorities were clarified and critical issues were focused on by formulating questions with regards to the targeted user group and the cultural factors surrounding remote work (Nesta, 2016). Problem finding took place through literature review and ethnographic research.

Literature Review

The literature review for this research includes Statistics Canada documents about people working remotely, mental health care, family demographics, and workplace trends in Canada. Academic papers, journals, and books that cover topics such as organizational design, psychological safety, leadership, learning and motivation were also reviewed. To assist with identifying trends, reports from various consulting firms and pop-culture resources were also referenced. Throughout the literature review, comparisons with worksystems in other countries, such as Europe, Asia, and throughout North America, also provided insights into trend analysis.

Ethnographic research

Ethnographic research was required for this paper to not only gain a deeper understanding of the organizations and people that are involved in remote working, but also collect a first-hand account of their actual experiences. It was critical to hear from organizational leaders and employees who are working remotely and who support teams with remote workers to understand the challenges, opportunities, and successes to accomplish the goals of the primary research including semi-structured interviews with organizational leaders and employees and diary study with remote workers. All research participants agreed to partake anonymously and are referred to in this report as an ‘interview participant’ or a ‘diary

participant'. The data synthesized fell into the categories of the future of work, remote workers, virtual communities, leadership, and trust.

Stage 2: Defining

In this problem framing phase of the project, the observations from the ethnographic research were analyzed and synthesized to further define the core problems that were identified in stage 1. To determine key insights and future considerations for the remote worker experience, various psychological and organizational behaviour theories were referenced to help determine key considerations and to understand the history and current state. This was done through:

- **Root cause analysis** to determine possible causes for the stigma felt by remote workers.
- **System mapping** to analyse workplace, workforce and work technology trends to pinpoint the scope of this research project.
- **Empathy and scenario development** based on composites of the interviewees and diary studies.
- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** to uncover the multi-level needs of the remote worker.
- **Schein's Model of Organizational Culture** to understand the underlying biases and dysfunctions within an organization that can lead to a lack of trust among workers and within organizations with remote workers.

Stage 3: Ideate

The ideation phase, also referred to as problem solving, provides an opportunity to consider alternative ways to view the problem and identify innovative opportunities for possible prototypes or further investigation (Interaction Design Foundation, 2009). The following tools were leveraged during the ideation phase of this project:

- **Trend analysis** to look at how current trends could impact the future of work and the remote work experience, with an analysis focused on the different external factors (Social,

Technological, Economical, Environmental, Political and Values (STEEP+V) that can influence and identify drivers (PESTLE analysis, 2015).

- **Dator's Four Futures** to build possible future experiences of the remote worker based on the trend analysis.

To begin this research and to gain understanding about the current state of remote working, the history of work was explored. The first stage of the design thinking process allowed for facts to be discovered, interpreted and understood through an empathetic lens.

Chapter 3: The Evolution of Work

Remote working experiences have become a 21st-century necessity developed out of the needs of modern life. Historically, hunter and gatherer communities were made by combining work and living spaces as a common way for families and the broader communities to pool people, time, and physical resources to work together for the good of the community (Reynolds, 2017). In medieval times, the working classes made up of weavers, butchers, dressmakers, and the like, set up shops in their homes to offer goods and services to the community as a way to support their families. The architecture of the time reflected the need for an at-home workspace and was designed to live and work from the same location. This continued into the industrial revolution, but as time wore on there was a need to house the administrative side of the business and the desire to create a more centralized location of business administration (Reynolds, 2017).

The industrial revolution brought the need for factories and both men and women were required to leave their homes to work and generate income for their families (Hammond, 1930). By the 20th century, inventions, such as the telephone and the typewriter, transformed the way people worked and modern-day offices became the norm. Public transportation provided an opportunity for access to jobs further away from the home and the nine-to-five schedule was born (Reynolds, 2017).

Current Landscape of Work

Businesses and governments alike are seeing the benefits of leveraging the skills of remote workers. The governor of the state of Vermont in the United States made headlines when he signed a bill funding a state offering of \$10,000 to people willing to move to Vermont and work remotely for an out of state employer (Hess, 2019). The governor's reasoning for this was that Vermont was looking to increase

its population and its tax base. Government officials recognized that a growing number of Americans work remotely (nearly two-thirds of companies in the United States have remote workers (Peters, 2018) while, at the same time, the cost of living in larger communities and city centres is on the rise. Providing incentives to help populate the state of Vermont, bring in new skills and knowledge, and provide workers with a more affordable cost of living seemed like a win-win opportunity (Peters, 2018). The state is currently taking applications for 2020 via the web site thinkvermont.com. Large scale strategies like this indicate that leaders are realizing the appeal and popularity of remote working and the broader social opportunities that can be generated by supporting effective remote work policies.

Organizations in Canada are providing opportunities for Canadians to work remotely as well. Sixty-two percent of Canadian employers offer their employees the option to work remotely (Indeed, 2018). In some cases, employees are forced to find alternative locations to work as a result of office hoteling, “also known as hot desking, is the method of reserving office space and resources in an office instead of assigning employees a regular workspace or office” (Jibestream, 2018). Hoteling offices are becoming more common and are set up with the assumption that employees will work from home time-to-time throughout the week. On days with events like mandatory meetings and more employees decide to come into the office, a shortage of space can occur forcing employees to find alternative workspaces. This can reduce engagement and productivity (Monster.ca, 2019).

Throughout North America, the new flexibility of workers is changing the dynamic of work pressure and middle managers are needing to be as efficient and effective as possible to manage remote and colocated staff. Forty-three percent of U.S. employees work remotely at least some of the time (Hickman, et al., 2019). Managers need to focus on what their off-site workers need to highlight their performance potential every day (Hickman, et al., 2019). Being given the flexibility to work remotely is becoming the expectation of millennials and not the exception. “Millennials seek work opportunities with flexibility, which is often viewed as a perk. The future of work is shifting towards alternative schedules

that allow employees to focus on their priorities, which in this case is a healthy lifestyle and more time for family and friends” (Taylor, 2018).

As well as remote working options, employees want more autonomy over when and where they work. More than half of employees (53%) say that it is “very important” for them to have a role that allows them to have greater work-life balance and 51% of employees say they would change jobs to have one that offered them flextime (Hickman, Adam, and Tonya Fredstrom, 2019). In the current work landscape, expectations are shifting and competition for top talent is changing, too.

Chapter 4: Research and Analysis

Beyond the initial literature review and research into the current landscape of the remote work experience, ethnographic research was conducted to gain a better understanding of the root of the issues concerning remote work from the perspective of organizational leaders and employees. The following chapter provides an overview of the research methods and findings for this project.

The Research Participants

The researchers interacted with 14 anonymous participants (11 interviewees and 3 diarists). They consist of men and women, ranging from their late 20s to mid-50s, who worked remotely at least two days a week. At the time of the research, the participants were all full-time employees of large organizations (over 100 employees) from various business sectors including finance, the Canadian government, technology, communications, and health care; Six of the participants were senior-level leaders (director and higher ranking) within their organizations, and the remaining eight were all individual contributors.

Method 1: Semi-structured Interviews

The Process

As part of the primary research for this paper, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with human resources (HR) and operational leaders in organizations with no fewer than 100 employees where some staff work remotely on a consistent basis for at least two days per week. The researchers interviewed met with individual contributors without direct reports within HR departments

who have the flexibility to work remotely. The 11 anonymous interviewees represented various business sectors including finance, communications, provincial and federal government, and health care. The research study was designed to examine the ways in which remote workers are supported in organizations whose teams consist of colocated employees. Participation in the study involved one-on-one interviews, each lasting for approximately 20-30 minutes.

Questions were asked in relation to the number of employees who work remotely, the frequency, and the size of the teams. Questions were asked about the qualitative experience of the workers in these organizations, such as:

- Why does your organization have virtual workers?
- Does your organization have a remote work policy? And if so, what is it?
- How does your organization support remote workers?
- What are the biggest challenges for remote workers in your organization?
- How is your organization designing its structure to ensure an engaging experience for remote workers that enhances diversity of thought, collaboration, and inclusion?

The Findings

Policies and Guidelines

None of those interviewed had a formal remote work policy. Decisions about working remotely were left to the managers or directors. Reasons given for not having a formal policy are taxation, liability, and the thought that remote working is a privilege, not a right. None of the anonymous interviewees have resources in place to guide leaders on how to support remote workers or how to properly onboard and support their remote work teams. There are no standards or guidelines to promote best practices to follow with remote workers, engagement information about remote workers, or the importance of building a community with the remote workers.



Dilbert, by Scott Adams, May 2013

Remote Work as a Perk

With no formal policy in place for any of the participants of the study, participants also raised their concerns over the risk of having their remote working option taken away at any time, especially at times when leadership changes. Three of the anonymous interviewees stated that should the remote working option end, they would look for other jobs. They felt there are lots of opportunities for contracts that could offer the work-life balance they expect and need.

Three of the leaders interviewed also indicated that the ability to work remotely is seen as a reward for those employees who proved they were trustworthy. Their own leaders (senior vice president level and above) are not as supportive of remote work, nor do they themselves work remotely. Not having senior leadership's understanding and empathy adds pressure to those leaders to work from the office even though they support working remotely for their own team members, thereby, avoiding any modeling ideal behaviours to their own remote workers. For two other leaders, their teams were required to work remotely (nine out of every 10 business days and the other due to reduced office space requiring employees to book time in the office).

Communication and Collaboration Tools

All anonymous interviewees use communication and collaboration tools made for business, such as Skype or Microsoft Teams, to conduct meetings and interact with remote workers. They also all identified technical issues with these tools and how it is one of the main sources of frustration when working remotely. Problems include slow connections, sound issues, and video buffering.

The anonymous interviewees all mentioned how video conferencing is suggested as a best practice, but no guidelines or mandatory considerations are provided on how to connect and interact with, and as well as include, remote workers into meeting discussions. With the exception of one anonymous interviewee, best practices are left up to the discretion of the leader of the department, but when ideas from the leaders are presented, they are not enforced.

Participants noted that it is a challenge to effectively hold meetings with people on the phone because colocated colleagues tend to forget that the remote workers can not see the hard copies, sticky notes, and other visual aids that are not shared electronically. In meetings, remote workers are “out of sight and out of mind” and sometimes ignored altogether; colocated colleagues often absentmindedly forget to engage and encourage remote worker colleagues so much so that sometimes they do not even receive a greeting.

Accountabilities for Leaders

All anonymous leader interviewees felt it was part of their accountabilities to engage the remote members on their teams, but they struggle without specific guidelines, coaching, or guidance provided by their organizations to ensure a consistent virtual team experience. One of the 14 participants was told that it was up to HR to ensure the onboarding and engagement of remote employees. As well, all anonymous leader interviewees were concerned about the engagement of their remote employees, but none of the leaders receive any engagement tactic metrics that specifically measured the engagement of their

employees. This same group indicated that cost savings was the main reason for the shift to a remote and colocated team approach. These cost savings were achieved through reduced physical footprint, reduced real estate costs, and densification.

Top Challenges Faced by Interviewees

Aside from technological issues already stated, as well as general problems with internet access, software bugs, and the lack of proper hardware that were mentioned by all of the participants in this study, there are additional challenges that face both leaders and employees.

Socialization

Fifty percent of the leaders interviewed for this research indicated that missing out on ‘hallway conversations’ and ‘water cooler chats’ (unplanned, in-person conversations) is one of the biggest challenges; the other half of participants; however, felt that working remotely allowed them to get away from the “noise” and “office gossip” that could keep the employees from maintaining their focus on the work at hand. Tied to this observation was the common perception by remote workers and leaders that multitasking is more of an issue than it is as no one can see what people are working on when they are not in the same room. People take the time while on meetings to email, message, and get work done when they are supposed to be actively listening or participating in the meeting.

Method 2: Diary Study

A diary study was conducted to learn first hand about the day-to-day experience of remote workers. Participants logged details about their colocated and remote work experiences over ten consecutive days, both in and out of the office. They kept a daily dairy answering the following questions:

1. Please describe your work and collaboration experience today (were you in the office or working remotely?)
2. How many colleagues did you interact with today? Did you connect with senior leadership? Or direct reports? What were the interactions like?
3. Did you have easy access to everything you needed to do your job? (files, people's attention, etc.)
4. What was the best part of your workday? The most challenging?

Participants were also asked to provide images, photos, or screenshots to represent how they were feeling about, their experience, and the challenges or benefits of working remotely compared to colocated. The research team was only able to collect three full data sets using this method. It is important to note that should data be collected via the diary in a future study, the length of time the participants have to provide feedback will be adjusted to make it less onerous on the participants.

Increased Productivity

Participant data shows that productivity increases when working remotely. All participants worked more hours per day, between one and three, when working remotely compared to the days worked colocated. They all experienced a lack of productivity when colocated because of in-person distractions, such as planned and unplanned meetings. As well, all participants used their remote working days

specifically to catch up on projects and fully complete work tasks. They each claimed to feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of their remote working days.



Dilbert, by Scott Adams, May 1999

Autonomy and Socialization

Participants enjoy the autonomy of not being in the office. One participant worked outside on his back patio, another had a midday coffee with his wife who was also working from home the same day, and another used the free gym in her apartment building over the lunch hour. But, not being in the office has its disadvantages. From a team and rapport-building aspect, the participants noted missing out on bonding and socialization work activities with colleagues. One anonymous diarist reported missing a staff pizza party and another an offsite event because they chose to work remotely.

Communication and Collaboration Tools

The anonymous diarists provided the same information as the interviewees. They rely heavily on business technology and telecommunications software, such as Telepresence, Skype for Business, and Mural to collaborate and complete their day-to-day tasks and suffer the same technical frustrations when it comes to slow connections, sound issues, and video buffering.

Insights and Key Findings

The following section provides an overview of the key insights and findings from the feedback from the interviews and diary study.

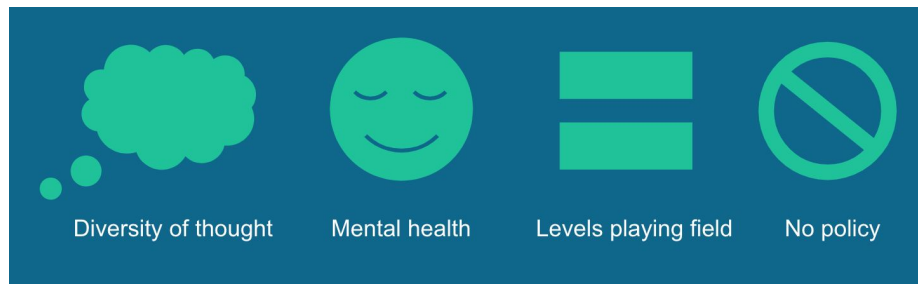


Diagram 3: The Top Four Factors (that research participants expressed about remote work)

Insight 1: Remote work opens opportunities to inclusivity and diversity of thought through expanding opportunities regardless of geography or mobility.

Both leader and worker research participants acknowledged that remote working options provide increased opportunities to work with a diverse and inclusive workforce. Remote working allows for global teams where multiculturalism, languages, and diversity of thought are encouraged to help build better products and services. By incorporating remote workers into their teams, leaders are able to look for talent beyond the city limits in which their organization is located. Currently in Canada, it is a competitive market for top talent. Canada's unemployment rate fell to the lowest rate in over 40 years in May 2019; the country added 27,700 net new jobs that month, sending the unemployment rate down to 5.4% from 5.7% (Labour Force Survey, Statistics Canada, 2019). Remote working options provide

organizations the advantage of attracting the best people with the right skills, attitude, and fit. In addition to attracting talent, one anonymous interviewee noted, remote work provided the opportunity to hire more people with physical challenges. Having the option to work remotely allows people with mobility issues to work in environments that are safe and comfortable, and that have access to the equipment they need.

Inclusivity and diversity of thought are also a current trend in the workplace as well. Workplaces are implementing diversity and inclusion practices to help remove barriers that some people face and, in turn, strive for a culture of respect, fairness, and acceptance. For remote workers this means providing improved access to information, people and resources; Being able to achieve a work environment in which “all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, can contribute fully to the organization's success” (Forbes, 2011). Above all though, employment equity, including providing remote work options to those who need it, is a matter of dignity. Inclusion practices ensure equal employment opportunities to women, Indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities, and offers everyone an opportunity to work and contribute to society (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). It is important to note that younger generations are leading by example and place their values at the forefront of their career decisions. Considering that “nearly two-thirds of millennials take interest in an organization's corporate social responsibility, organizations are, in turn, looking to the future workforce to direct the way forward (Parikah, 2018). Being socially responsible, including being diverse and inclusive, is the heart of the future of work.

Diversity of thought and inclusion also have a great impact on collaboration. As businesses are drawn into the global market, connectivity between teams is increasing and collaborative teamwork has been identified as a marker for organizational success (Grant, Cross, & Grant, 2016). Collaboration allows for internal departmental silos to break down, employee connectivity to increase, and teamwork to act as the key to organizational success.

Insight 2: Remote work levels the playing field for employees to enhance psychological safety from an economic and social perspective.

Three of the five individual contributors who participated in the interviews indicated that from a psychological safety perspective, working remotely leveled the playing field and allowed people to “feel more comfortable” when collaborating with each other as they were focusing on the skills each person brings to the table. Team psychological safety is a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (see diagram 3). This tends to be a tacit belief, which is taken for granted. Although tacit beliefs about interpersonal relationships are sometimes discussed among teams, their being made explicit does not alter the feeling of whether or not the team feels psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). “Individuals' tacit beliefs about interpersonal interaction inhibit learning behaviour and give rise to ineffectiveness in organizations” (Edmondson, 1999).

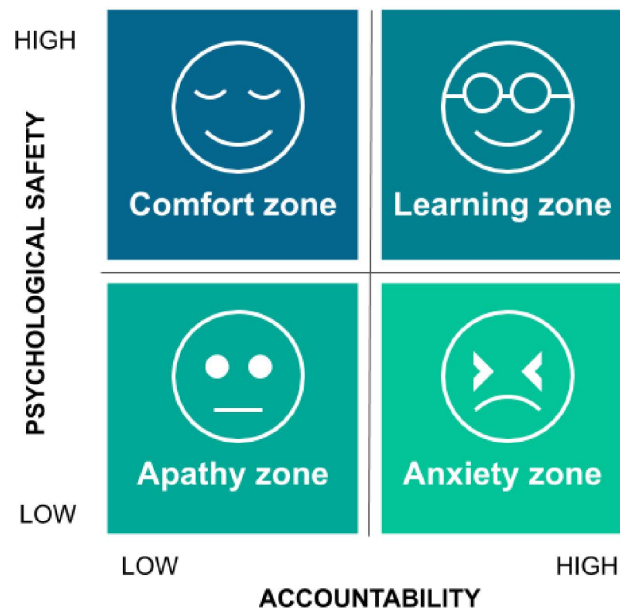


Diagram 4: Building Psychological Safety (Amy Edmondson)

The anonymous interviewees shared a variety of insights that are drivers of psychological safety. These factors include economics, family dynamics, and social insecurities.

Impact of Economics on Psychological Safety

From an economic standpoint, employees can feel psychologically unsafe or insecure when managing feelings of insecurity with a perceived social and economic ranking of leadership. Most organizations are hierarchical, but in some more than others employees are acutely aware of status differences. In those organizations, people are overly careful and cautious around those higher up in the hierarchy (Legace, 2018). Three anonymous interviewees mentioned that by working remotely they felt that the playing field was leveled. There was more focus on the skills and knowledge of the participants on the conference call than possible stress caused by the intimidation factor of the organizational hierarchy when they were in the room.

Challenges to the Benefits of Working Remotely

On the flip side of the benefits of increased psychological safety by leveling the hierarchical playing field through conference calls instead of in-person meetings, two anonymous interviewees commented on the cost of maintaining the privilege of working remotely can be costly with the expectation of high-speed internet, cell phones, and technology. Paying for high-speed internet is cost-prohibitive for some, especially the economically disadvantaged. For example single-parent employees. Lone mothers accounted for 81% of lone-parent families in 2014, 69% of lone mothers and 82% of lone fathers were working (Statistics Canada, 2015). While there are many other benefits to families who have the ability to work remotely, there are significant economic barriers that companies should consider when they encourage employees to work remotely.

Psychological Safety from a Social Perspective

From a social perspective, working remotely allows parents to contribute to their family lives and their children without the fear of being judged, including being available to participate in events at their child's school and attend their child's medical appointments. They are provided the freedom to complete simple day-to-day tasks while multitasking with work responsibilities, such as putting on a load of laundry between meetings, preparing dinner at a time that would normally be spent commuting, and being able to be present for sick children, and elderly parents.

Insight 3: Mental, Emotional and Physical Wellness

In recent years, the issue of loneliness has become a top of mind for leaders as organizations and governments take a closer look at how loneliness impacts the health of citizens around the world. Important research was conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, in partnership with *The Economist*, to survey adults in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan to uncover the source of loneliness and the impact it was having on modern-day society. The results from the survey indicated that 22% of adults in the United States, 23% in the UK, and nine percent in Japan feel often or always feel lonely. It was also determined that people experiencing loneliness come from disproportionately lower incomes and often have a debilitating health condition or mental health conditions. As well, those people reporting loneliness indicated that they have fewer confidants, relatives or friends living nearby who they can rely on for support (DiJulio, Muñana, Brodie, & Hamel, 2018).

Whereas some research indicates that loneliness is becoming a health concern (Pomeroy, 2019), the data collected for this paper reveals that loneliness and isolation are not major concerns among the remote worker research participants. If anything, having physical space away from a busy office environment and their colleagues help with concentration and productivity. They enjoy having options on

where to work (in their home, outside, or a cafe) and do not need to be around unpleasant office smells and general noise that distracts them from their work. It is important to note that “most Canadians reported workplace stress as a primary source of their mental health issues” (Dasai, 2019).

Remote worker research participants also mentioned other benefits from working alone, such as being removed from politics and gossip, and avoiding unwanted interactions, such as hallway conversations and impromptu meetings. Being physically removed from these situations through remote working allows people with mental health issues the opportunity to work in an environment that is best for their productivity. According to Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), “by the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, one in two have (or have had) a mental illness. The economic burden of mental illness in Canada is estimated at \$51 billion per year. This includes health care costs, lost productivity, and reductions in health-related quality of life,” (CAMH, 2019). Anonymous interviewees for this research also commented on how working remotely helps them or their team members manage anxiety and other disorders that prevent them from comfortably working and thriving in an office environment. Increased work-life harmony (or more commonly referred to as “work-life balance”) was mentioned by all interviewees as a benefit of remote workers. In addition to mental and emotional health, physical health seems to also be positively impacted by remote working. The remote workers, as part of this report’s research study, commented that they feel like they do not get sick as often as the people who consistently work in the office. Even when they are not feeling their best, remote workers do not take the day off (by either using a sick day, vacation day or having the day unpaid) but continue to work their full shift from the comfort of their own home while tending to their illness (Nicholas Bloom, 2017).

Insight 4: Not having an official remote work policy results in misunderstanding, frustration, fear and a lack of trust.

Research shows that 64% of hiring managers feel that their company has the resources and

processes in place to support a remote workforce, yet the majority (57%) lack a remote work policy (Upwork, 2018). Among all 14 research participants for this report, it was reported that none have a formal remote working policy and that the level of expectations around the role is unclear. Because of the lack of clarity, anonymous interviewees note that they are fearful that changes could be made at any time that would change their work-life balance. If a policy were in place for both leaders and employees, there would be a clear understanding of remote working, which could result in better management of the other insights already mentioned above. An active plan, in the form of a policy, to be mindful of improving these conditions inclusivity and diversity of thought, economics and well being. A policy could be seen as the first step to building trust.



Dilbert, by Scott Adams, October 1997

“Trust is essential. When employees do not trust organizational leadership, their chances of being engaged are one in 12. But when that trust is established, the chances of engagement skyrocket to better than one in two” (Hickman & Fredstrom, 2019). Maintaining remote employees' trust ensures that they feel a sense of belonging to the organization and their team; This feeling can be created by addressing basic workplace needs—human needs (Hickman, Fredstrom, 2018).

Scenario Building and Empathy Maps

To analyze the research data from the interviews and diaries, literature reviews, and trend analysis (for more information about trends in the workplace, see [Chapter 7: The Future of the Remote Work Experience](#)), the most cited examples were compiled into four scenarios that capture remote worker profiles. Scenarios were built to illustrate the remote worker experience and to inspire new solutions. The scenario generation also allowed the opportunity to empathy map, which is a way to visualize user attitudes and behaviours resulting in deeper, human-centred understanding (Sanders & Stappers, 2018).

The empathy maps (see Diagrams 5-8) are used to go beyond the users demographics and better understand the environment, behaviours, concerns, and aspirations of remote workers. Empathy mapping contributes to the development of stronger solutions as it provides further guidance for creating a user profile. It is also a key building block in the development of the value proposition for the proposed solutions as part of the next phase of this project (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013).

Together, the user scenarios and empathy maps provide increased awareness of the target research group through noting what they think, feel, do, see and say, while identifying pain points and opportunities.

Scenario 1:

Full-time employees balance work with single parenthood

Among working couples with children aged less than 16, the proportion of dual-earners within a home increased from 36% in 1976 to 69% in 2014. Lone-parent families accounted for 20% of families with children aged less than 16. Lone mothers accounted for 81% of lone-parent families in 2014, 69% of lone mothers and 82% of lone fathers were working (Statistics Canada, 2015). For full-time employees who also balance family life outside of work, remote working is a beneficial option to help provide

work-life harmony. Research participants expressed that remote working provides flexibility for those who parent, and is crucial for single parents. Participants in this scenario stated that they would seek out and choose a job based on its remote working options.

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| WHO are we empathizing with? Lindsay is divorced and has her children 80% of the time and needs to be available for overall daily care, appointments and emergencies. She does not receive financial support and needs to work full-time to supply for her family. | What do they THINK and FEEL? "I work more than 40 hours a week, but proud of the effort I put in" "I am worried leaders will decide against remote working" "I wonder when I'll have to start looking for a new job that supports remote work" | What do they need to DO? "I need to be online more than usual to prove I am working." |
| What do they HEAR? Leadership is skeptical of employees who work remotely. | Lindsay Technical Writer for large tech company | What do they SEE? The she is ignored and forgotten when not in the office. |
| What do they do? She will always keep an eye out for an opportunity that has a remote work policy. She will continue to work longer hours and look for ways to "be more visible" | | |
| PAINS She needs Internet access at home and its costly Senior leadership does not like the idea of remote working Leadership does not look at metrics to judge performance, they look at the faces. | GAINS Saves money because she does not need to commute everyday. Is available for her children and to take them to appointments. Increased production hours and feels like a solid contributor. | What do they SAY? "I just want to feel secure in my role and continue doing good work." |

Diagram 5: Remote Worker Scenario 1 (An outline that explains what the worker thinks, feels, does, sees and says, while identifying pain points and opportunities)

Scenario 2:

Full-time employees who live hours away from the office to save on cost of living

According to Statistics Canada, from 1996 to 2016, there has been an increase in the proportion of commuters who worked 25 km or more from the city centre in seven of the eight Census Metropolitan Areas (Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa–Gatineau, Edmonton, Québec City, and

Winnipeg), thereby increasing commuting time in these cities (Savage, 2019). Sixty-four percent of commuters in Toronto and eighty-one percent of commuters in Vancouver who live and work in the city, spend more than 60 minutes commuting (Statistics Canada 2019).

The cost of living overall is increasing and people are choosing to leave large city centres for smaller towns (Eisen, 2019). For organizations to attract the best talent, remote working policies make it possible to employ people that may otherwise not be considered based on their location. Research participants in this scenario stated that not having to commute hours a day provides them with a more balanced schedule even though they work longer hours on days when they are remote.

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| WHO are we empathizing with? Miguel moved outside of the greater Toronto area to buy a house that provided more value for his money. He plans to retire early, but still needs to work for a few years. He works remotely 2 days a week and then lives in a short term rental the other days when he works in the office. If he commuted it would take over 3 hours each way, per day. | What do they THINK and FEEL? "I get so much more productive work done when working remotely. Being in the office feels like a waste of precious time. There are too many disruptions and way too many meetings." | What do they need to DO? He needs to find a job closer to his home or negotiate better support at work. It is important to note that he did quit his job and is unemployed and looking for work locally. |
| What do they HEAR? He was told his remote work agreement was a trial only and it would be revisited. Since then, the CEO has changed the remote work option and now personally oversees and reviews every request to work from home. | Miguel Project Manager in Healthcare | What do they SEE? He sees a leadership team that prefers face to face meetings and that take a "war room" approach to work. |
| What do they do? He has been paying mortgage plus rent, for Internet when working remote, and pulling long hours to show his commitment to the organization. | | |
| PAINS He feels uneasy knowing his remote working situation isn't permanent. | GAINS He feels good about his productivity and coordinates his task list to the environment he's working in. For example, if he has to concentrate for long hours, he'll do it when working remotely. | What do they SAY? "I wish my talent and contribution was enough to build trust with the CEO." |

Diagram 6: Remote Worker Scenario 2 (An outline that explains what the worker thinks, feels, does, sees and says, while identifying pain points and opportunities)



Dilbert, by Scott Adams, February, 1995

Scenario 3:

Remote workers do not get recognition for the contributions they make to the organization

Evidence from interviews and literature reviews indicate that remote workers feel that they are not compensated or recognized for the contributions they make to their companies. Organizational leaders recognize the importance of building strong relationships with employees, yet they often neglect those who do not work in the main office (O'Leary, 2013). An experiment by scholars at Stanford University indicated that people working full time from home in the U.S. are 13% more efficient at their job, but are promoted less (O'Leary, 2013). This lack of recognition impacts the 31% of Americans (Ferguson, 2018) and 47% of Canadians (Benefits Canada, 2017) who work several days a week and easily feel forgotten (Ferguson, 2018) even when it is estimated that they put in, on average, six to seven hours extra a week of unpaid work (Muhammed, 2019). According to one anonymous interviewee, they felt that senior leadership rewards what they see in person versus the metrics for the work being done. Meanwhile, middle-managers are accountable for making sure their remote employees are seen and heard, even when they are not physically in the office.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| WHO are we empathizing with? Laura is based in Toronto and has a new position managing a team of communications specialists for eastern Canada. They are located across Canada but senior leadership is at the head office in Toronto. Laura's has been encouraged to work remotely a few times a week to reduce congestion in the new "hotelling" office spaces. | What do they THINK and FEEL? "I don't care where my people work so long as they get the job done. They are all adults. They have timelines for their projects. I trust that they'll get the work done." | What do they need to DO? Laura needs to promote the great work the individuals on her team are doing so they can get the recognition they deserve from senior leadership within the bank. |
| What do they HEAR? Laura's team tells her that they feel more isolated now and don't have enough face to face time with senior leadership. They feel that they are missing out on opportunities to get ahead. | Laura Team Manager in Finance HR | What do they SEE? Laura sees that her team is engaged but they feel isolated in the regions and they don't get the same amount of recognition as the people at head office. |
| What do they do? Laura does her best to bring her team to conference calls with her senior leadership and discusses their contributions during her one-on-one meetings. | | |
| PAINS She feels her team will become disengaged with the lack of support and recognition from leadership who does not see them face-to-face on a daily basis. | GAINS She feels great that her people are never off sick, they are always productive, and they have very high engagement scores for now. | What do they SAY? "I would like my team to have the same opportunities as everyone else in the bank." |

Diagram 7: Remote Worker Scenario 3 (An outline that explains what the worker thinks, feels, does, sees and says, while identifying pain points and opportunities)

Scenario 4:

Remote Workers Take Better Care of Their Overall Wellness

Working remotely provides employees with the conditions and environments needed to best manage their mental and physical wellness. In 2018, approximately 5.3 million people living in Canada mentioned they needed some help for their mental health in the previous year (Statistics Canada, 2019). Roughly three million Canadians (11.6%) aged 18 years or older reported that they had a mood and/or anxiety disorder (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2015). Two anonymous interviewees, referencing

their own experiences, claim that working remotely allows people dealing with anxiety disorders to manage their condition, take the breaks they need and get the support necessary.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| WHO are we empathizing with? Sam has struggled with anxiety their whole life. By the end of the week in in the office they are exhausted. Sam was so thankful to find a job where they could work remotely a couple times a week to relieve the pressure from the social anxiety they feel on a daily basis. | What do they THINK and FEEL? "I just need a break from the office." "I need time to go to my appointments without being questioned about where I am going and why." "I need time to think and be creative." | What do they need to DO? Sam is an individual contributor. They do not lead a team but works on a daily basis supporting a cross-functional team as a project manager. It is important that Sam builds strong relationships with this national cross-functional team. |
| What do they HEAR? You need to be face to face to really build strong relationships with leadership and the various members of your team. Body language is critical. You cannot do this from home all the time. | Sam Project Manager at a large tech company | What do they SEE? Sam sees other individual contributors working remotely and has the support from their Manager but no policy in place or official guidelines. |
| What do they do? Sam makes sure to schedule meetings with leadership on the days they are going to be in the office to maximize face to face time. Sam uses their time at home to get work done! | | |
| PAINS Sam works long hours when they work from home. These hours are not accounted for but Sam feels it is worth it to have the flexibility. | GAINS Sam feels supported by their Manager to work from home and attend the appointments they need to manage their anxiety disorder. | What do they SAY? "I feel that my life is much more manageable when I can work from home." |

Diagram 8: Remote Worker Scenario 4 (An outline that explains what the worker thinks, feels, does, sees and says, while identifying pain points and opportunities)

By analyzing the data from both the interviews with leaders and diary studies with remote workers, four shared patterns and themes emerged that go beyond the common concern about issues with technology. These are: Needs, Trust, Psychological Safety, and Emotional Intelligence.

Chapter 5: The Hierarchy of Needs

The implications from the research-led insights and conceptualized scenarios were used to inquire about the drivers of key human behaviours of successful remote workers. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as well as Schein's Model for Organizational Culture were leveraged to take a deeper dive to analyze the patterns that appeared in the research for this study (See [Chapter 6: Leveraging Trust and Psychological Safety to Motivate Remote Workers](#)).

Understanding Motivation through Maslow's Theory

To better understand how to support organizational leaders and teams with both remote and colocated workers, the researchers looked at the foundation of what motivates people and, to do this Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory was used to map the experience of the virtual workforce (McLeod, 2018). Abraham Maslow identified five basic types of needs in his theory, all of which act as drivers of human behaviour. Personal circumstances force individuals to focus on their immediate needs. These needs are the basis of human motivation. What is particularly significant about this theory is the hierarchy ranking; 'basic needs' have to be satisfied before an individual could progress to focusing on the next type of need (Wright, 2009) (see diagram 9).

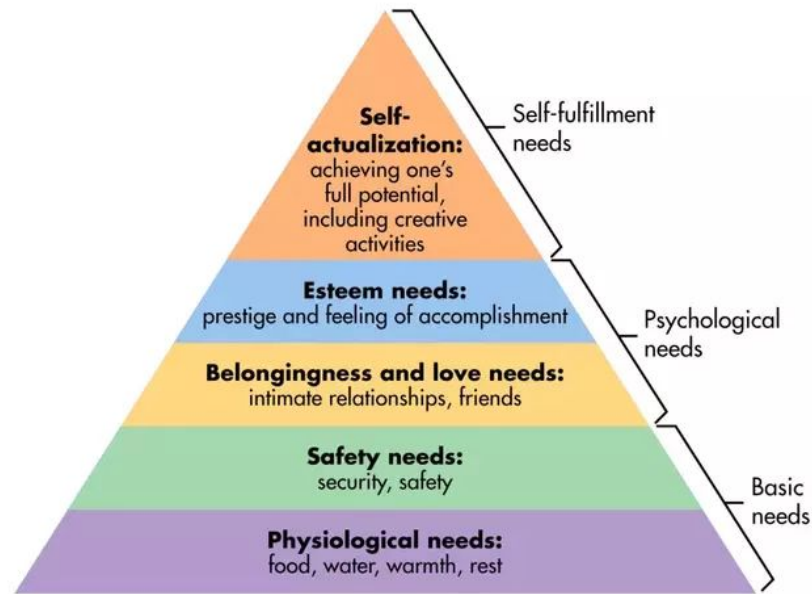


Diagram 9: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Image source: simplypsychology.org)

The following (Table 1) provides the mapping of Maslow's needs to the current needs of remote workers.

Table 1: Remote Worker Needs

Maslow's Theory

Level 1: Physiological

At the base of the pyramid, these needs cover the function, comfort, and maintenance of the body at its most basic level. These include the primitive survival requirements for humans, such as air, food, drink, heat, shelter, sleep, light, water, health (Wright, 2009).

Remote Worker Needs

- Space
- Clean air, water, food, etc.
- Light
- Healthy food
- Computer, desk, Internet access, software
- Electricity
- No pollution
- Environmental preparedness plan
- Working hours (don't work too long)
- Commuting time (for in-office days)

Level 2: Safety

Safety refers not just to our own physical safety and protection from harm but also to our continued well-being. This level, therefore, covers our financial security (employment, pension, savings) as well as insurance, access to medical help, law and order, limits, stability – all the infrastructure that keeps us secure (Wright, 2009).

- Mental and physical well being
- Psychological safety
- Employment stability
- No fear of retribution for remote working
- No fear of having the opportunity to work remotely taken away
- Technical security - secure network, Internet,
- Ergonomic perspective

Level 3: Belonging

These refer to our various needs for human contact: family, friends, relationships, love, acceptance, teams, society (Wright, 2009).

- Protection from feeling isolated
- Sense of community
- Active participation
- Ability to be seen, heard, respected
- Protection from loneliness
- Psychological safety

Level 4: Esteem

These recognize the need for status, power, prestige, acknowledgment, respect, responsibility, mastery or dominance – the sort of attributes that can elevate individuals in some way, giving them a higher position within a social group (Wright, 2009).

- Respect
- Acknowledgment
- Opportunity to speak
- Recognition of contributions
- Incentives
- Trust
- Humanizing interactions
- Inclusion

Level 5: Self-actualization

The final set of needs deals with each person's desire to become the best that they can be through personal growth and by achieving their potential; to be fulfilled by living out their individual destinies (Wright, 2009).

- Sense of purpose
- Opportunities for personal development
- Work-life harmony
- Fulfillment
- Balanced (mental health perspective)
- Autonomy
- Diversity of thought
- Effective, efficient, productive
- Return on investment (ROI)

It is important to consider that in 2019 the business world is witnessing the most demographically diverse workforce most organizations have ever seen with “babies born today can expect to live to over 100” (World Economic Forum, 2017). As well, structural changes in the workforce are driving a shortage of top talent. As older workers age out of the workforce, the demographic changes and fewer Generation X (Gen X) are available to fill the mid-to-upper level management and a relatively smaller Millennial

(Gen Y) and Generation Z (Gen Z) boom relative to the population compared to the boomers at that same stage some forty plus years before (Cagle, 2019).

To plan for this longevity, leaders within organizations must change the way they think about economics, education, work, and social constructs. Over the past century, life in the West conformed to the three-stage model of study, work, and retire. This model provided high levels of certainty regarding the skills required in the workplace, the job market, conditions for succession and retirement. It was common for employees to be trained in a specific field of study, and commit to one or two employers for the majority of their working life (Gratton & Scott, 2016). With this new multi-generational workforce, also known as the five generations of work, it is even more important for leaders to get the right people in the right roles and keep them motivated to reduce attrition and increase productivity.

Trust is defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another (Rousseau et al., 1998). Employees who feel trusted are more likely to feel empowered and, therefore, more likely to feel satisfied with their job. Trust is a major factor in both employee engagement and employee retention (Miller, 2018) for both remote and colocated workers. Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, describes trust as the initial element that every team must overcome to eliminate dysfunction. The absence of trust is driven by members' unwillingness to be vulnerable within the group. Lencioni suggests that teams can overcome the challenge of a lack of trust by sharing experiences, demonstrate follow through on actions, demonstrate credibility, and developing strong insight into the unique characteristics of team members (Lencioni, 2012). Psychological safety is often confused with other concepts, such as trust and psychological mindfulness. The primary differences between psychological safety and trust are that psychological safety focuses on a belief about a group norm, but trust focuses on a belief that one person has about another. Also, psychological safety is defined by how group members think they are viewed by others in the group, but trust is defined by how one views another (Edmondson, 2003). Trust is the

foundation of strong relationships; It has to be earned and given. Credibility, reliability, and intimacy make up the formula to build trust, with the overall denominator being self-orientation. When the formula increases, so does trust (Maister, Green, & Galford, 2002).

Chapter 6: Trust and Psychological Safety as Motivators

The benefits to the business and employees have been quantified and qualified – the statistics speak for themselves through engagement scores, increased productivity, and wellness. Through this research; however, serious gaps were uncovered in the systems supporting remote work. Although the benefits are clear, there is still a strong stigma against remote work from senior leadership within organizations. Bringing in policies alone will not address the main gap facing remote workers; it relies on the desire of the organization to implement or comply with a policy, and is a deeply rooted organizational issue.

Applying Schein's Model of Organizational Culture

To better understand and help frame how organizational culture feeds the behaviours and attitudes that contribute to the remote worker stigma, Edgar Schein's three-level model of organizational culture is referenced (diagram 10).

What is 'Culture'?

In an organizational setting, there are different definitions of culture with some being fairly simplistic, and others more detailed. In one respect, organizational culture could be defined as the way things are done, while in another it could be defined as unspoken assumptions (Chapman, 2012). Schein's model breaks down organizational culture into three levels; Artifacts, Espoused Values and Basic Underlying Assumptions:

Three Levels of Culture (Schein)

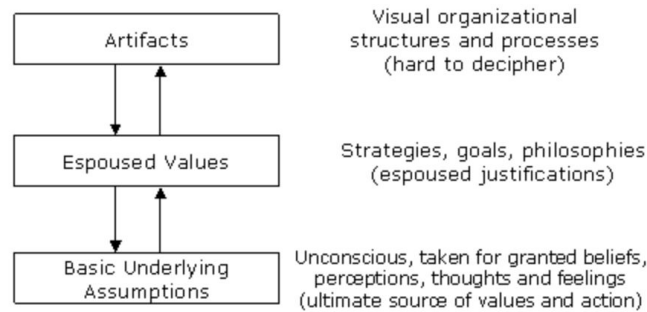


Diagram 10: Schein's Model of Organizational Culture (Image source: valuebasedmanagement.net)

The first level of culture is artifact. Although they are easy to see as they are visual structures and processes, they are hard to understand. For example, not having a remote work policy is obvious to employees, but the reason behind not having one is difficult to understand. The second level, espoused values, are the reasons why things are done. Using the same example, the reason why there is not a policy is because leaders do not want to commit to a remote working option, and want the security of knowing that they can change their minds at any time. The third level, basic underlying assumptions, is an unconscious thought. Continuing with the example, leaders may not even realize the real reason why they will not have a remote work policy. On a conscious level, leaders may not understand the real driver for not having a policy, but unconsciously they could feel like employees are taking advantage, or that it would cost the organization too much money, or that the effort can be put toward something else that they find more important. Working through the three levels of culture with remote work policy as an example, it becomes obvious how an underlying assumption becomes a key driver to shaping value and creating artifacts.

It Starts With Trust

As organizations move toward future thinking by trying to improve diversity of thought, innovation, and business strategy, leaders need to focus on the human factors that can influence the success or failure of their organizations. The research insights in this paper indicate that current leaders find themselves in a conundrum as they are tasked with improving the bottom line, increasing employee engagement, improving diversity of thought, and hiring the people who are the right fit with the right skills.

Flexibility is Key to Millennials and Gen Z

Millennials and Gen Z values of flexibility in the workplace. For these groups, they are working in a time where the gig economy is providing increased income potential and overall job flexibility and a clear majority have already taken on such roles or would consider doing so (Deloitte, 2019).

Organizational leaders are having to answer to their senior and executive teams about how they are going to adapt to the demands of the new creative minds entering the workforce with a modern approach to attract new talent while supporting tenured employees. As previously mentioned, none of the research participants work for organizations that have official remote work policies. Without one, it is difficult to build the trust needed in a blended workforce – organizations with a mix of full and part-time employees, contractors and freelancers all working together have been on the rise since the 2008 recession. This recession forced many companies to change their approach to resourcing by cutting back on full-time employees and unintentionally launching the large freelance market that is evident today. Freelancers now have the opportunity to work on multiple contracts and focus on the projects they enjoy doing whether spending time in the office or working remotely (O'Brien, 2017). This flexibility is built on trust by both the company and the worker. The worker is trusted to do the job and given the freedom to work how and

when they want provided they continue to deliver on deadlines and meet expectations and values of the organization.

Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose

Three key factors that motivate people are autonomy, mastery, and purpose and the notion of ‘the carrot and stick’ approach (a combination of reward and punishment) is outdated for most of today’s workforce (Pink, 2008). Taking into consideration the signals pointing to the future of work, companies are looking to automate routine, repetitive tasks and instead leverage intrinsic motivation (which is when people are self-motivated because they are given the freedom to do the work they enjoy) to build out the human resources needed. Autonomy motivates people to think creatively without needing to conform to strict, workplace rules. By rethinking traditional ideas of control—regular office hours, dress codes, and numerical targets—organizations can increase staff autonomy, build trust, and improve innovation, and creativity” (Mind Tools Content Team. (n.d.). The middle-managers research participants subscribe to this idea with their remote workers, where they provide the freedom to work when they want to and choose projects of most interest to them. The feedback also indicates, however, that senior leadership still struggles with this concept. Three of the anonymous interviewees (leaders and individual contributors) stated that senior leadership in their organization still sees remote work as a reward (the carrot) that could be taken away (the stick) if they do not perceive that the work was getting done. One anonymous interviewee stated that “senior leadership does not look at the work being produced, but rather who is in the office.”

Beyond Motivation

Beyond motivating remote workers through autonomy and flexibility, leaders must also be aware of the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EI); humanising our interactions and building connections. Humans want to feel connected and are hard-wired for personal interaction, and a sense of belonging and purpose. Daniel Goleman, a psychologist and leading expert on EI has developed a mixed model that includes five key skills and competencies that he believes drive leadership performance (Goleman, 2019). Goleman prescribes to the following:

- **Self-awareness:** The ability to understand and be aware of emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and goals, and be able to recognize their impact on others while using intuitive feelings to drive decisions (Goleman, 2019).
- **Self-regulation:** The ability to manage or redirect disruptive emotions and impulses adapt to changing circumstances and to think before acting (Goleman, 2019).
- **Social skills:** The ability to connect and build rapport, and manage relationships to move people in the desired direction (Goleman, 2019).
- **Empathy:** The ability to recognize, understand and consider other people's emotions, especially during the decision-making process (Goleman, 2019).
- **Motivation:** The ability to motivate oneself or be driven to achieve for the sake of achievement (Goleman, 2019).

Goleman feels that these five competencies can be developed to achieve outstanding performance in the workplace, experience successful relationships, and have mental and physical well-being. According to the research, the role of emotional intelligence and the competencies for virtual teams, which are composed of geographically-dispersed employees who use technology to accomplish organizational tasks (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004) could possibly be faced with unique obstacles for effective communication (Martins et al., 2004). For example, compared to face-to-face teams, virtual

teams demonstrate decreased social interaction, communication, and emotional expression (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

The Strength of Virtual Communities

One way to improve connections between remote and colocated colleagues is through a network of virtual communities. As increased profit and productivity have not diminished the negative stereotype around remote workers, the researchers looked to other groups of people who use technology to collaborate and communicate to discover their recipe for success. The technology used in both work and non-work virtual environments is the same (the Internet, chat programs, email, social hubs), but the approach to using the technology, and reason for communicating with others in each environment, are different. It is important to remember that the tech product is only the tool, but the people using it have the power to influence the level of interaction and collaboration needed. The people using the tool provide the motivation, trust, support, and energy needed for virtual workers to go beyond the platform that the technology provides. Research suggests that virtual communities, such as online social groups, are successful when there is a mutual sense of ‘membership’ that comes with being part of the community (Leimeister, et al. 2011). Whereas online social groups’ reason for existence is to act as a hub to gather people from all over based on a commonality, working remotely is seen as a separate part of work; an inconvenience for colocated workers lacking a shared value and community identification.

Chapter 7: The Future of the Remote Work Experience

Going Beyond the Data

The data collected, as well as the research into trust and virtual communities, help determine the driving forces behind the remote working issue. To go beyond analysis and move into forecasting, a scanning activity was completed to gain a better understanding of what is currently shaping the future of work and the effect current trends could have on the remote worker experience in 10 years.

Driving Forces Behind the Future of Work

There are many trends impacting the worker experience today from talent mobility to skills training to the new office environment (Deloitte, 2019), and the trends identified in this section go beyond the remote worker experience to provide a holistic view of the future of work. These trends were also highlighted in the literature review and aligned to the feedback received through the interviews and diary studies. The table below (Table 2) outlines five key trends shaping the current and future workplace landscape and that could have a significant impact on remote working. The information in the table outlines the name of the trend, a brief description, as well as signals and evidence as found as part of the literature review that supports the identification of these trends.

Table 2: Future of Work Trends

| Trend Name & External Factor (STEEP+V) | Description | Signals and evidence |
|---|--|----------------------|
| Diversity of Thought (Values) | Workplaces have come to realize that a diverse and inclusive organization can not only benefit | |

the people who work there, but the products and services it provides. Being able to achieve a work environment in which “all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, can contribute fully to the organization's success” (Forbes, 2011).

Professional Nomad (Economical)

Professional nomads strive for independence of work and life, engage in a community of like-minded professionals to break down temporary structures of working and living (Reichenberger, 2017). For these workers the length of their stay in any given location varies, as does their age and profession. These professionals are mobile, they rely on existing technologically savvy organizations that have created networks to support their lifestyle, allowing them to flourish in the gig economy, taking in work as needed (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017).

- “Nearly two-thirds of millennials take interest in an organization's corporate socialresponsibility and are looking to the workforce lead this initiative (Parikah, 2018)
- Reconciliation and decolonization awareness and efforts (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.).
- Training and implementation of AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) compliance.
- Anonymous leaders interviewed for this project indicated the importance of promoting opportunities regardless of geographic location. Skilled workers are more important than geographic location
- More jobs are becoming portable, possible to do at a digital distance – not just web designers and freelance writers but fashion designers, photographers, models, marketers and even a remote-working GP (Hart, 2015).
- Beyond graphic designers and traditional nomadic professions, companies like Nomad Health, connecting doctors to freelance work in healthcare systems, are on the rise. Nomad Health currently works with about 30,000 doctors in 12 States and the aim is for continued geographic expansion (Ramsey, 2018).
- Support tools are in place with sites like Nomad List, a website that ranks destinations that are accommodating to professional nomads, based on factors like cost of living, internet speed and weather (Mohn, 2017).
- Networking opportunities are more available for professional nomads through organizations like Nomad Cruise, a bi-annual two-week cruise for professional nomads to network and unwind (Mohn, 2017).

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Collaboration Nation (Political) | Collaboration is taking over the workplace with little understanding of the meaning or the process. As businesses as drawn into the global market, connectivity between teams is increasing and collaborative teamwork has been identified as a marker for organizational success (Grant, Cross, & Grant, 2016). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% to 35% of value-added collaborations come from only 3% to 5% of employees (Grant, Cross, & Grant, 2016). • For many organizations, the costs associated with meetings, emails, instant messages (IMs), and other forms of workforce collaboration now exceed the benefits (Mankins, 2017). • Companies seek new tools (for example, Microsoft Teams, Slack, Box) without considering their approach to collaboration (Mankins, 2017). |
| Psychological Safety (Social) | As the gig economy continues its intensive growth, fewer employees are now co-located with their colleagues. As more and more employers offer remote work opportunities, issues of trust and psychological safety are becoming more common as topics of conversations between employees and leaders. Telecommuting and other forms of working from home can unintentionally end up changing the trust equation between employees and managers. (remote.co) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When employees don't trust organizational leadership, their chances of being engaged are one in 12” (Hickman, Fredstrom, 2018). • “When trust is established, the chances of engagement skyrocket to better than one in two” (Hickman, Fredstrom, 2018). • Focusing on open communication, autonomy, and building trust makes people more effective no matter where their desk is (Price, 2019). • Google, among others, talk about the importance of psychological safety and belonging as part of a healthy team. In other words, relationships are a sound investment (Price, 2019). |
| Longing to Belong (Social) | “Having a sense of belonging is a common experience. Belonging means acceptance as a member or part. Such a simple word for huge concept. A sense of belonging is a human need, just like the need for food and shelter. Feeling that you belong is most important in seeing value in life,” (Hall, 2014) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Maintain your remote employees' trust by ensuring that they feel a sense of belonging to you, their team and the organization. You can create this feeling of belonging by addressing basic workplace needs – human needs” (Hickman, Fredstrom, 2018). • After coming out as gay in 2014, Tim Cook of Apple stated, “I’ve come to realize that my desire for personal privacy has been holding me back from doing something more important” (Cook, 2014). • “Employees with a high sense of belonging take 75% fewer sick days than employees who feel excluded” (Fraser-Thill, 2019). • “Employees see a 56% in job performance when they feel like they belong, resulting in a gain of \$52 million per year for every 10,000 employees” (Fraser-Thill, 2019). |

The Four Futures

In predicting the future of remote working, Dator's Four Futures method was leveraged to create four "alternative" futures based on the research findings. According to Dator, Futures studies is not about correctly predicting "The Future." It is about understanding the varieties and sources of different images of the future (Dator, 2009). This method groups images of the future into one of four alternative futures: Continuation, Decline, Discipline, and Transformation (Diagram 11).

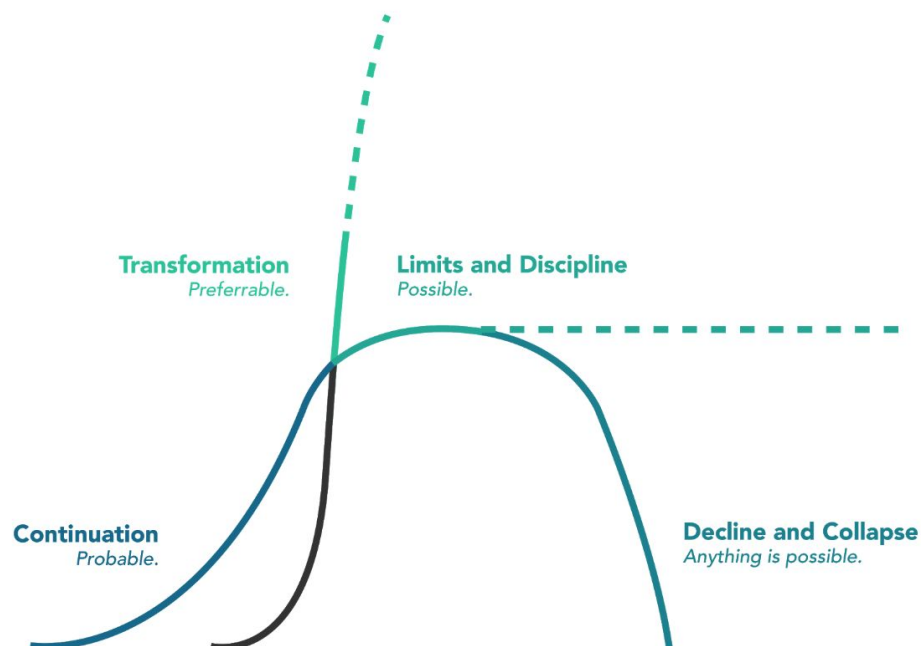


Diagram 11: Dator's Four Futures

Continuation

The first scenario includes the best intelligence about where current and recent trends are headed (Bezold, 2009). This is the ideal hypothesis of a positive, growth-oriented future.

Based on the research presented in this report, in this continued growth future, the remote workforce will steadily increase in size. Organizations will continue to offer the option and cast a wider net when seeking

new employees; urban-centred located offices will look through the province, country and worldwide. Currently, it is estimated that “30 to 45% of the working-age population around the world is underutilized—that is, unemployed, inactive, or underemployed. This translates into some 850 million people in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Brazil, China, and India alone. Most attention is paid to the unemployed portion of this number, and not enough to the underemployed and the inactive portions, which make up the majority of untapped human potential,” (Manyika, 2017). This untapped labour could broaden the spectrum of the global job search and bring untapped skills to new markets.

In the near future, the five generations of workers will get to choose working styles that suit their personal needs and preferences. These groups of workers are trained to focus on cross-generational team collaboration and the decades-long stigma of the remote working slowly but continuously shifts to a more positive view as a progressive government continues to dedicate budget to innovation and research. For example, Innovation Canada, a relatively new branch of the Canadian government was put in place to provide funding and expert advice to drive new collaborations and programs to help businesses innovate, create jobs and grow Canada’s economy (Government of Canada, 2018).

Organizations will seamlessly begin to adopt remote work policy as employees, lead and supported by middle managers, will create their own and seek approval. To retain talent, foster employee engagement and remain a competitive workplace, organizations will let their employees lead the way.

Companies and employees will see a reduction in business costs and be seen as environmentally conscious because office spaces will slowly be reduced and organizational policies will support environmental causes. The U.S. government has been examining the benefits of remote work and provided an update to congress stating that “a change in behavior from not teleworking to teleworking three days per week decreased emissions from about 3 MT to 1.4 MT CO₂e, or about in half,” (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2013) thereby, providing organizations with strong

environmental messaging with regards to the benefits of remote workers. Size matters, “between 2009 and 2013, square footage per employee shrunk 5.8%, which is an average of 1.4% per year. Since 2013, the annual average rate of densification has been less than half that pace (0.6% per year)” (Campbell, 2018). As companies look to reduce their costly real estate, the reduction of office space, brings with it a reduction in lighting, office furniture, and utilities, all of these factors influence the carbon footprint of an organization (Miley, 2018).

Decline/Collapse

The second scenario depicts the decline or collapse from a cause or combination of causes. The decline is either to extinction or to a lower stage of development than it currently is. The collapse can be from a community level to a global level. As Dator stated, “communities, organizations, and cultures vanish every day as economic and social forces render once-valuable institutions and places unneeded or unviable now” (Dator, 2009). In this future, the negative stigma of remote working takes a toll. Remote working is no longer an option and has been completely removed within medium and large size organizations. As a result, innovation is only growing out of smaller-stage organizations, such as “young startups, because they do not have as much corporate red tape and remote working is a given” (Spector, 2017). As larger companies are struggling to compete, they step back from innovation altogether and focus on other areas of business. This leads to a decline in attracting and retaining the best possible talent, which, in turn, severely impacts the diversity of thought and inclusion in the workplace. For employees working in these companies, self-purpose and drive take a drastic decline as well. With all employees expected to be in the office, building rent continues to increase and traffic, because of commuting by car and train, increases to the point of destroying the ozone, depleting water sources, eroding valuable farmland and reducing biodiversity (Arenas, 2016).

Discipline

This future is a conservative society that believes in the need to manage the shrinkage and to find ways to stabilize the society rather than grow it (Bezold, 2009). The future of discipline is focused on enforcing the conservation of society through authoritarian means. Each company will heavily invest in monitoring its employees out of senior leadership's fear and lack of trust. For middle managers, this disciplined future provides a sense of purpose and security, and reduces their fear of serving no purpose by being tasked with keeping a watchful eye on their teams. Variations of the punch clock have been used since the late 1880s as a way to track employees' comings and goings. In the 21st century, there are many options (apps, systems, tools) employers can use to monitor every minute an employee works (Alton, 2017).

From logging work hours to surveilling computer use, employees' every move is tracked to ensure that all work hours are accounted for. Employees lack autonomy with any self-regulated processes completely taken away. For those employees who produce the best work without restrictions, such as working wherever and whenever they want, they will face a barrage of challenges to fit into strict rules and regulations that all employees must follow without exception. The energy brought in from employees will be used to keep leadership happy, rather than put toward generating great work. This disciplined future preys on leadership's hunger for power and control and turns worklife into a policed environment while costing companies large amounts of money to issue and license tracking for each employee.

Transformation

This is the preferred future that a community or society is committed to creating. "It is a vision, and it is not about reality. A vision defines a future desirable state that does not yet exist. A vision provides a "north star" that sets our direction for creating a desirable future state (Bezold, 2009)." In this

future, the stigma of remote working has disappeared as companies benefit from employees who thrive with enhanced work-life harmony and a decrease in commute-related stress (two of the top factors that make people want a job with flexible options) (Reynolds, n.d.). For people with mental health concerns, caregivers, and professionals at large, flexible work options can help support efforts to improve mental health (Reynolds, n.d.).

With so much evidence on the positive results of remote work, employees are given complete trust and are in a position to tell their employers how they will be working and contributing to the company. Employers have complete trust in their remote workers and provide autonomy as long as quarterly goals are achieved. Companies take a stronger focus on assessing employees through metrics based on objectives (biz-hr, 2019). The future of transformation does bring some risk to employers. As remote workers are given autonomy that results in power, there is a chance that they may not be faithful and leave for other opportunities on a whim. As innovation becomes tied to the person and not the organization, the brain behind the work is more valuable than the business itself. This future results in a nation of sole proprietors that brings with it legal and intellectual property headaches for the companies that hire them.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Based on the research data, insights analysis, and four futures scenario development, there is a contradiction happening between employees and leadership in organizations that support a blended model of colocated and remote work. Leaders view remote work as a privilege and a reward for good behaviour; they pay more attention to what they observe in the office space rather than the key metrics delivered projects from the employees; they do not have the policy or the behavioural tools within their organizations to fully support remote workers.

The notion of trust will be at the essence of all possible next steps for this research. The researchers will look closer at trust through the lens of Maister, Green, and Galford's *The Trusted Advisor*, and possibly utilize co-author Charles H. Green's formula for measuring a person's trustworthiness (AIM Leadership, 2019):

$$\text{Trustworthiness} = \frac{\text{Credibility} + \text{Reliability} + \text{Intimacy}}{\text{Self-orientation}}$$

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the denominator is self-orientation. It has to do with the focus of the individual. Are they more focus on themselves or others? Self-obsessed or more altruistic? From this equation, it is suggested that a person can determine their trust quotient, similar to determining their intelligence quotient (IQ). It is a valuable tool for any organization to use as numerators and denominators are characteristics that can be developed in people (Green, 2017).

With intimacy and self-orientation being the most important factors of this equation (Green, 2017), how might we leverage this type of formula to build intimacy among employees and leaders to develop trustworthiness and ultimately break the stigma of the remote worker?

Next Steps

Employees working remotely are working longer, getting more done, and feeling more self-purpose; while at the same time they live in fear that the privilege of working from home will be taken away with changes of leadership and the lack of a policy protecting their rights. Middle managers are not set up for success to manage a team of both colocated and remote workers, but they are expected to roll with the reality of little training, support, and tools. In interviewing both leadership and remote employees, it was determined that the following opportunities would be next for further exploration, as they could be the first step in building an organizational culture of trust:

Consideration 1: Remote Work Policies Fostered at the Leadership Level

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence, but to act with yesterday’s logic.”

- Peter Drucker

The researchers might consider ways in which organizations can develop policies to support the unique needs of remote workers while balancing with the needs of the business. The reluctance of organizations to support remote workers based on biases that working remotely can lead to poor communication, reduced employee accountability and decreased engagement (Muhammed, 2019), could be overcome by enforcing a robust remote work policy to provide comfort to senior leadership knowing that guidelines and agreements are in place. Working with HR and employee engagement professionals could be the start of building a strong culture that understands the evolution of the worker profile and the need for their organization to evolve as well. Providing employees with the stability of an official policy will signify how the organization recognizes that remote work is not a privilege, but a trustworthy option.

Consideration 2: Employee Storytelling Workshop to Build Empathy

“The power of storytelling is exactly this: to bridge the gaps where everything else has crumbled.”

- Paulo Coelho

The researchers might consider how to leverage the power of storytelling with the experience of remote workers as a way to begin shifting attitudes around remote work. Storytelling could help to accurately depict the reality of remote working situations and build empathy in the organization. The workshop will be an educational program designed to interact with participants to generate real-life narratives. At the end, an employee engagement campaign, with real colleagues behind it, will be shared to sway the perceptions and attitudes of leadership, build support from coworkers, and start removing the stigma.

Consideration 3: Customized Toolkit for Managers of Blended Teams

“The conventional definition of management is getting work done through people, but real management is developing people through work.”

- Agha Hasan Abedi

The researchers might consider how to leverage middle managers as they are in an ideal position to identify organizational opportunities; they have a 360-degree view of, and access to, the people in their organization – their colleagues, their leaders, and their own staff. They “are central to an organizations’ ability to execute its business strategy. Ensuring this group is engaged is critical to organizational success; however, only one-third of middle managers are highly engaged” (Hall and Comeau, 2018). A toolkit for middle managers, that goes beyond the typical self-study guides and quick links, could be created based

on a consistent framework that promotes engagement for the middle manager to help facilitate the successful performance of their blended teams.

Final Thoughts

“Remember teamwork begins by building trust. And the only way to do that is to overcome our need for invulnerability.”

- Patrick Lencioni

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