

AI, flexible workforces and THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP

Future of Work Study 2024

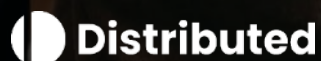
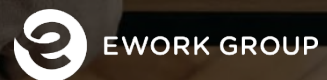
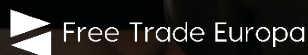
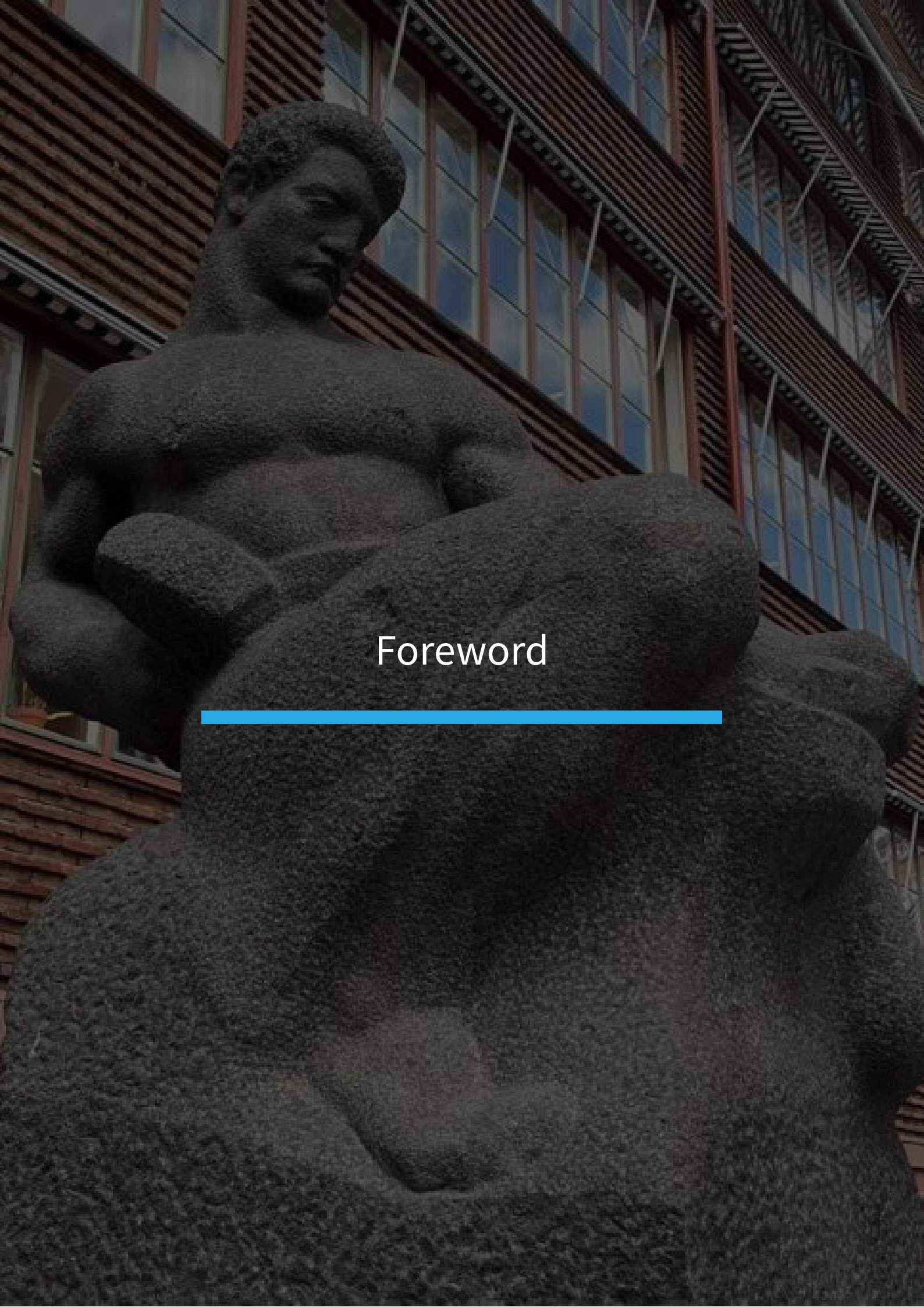


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Foreword

In central Stockholm stands a statue entitled “The Worker” by Mikael Katz. With a furrowed brow, muscular chest and heavy mallet in hand, the subject is caught in the middle of carrying out a physical, dour task.

At the end of the 1800s - when this sculpture was completed - “work” was often carried out in a factory, in a field or down a mine. Something backbreaking and often something to be endured. While the world of work has been revolutionised by technology, many of the principles, processes and mindsets associated with “work” have changed very little since this statue was crafted. This study therefore examines the role of AI, the rise of flexible workforce models and how this impacts corporate leadership today.

Glen Hodgson, Autumn 2024




Introduction



Digitalisation and AI have changed the world of work and also the demands on companies, teams and how to lead. Workforces are becoming more flexible, and the command-and-control model has been replaced by that of a coach who needs to manage a matrix organisation in terms of locations and functions as well as full time staff, consultants and freelancers. The days of a one-size-fits all leadership style is over and new hard and soft skills are needed.

This study therefore analyses the new world of work; the changing shape of the organisation; digital transformation: the use of AI and flexible workforces; and the regulatory framework before looking at the impact on leadership.





Emerging hypotheses

Regarding the emerging hypotheses, these are divided into themes while offering concrete recommendations on the way forward.

Companies and individuals need to be in sync with technology

There is a need for both corporations and workers to utilise technology and digitalisation: not deny it or work against it. They need to adopt technology to remain competitive, efficient, and innovative in an increasingly digital world. Technological advancements streamline operations, enhance productivity, and reduce costs by automating tasks and enabling better resource management. For workers, embracing technology is crucial for staying relevant in the job market, as it equips individuals with essential skills and tools to perform their roles more effectively. This covers AI and means that constant reskilling and upskilling is vital as the half-life of knowledge diminishes and thus the value that can be brought to partners has a shorter shelf-life.

Remote and flexible work are here to stay

In spite of recent calls by some industry leaders to return to the office, workers have adapted to flexible, remote and hybrid solutions and show no signs of changing back to the 9 to 5. Most workers, companies and organisations also have a great deal to gain from the benefits to efficiency, productivity and cost-savings that flexible work can bring. This means that organisations need to adapt to the requirements of open talent while offering fractional roles as well as utilising freelancers, gig workers and contractors in addition to full-time employees. This calls for a freelancer strategy and a corporate commitment to blended teams in order to maximise operational and cost efficiencies as well as attract the right talent for the organisation.

Talent clouds and elastic teams are the now of work

In addition to companies needing a freelancer strategy, organisations need to reap the benefits that are offered by talent clouds and elastic teams. These allow entities access to a vast amount of expert, pre-vetted talent which will allow them to increase efficiencies and productivity as well as scale their business up and down very quickly in response to market trends. This also allows companies to focus on tasks and value-added as opposed to job titles. The evidence clearly shows that organisations big and small who are utilising talent clouds and elastic teams are reaping the benefits.

A Total Talent Management approach is vital

Linking with the previous point, organisations across Europe need to get to grips with an evolving labour market and changing workforce. The traditional model of individuals on 9 to 5 contracts travelling into an office five days per week is no longer the only model in town. Modern organisations increasingly blend a mixture of permanent employees, consultants, freelancers and other contingent workers. Studies show that 40% of businesses are made up of non-permanent talent. This reality necessitates the need to create an all-encompassing, holistic approach to talent management and focus more on the value that a worker can provide an organisation without focusing on their employment status.

Adaption to this reality will lead to organisational success. Companies who are able to attract, optimise and retain all employed and non-employed talent types will be able to create a competitive advantage in their market: particularly as the skills shortage in Europe increases. Getting the right approach to total talent management will improve the organisation's ability to respond to wider business strategies; improve workforce productivity; and heighten the ability to evaluate the availability of skills across the total workforce. This will require HR - which is traditionally tasked with hiring full-time employees - and procurement - which is typically tasked with hiring contingent talent - departments to be more integrated and less siloed, while employer branding will need to focus on the full spectrum of available talent and not just permanent staff.

Furthermore, leadership styles will be required to change as a result. The hierarchical, top-down approach associated with individuals at the top of a pyramid giving orders to layers of subordinates (think a military structure) will be replaced by a matrix structure.

Successful businesses across Europe are capitalising on technology and embracing more flexible talent structures to navigate the evolving landscape of work and leverage the benefits technology offers. In parallel, workers are opting for more flexibility and choice over their working lives, while reaping the benefits of new technology-driven solutions. This reality should be facilitated by the legal framework in Europe rather than hampered by it. EU Member States therefore have a great opportunity in their hands and would be foolish to waste it.

Europe needs the right regulatory framework

When it comes to the implementation of the EU Platform Work Directive, it is vital that national governments do the following:



Avoid a mass presumption of employment - a nuanced approach is needed when it comes to deciding if an individual is employed. This needs to respect the diversity of freelance work, while being specific and therefore a higher threshold - of 3/7 criteria, at a minimum - would be acceptable.



Do not create employment relationships for One-Person Companies - if implemented wrongly, the Directive threatens to force countless one-person companies into employment relationships against their will. This shift from an autonomous business model to a more rigid employment structure would severely diminish the flexibility and freedom that is fundamental to why many choose a freelance workstyle and platform work.



Introduce Voluntary Employment Classification - Freelancers should be able to choose when, where and how they earn money. Similarly, workers should be allowed to 'opt-in' for employee classification. This approach respects individual autonomy and is more suited to the varied nature of freelancing and platform work.



Do not impede the Digitalisation and Market Access of SMEs - Legislation should not create a barrier to the digitalisation of SMEs. By adding layers of complexity and regulatory hurdles, red tape will restrict the ability of SMEs to use digital tools for client acquisition and service delivery. This restriction could lead to a decrease in SME output and diminish the variety of options available to EU citizens. It is crucial to recognise that many platform workers are, in reality, SMEs or family businesses. New legislation should not strip away a vital channel for these businesses to diversify their consumer base and maintain economic viability.

A photograph of a modern office environment. In the foreground, a woman with long, wavy brown hair is focused on her work, typing on a silver laptop. She is wearing a white sleeveless top with dark horizontal stripes and a gold bracelet on her left wrist. To her right, another person is partially visible, holding a smartphone. In the background, two other women are seated at desks, also working. A black desk lamp is visible on the left side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is professional and collaborative.

The evolution of work

This section looks at how work is changing, and the structure of organisations too in response to this evolution. It also analyses the components of the new world of work, and the reactions to these.

THE CHANGING SHAPE OF WORK AND THE ORGANISATION

This section looks at the shift from physical to knowledge work; the rise of the organisation as a force, as well as its switch in focus from pure profit to purpose; as well as the rise of remote work and open talent since the COVID-19 pandemic.

From physical to knowledge work

The transition from physical work to knowledge work in Europe over the past two centuries has been a transformative journey shaped by industrialisation, technological advancements, and shifts in economic paradigms. In the early 19th century, Europe was predominantly agrarian, with the majority of the population engaged in manual labour in agriculture and small-scale craftsmanship. The advent of the Industrial Revolution marked a significant turning point, as mechanization and factory systems began to dominate, shifting labour from farms to factories. This era was characterised by intensive physical labour, with workers operating machinery in manufacturing hubs, which spurred urbanisation and the growth of industrial cities.

As the 20th century progressed, technological innovations and advancements in automation began to reduce the need for manual labour in industries. The development and widespread adoption of computers, telecommunications, and the internet marked the beginning of a new economic era centred around information and knowledge. This shift was particularly evident in Europe, where economies started to transition from manufacturing-based to service-oriented. Jobs in finance, healthcare, education, and information technology grew rapidly, demanding a workforce with specialized knowledge and skills rather than physical prowess. Education systems evolved to support this shift, emphasising higher education and technical training to prepare individuals for roles in this emerging knowledge economy.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the digital revolution further accelerated the transition to knowledge work. The proliferation of digital technologies, big data, and artificial intelligence transformed how businesses operated, requiring a workforce proficient in managing, analysing, and leveraging information. This period saw the rise of knowledge-intensive industries such as software development, digital marketing, and research and development. In Europe, policies and investments in innovation and education fostered the growth of a highly skilled labour force adept at navigating the complexities of the digital age. Consequently, the nature of work evolved, with an increasing emphasis on intellectual capabilities, creativity, and continuous learning, marking a significant departure from the physical labour that once dominated the economic landscape. According to Eurostat data, the employment structure in Europe

has shifted considerably towards service-oriented¹ and knowledge-intensive sectors. For example, the share of employment in the services sector, which includes many knowledge-based jobs, has increased from around 60% in the early 2000s to over 70% in recent years across the EU.

The rise of the organisation

The rise of the corporate organisation has its roots in the economic and industrial transformations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This played a pivotal role in shaping the modern economic landscape, driving growth, innovation, and globalisation, while also having a significant impact on the world of work.

The corporate organisation profoundly shaped work culture by introducing formalised structures, hierarchies, and standardised practices. As corporations grew, they necessitated the development of clear organizational hierarchies and divisions of labour to ensure efficient operation and coordination. This led to the establishment of distinct roles and responsibilities, creating a more structured and predictable work environment. The implementation of formal management practices, such as performance evaluations, training programs, and standardised operating procedures, contributed to a culture of professionalism and accountability. These practices also facilitated the development of specialised skills among employees, fostering a more competent and productive workforce. These were important in the industrial age and the economic developments following World War II.

Additionally, corporate organisations influenced work culture by promoting values such as efficiency, productivity, and innovation. The focus on achieving business goals and meeting performance metrics encouraged employees to adopt a results-oriented mindset. Corporations also played a significant role in shaping workplace norms and behaviours, promoting teamwork, and emphasizing the importance of collaboration and communication in the pre-internet age. Yet times have changed and with dramatic impacts of the role of the organisation and the future of work.

From profit to purpose

The role of the organisation has changed in recent years. Companies are increasingly becoming Purpose-Driven Organisations rather than purely chasing and maximising profits. This is being demanded by governments, employees, shareholders and the broader society alike. There is a growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and ethical business practices. Companies are expected to consider their impact on society and the environment, and many have been forced to integrate social and environmental goals into their core business strategies. As a result, companies are engaging with stakeholders more proactively, seeking input, and building relationships based on transparency and trust.

¹ [Services were the largest economic activity in the EU at 73% measured in terms of gross value added \(GVA\) generated, according to Eurostat](#)

Simultaneously, employee well-being has become a key element: companies are placing greater emphasis on supporting well-being, development, and satisfaction. This includes providing flexible work arrangements, investing in training and development programs, and promoting a culture of inclusivity, diversity, and belonging.

Within this aspect is the rise of hybrid and remote work. The office is no longer the heart of an organisation. It is no longer a physical place that people travel to 9 to 5, five days per week. It is spread over different locations and time zones whereby Companies can leverage a distributed workforce to tap into diverse skills and expertise, regardless of geographical boundaries.

The rise of remote work and open talent since COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis was the catalyst for the mass adoption of remote working and a move towards open talent models as people became comfortable with the technology, applications and digital tools available. The pandemic forced many companies to rapidly adopt remote work arrangements to comply with social distancing measures and ensure employee safety. This led to a widespread acceptance of remote work as a viable alternative to traditional office-based work and has stayed even though the pandemic has gone, and some executives have called for a return to the office. Data shows that return to office decrees can increase office attendance by as much as 14% but push employee engagement scores down by 26%².

Technological advancements also mean that the availability of advanced digital communication tools and collaboration platforms has made remote work more feasible and effective. Video conferencing, project management software, and cloud-based productivity tools have enabled seamless communication and collaboration among remote teams.

THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

The world of work is undergoing significant transformation driven by technological advancements, demographic shifts, and evolving organizational structures. Some key changes that are already visible include the rise of remote and flexible work; the growth of the Gig Economy and Freelancing; the place of automation and AI; the importance of skills and lifelong learning; the role of diversity, inclusion and well-being; the use of remote collaboration and digital tools; the symbiotic role between large and small organisations; and the increased use of technology and data at the heart of the organisation.

Remote and Flexible Work

When it comes to Remote and Flexible Work, the adoption of this has surged, facilitated by advancements in digital communication technologies, as well as fuelled by the work

² [Cushman & Wakefield, a commercial property adviser, found this in 2023. Quoted by Clark, Pilita in "The New Normal of office Life". Financial Times, 8th July 2024](#)

from home mandates of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations now offer flexible work arrangements, allowing employees to work from anywhere, anytime, leading to greater work-life balance and increased productivity. Commuting time has been eliminated (several hours per day for those in big cities), providing more time for leisure activities, family, and personal pursuits. Despite some organisations obliging workers to return to the office, this is meeting strong resistance from workers and a hybrid model is often the compromise that is reached.

Many organisations are transitioning to hybrid work models, combining remote and in-person work arrangements. This approach offers the flexibility of remote work while maintaining opportunities for face-to-face collaboration and connection. This allows workers to attain a better work-life balance³ and studies show that this makes employees happier as well as more productive⁴⁵.

Remote work can result in cost savings for both employees and employers. Companies can reduce expenses associated with office space, utilities, and infrastructure, while employees save on commuting costs and expenses related to office clothing and meals.

Gig Economy and Freelancing

The rise of the gig economy has reshaped the employment landscape, with more individuals opting for freelance or independent contractor roles. Platforms and apps connect workers with short-term projects. This provides more of the flexibility that is demanded by workers, while concerns about job security and benefits are being voiced in some quarters. Figures show that this is on the rise in Europe, with 43 million people in the EU expected to be freelancers by 2025⁶ according to the European Commission's conservative figures.

Furthermore, remote work and the adoption of open talent strategies has expanded the talent pool for companies, enabling them to recruit and retain top talent regardless of geographical location. This has facilitated access to diverse skills and expertise, leading to greater innovation and productivity.

Automation and AI

Automation technologies, including robotics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, are transforming industries and job roles. While automation streamlines processes and increases efficiency, it also raises concerns about job displacement and the need for upskilling and reskilling. This is an area looked at in more detail in this study.

³ [Robinson, Bryan. "Remote Work Increases Employee Happiness By 20%". Forbes](#)

⁴ [Huijter, Hugo. "Tracking Happiness Report"](#)

⁵ [Chui, Michael & Bloom, Nicholas "McKinsey Global Institute's Forward Thinking podcast"](#)

⁶ [European Commission and European Council figures](#)

Skills and Lifelong Learning

The demand for skills is evolving rapidly, driven by technological advancements and changing market needs. Lifelong learning has become essential for staying competitive in the workforce, prompting individuals and organizations to invest in continuous education and skill development.

Diversity and Inclusion

There is growing recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Organisations are prioritising diversity initiatives to create more inclusive environments, foster innovation, and attract top talent from diverse locations and backgrounds. Choosing when, where and how to work is an important part of diversity and inclusion - not just sex and race. Many people for physical and mental reasons find the 9 to 5 impossible.

Remote Collaboration and Digital Tools

Collaboration tools and digital platforms enable seamless communication and collaboration among remote and distributed teams. Virtual meetings, project management software, and collaboration platforms facilitate teamwork and knowledge sharing across geographies. These have been that catalyst for the development of talent clouds and elastic teams - on demand teams of skilled experts who are available and ready to add value to organisations - which raise efficiencies and productivity for organisations, while reducing costs.

Focus on Well-being

Organizations are placing greater emphasis on employee well-being and mental health. Flexible work arrangements, wellness programmes, and initiatives to promote work-life balance are becoming more prevalent, recognizing the importance of supporting freelancers' and employees' physical and mental health.

The symbiotic role between large and small organisations

There is also a symbiotic role between large and small organisations when it comes to the future of work and organisational structures. The Whale and Plankton Eco-System of Mutual Enforcement⁷ is a metaphor often used in the context of business ecosystems to describe the symbiotic relationship between large companies (whales) and smaller, innovative startups (plankton).

Whales represent large, established companies with significant resources, market presence, and customer bases. These companies often have established products or

⁷ [Tobaccowala, Rishad. "The Rise and Fall of Giants?" The Future Does Not Fit in the Containers of the Past. Edition 186.](#)

services, extensive distribution channels, and strong brand recognition. In the ecosystem metaphor, whales provide stability, scale, and resources to the ecosystem.

At the same time, plankton symbolize smaller, agile start-ups or innovative companies that operate within the same ecosystem. These companies are often characterised by their innovation, flexibility, and ability to disrupt traditional markets. In the ecosystem metaphor, plankton contribute to the diversity, innovation, and dynamism of the ecosystem. They are often a resource for the larger organisation to utilise too.

The concept of mutual enforcement refers to the idea that both whales and plankton benefit from their symbiotic relationship within the ecosystem. Whales benefit from partnering with plankton by gaining access to innovative technologies, products, or business models that can complement their existing offerings, enhance their competitiveness, and drive growth. Additionally, partnering with start-ups can help whales stay agile and responsive to market changes.

Plankton benefit from partnering with whales by gaining access to resources, distribution channels, and market insights that can accelerate their growth, increase their visibility, and scale their businesses more rapidly. Partnering with established companies can also provide validation and credibility for start-ups, helping them attract investors and customers.

Overall, the Whale and Plankton Eco-System of Mutual Enforcement highlights the interdependence and symbiotic relationship between large companies and startups within a business ecosystem. By collaborating and leveraging each other's strengths, both whales and plankton can thrive and contribute to the overall health and success of the ecosystem.

The increased use of technology and data at the heart of the organisation

The enhanced utilisation of technology and data has revolutionised how businesses operate, make decisions, and interact within their ecosystems. In the contemporary business landscape, technology is integral to almost every aspect of an organisation's functions, from basic communication and co-ordination to complex decision-making processes. Advanced information systems, such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, enable organisations to integrate and streamline their operations across various departments. These technologies facilitate real-time data sharing, enhance efficiency, and ensure that all parts of the organisation are aligned with strategic goals.

Data has emerged as a critical asset, driving a data-centric approach to decision-making. Organisations now leverage big data analytics to gain insights into customer behaviour, market trends, and operational efficiencies. By harnessing data from diverse sources, companies can perform predictive analytics, identifying patterns and forecasting future trends that inform strategic decisions. This shift towards data-driven decision-making reduces reliance on intuition and guesswork, allowing for more precise and evidence-based strategies. Moreover, data analytics tools enable organisations to

measure performance metrics accurately, assess the effectiveness of various initiatives, and make necessary adjustments to improve outcomes continuously.

The integration of technology and data has also transformed customer engagement and service delivery. Advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and automation have enabled personalised customer experiences and enhanced service efficiency. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants provide instant customer support, while machine learning algorithms analyse customer preferences to deliver tailored recommendations and offers. This personalized approach not only improves customer satisfaction but also fosters loyalty and increases sales. Additionally, technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain are creating new possibilities for innovation in supply chain management, product development, and operational transparency. As technology and data continue to evolve, organizations that effectively harness these tools are better positioned to adapt to changing market dynamics, enhance their competitive edge, and drive sustainable growth.

Furthermore, with increased reliance on technology comes greater cybersecurity risks. Organisations are investing in cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive data, safeguard against cyber threats, and ensure compliance with data protection regulations. Cybersecurity technologies such as encryption, multi-factor authentication, and threat detection systems are essential for mitigating risks in today's digital landscape.

An overhead view of a collaborative workspace. Several people are seated around a round table, their hands visible as they interact with various devices. There are multiple silver laptops open on the table. A person in the upper right is holding a smartphone. A dark blue notebook with a 'BUGATHON' sticker is prominent. A white notepad in the lower center contains handwritten notes: 'Colour's (Spud) 4', 'Colour's (Jane) 1', and 'Spud's 1'. Other items include a glass of water, a glass of orange juice, a pen, and a small plant. The overall scene suggests a meeting or workshop focused on digital tools and collaboration.

Digital transformation: The use of AI and flexible workforces

When it comes to digital transformation, there is a need for enterprise-ready solutions. Companies are looking for third parties to take away the risk - tax, government policy and regulations, intellectual property and privacy concerns - and ensure compliance while increasing efficiencies, reducing costs and accessing the talent that is needed. In this section we define some of the key terms, look at the current trends on AI and flexible talent; and some real-life case studies on how this is working in practice.

DEFINITIONS

When we speak about digital transformation, it is vital that we define the key terms of AI, flexible workforces, talent clouds and elastic teams.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

When it comes to Artificial Intelligence (AI), this refers to the branch of computer science focused on creating systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning from experience, understanding natural language, recognising patterns, solving problems, and making decisions. AI systems achieve these capabilities through a combination of algorithms, machine learning techniques, neural networks, and data analytics. Machine learning - a subset of AI - involves training models on large datasets to identify patterns and make predictions or decisions without explicit programming for each specific task. Deep learning, a further subset, utilises complex neural networks to achieve higher levels of abstraction and comprehension, allowing for more sophisticated applications such as image and speech recognition.

AI encompasses a wide range of technologies and applications, from narrow AI, which is designed to perform a specific task (such as virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa), to general AI, which aims to replicate human cognitive abilities across a variety of tasks. The development and deployment of AI have profound implications across various industries, and as AI continues to advance, it promises to transform how we live and work, presenting both opportunities and challenges related to ethics, employment, and societal impact.

Flexible workforces

A flexible workforce refers to a labour pool that can adapt swiftly and efficiently to changing work demands and conditions. This adaptability is facilitated through various employment arrangements for open talent such as part-time work, telecommuting, freelancing, working to temporary contracts, job sharing, and fractional positions. Flexible workforces enable organizations to respond to fluctuations in market demand, scale operations up or down as needed, and manage resources more effectively. This flexibility not only helps businesses maintain productivity during peak periods or unforeseen disruptions but also supports employees in achieving a better work-life balance, accommodating personal commitments, and reducing stress associated with rigid work schedules.

The concept of a flexible workforce is increasingly important in today's dynamic economic environment, characterized by rapid technological advancements and evolving business models. It allows organizations to leverage a diverse talent pool with specialized skills for specific projects or short-term needs, enhancing innovation and competitiveness. Furthermore, flexibility in the workforce fosters a culture of agility and resilience, where both employers and employees can thrive amidst constant change. This approach to workforce management also encourages inclusivity, as it opens opportunities for individuals who might be unable to commit to traditional full-time roles, such as caregivers, students, or those with mental/physical health constraints, thereby promoting a more diverse and equitable workplace.

Talent clouds

A talent cloud is a digital platform or ecosystem that connects organisations with a vast pool of vetted and skilled freelance, contract, and gig workers: this enables companies to access and leverage specialized skills and expertise on-demand. This cloud-based system facilitates the sourcing, vetting, and management of talent through advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics. By using a talent cloud, companies can efficiently match their project needs with the right professionals, streamline the hiring process, and scale their workforce dynamically to meet changing business requirements. This model promotes flexibility, agility, and cost-effectiveness, as organisations can tap into a global network of talent without the long-term commitments and overhead costs associated with traditional employment.

The concept of a talent cloud aligns with the broader trend towards the gig economy and remote work, offering benefits to both employers and workers. For employers, it provides access to a diverse and highly skilled talent pool, enabling them to quickly fill gaps, drive innovation, and maintain competitive advantage. For workers, a talent cloud offers greater autonomy, the opportunity to work on varied and interesting projects, and the ability to balance work with personal commitments. This model also supports continuous learning and career development, as professionals can engage in different roles across industries, enhancing their skills and marketability. As the workforce landscape continues to evolve, talent clouds are becoming an integral part of strategic human resource management, fostering a more flexible, efficient, and resilient approach to talent acquisition and utilisation.

Elastic teams

Elastic teams can be defined as dynamic groups of professionals that can expand or contract in size and composition based on the specific needs and demands of a project or organisation. This flexibility allows businesses to efficiently allocate resources and expertise where they are most needed, ensuring optimal productivity and responsiveness to changing conditions. Elastic teams are often composed of a mix of full-time employees, part-time workers, freelancers, and consultants, enabling organisations to leverage diverse skills and perspectives. This model supports rapid adaptation to market shifts, project requirements, and technological advancements, promoting agility and innovation within the workforce.

The concept of elastic teams aligns with the increasing emphasis on agility and flexibility in modern business environments. By utilising elastic teams, companies can quickly scale up to meet peak demands or specialized project needs and scale down during slower periods or after project completion, optimising operational efficiency and cost management. This approach also enhances employee engagement and satisfaction by providing opportunities for diverse and meaningful work experiences.

CURRENT TRENDS ON AI AND FLEXIBLE TALENT

Elastic teams can be defined as dynamic groups of professionals that can expand or contract in size and composition based on the specific needs and demands of a project or organisation.

Addressing Talent Shortages

Talent shortages have become a prevalent challenge across various sectors, while being particularly acute in the technology sector. Organisations are continually grappling with the scarcity of skilled professionals to meet their evolving needs, especially in development and operations. This problem is set to worsen with recent European studies showing that only 12 million skilled professionals may be available by the end of the decade, despite EU targets of employing 20 million ICT specialists by 2030⁸. Furthermore, tech talent increasingly does not want to be limited by a 9 to 5 employment structure. This reality has given rise to the development of talent clouds as a dynamic ecosystem of pre-vetted pools of IT talent.

Improving efficiencies for the enterprise

In today's fast-paced business environments, efficiency is paramount for sustainable growth and competitiveness. Traditional talent acquisition processes often entail lengthy recruitment cycles, bureaucratic hurdles, and high overhead costs. Talent Clouds provide a pre-vetted alternative, streamlining the talent acquisition process and eliminating unnecessary intermediaries, offering both remote and on-site talent solutions.

By leveraging Talent Clouds, organisations can adopt agile workforce models, matching specific skills, expertise, and teams with project requirements in real-time. This on-demand access to talent not only accelerates time-to-hire but also optimises resource allocation, minimises idle capacity, and enhances operational efficiencies. Assembling high-performing teams tailored to specific projects, objectives, and deliverables is seen as the way forward and will benefit workers in emerging Europe. An increasing number of organisations - both large and small - are adopting this model in Europe as well as in the US. Moreover, Talent Clouds facilitate seamless collaboration and knowledge

⁸ [European Commission. "First report on the State of the Digital Decade".](#)

sharing, fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement within organisations.

Talent Clouds enable organisations to tap into niche expertise and specialised skills that may not be readily available in-house. This strategic access to diverse talent enhances problem-solving capabilities, drives innovation, and unlocks new opportunities for growth, differentiation and revenue in today's competitive landscape.

The shift from “roles” to “value-added”

To boost productivity and focus on results, successful organisations are embracing outcome and value-based models for talent. In this way they can prioritise results over roles, focusing on the tangible impact of individuals and teams on business outcomes. This results-driven approach not only incentivizes performance but also fosters a culture of accountability, ownership, and collaboration among employees and external talent alike. It also speeds up the learning of individuals through continuous feedback loops, which replace the outdated annual performance review.

Similarly, there is a large amount of debate about whether AI will destroy jobs. By way of an example, a report published in June 2024 by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)⁹ underlined that it has profound concerns about massive labour disruptions and rising inequality as societies move towards artificial intelligence, and it urged governments to do more to protect their economies. Yet the reality is that AI will make tasks easier, quicker and simpler while more jobs will in fact be created.

The move away from the 9 to 5: workers are no longer happy with this

The European Commission states that 43 million people in the EU are expected to be freelancers by 2025. This is backed up by the 2024 Freelancing in Europe¹⁰ report which highlights that a majority of fulltime European freelancers are committed to their freelancing career. Overall, 61% of freelancers reported no current interest in changing to a full-time role. In our 2022 study we found that 78% of freelancers said that they would be doing project work in 12 months¹¹.

This figure is bolstered by the number of people wanting to engage in flexible or hybrid work. According to Eurostat, the share of employed people in the EU who usually work from home increased from 5.4% in 2019 to 12.3% in 2021¹², largely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift indicates a significant move towards more flexible working hours as remote work often allows for greater flexibility compared to traditional office-based

⁹ [Fernanda Brollo ; Era Dabla-Norris ; Ruud de Mooij ; Daniel Garcia-Macia ; Tibor Hanappi ; Li Liu ; Anh D. M. Nguyen. International Monetary Fund \(IMF\). “Broadening the Gains from Generative AI: The Role of Fiscal Policies”](#)

¹⁰ [Malt. Freelancing in Europe 2024.](#)

¹¹ [Future of Work Study 2022: The Voice of Freelancers.](#)

¹² [Statista. Percentage of employed people that sometimes or usually work from home in the European Union \(EU27\)](#)

roles. Furthermore, many European countries have introduced or expanded legislation to support flexible working arrangements. For instance, the UK's Flexible Working Regulations 2014 give all employees the right to request flexible working, and similar laws exist in Germany, the Netherlands, and other European nations. The increased legislative support indicates a societal shift towards valuing work-life balance and flexible hours. A new study highlights that hybrid workers report higher job satisfaction and are less likely to quit, especially if they are nonmanagers, female, or have long commutes¹³. The authors conclude that “a hybrid schedule with two days a week working from home does not damage performance”.

This is a vital societal trend too since flexible work will help to address falling birthrates across Europe and the Western world. An OECD study¹⁴ highlights that the average number of children per woman fell from 3.3 in 1960 to 1.5 in 2022. This leaves the fertility rate well below the “replacement level” of 2.1 and is putting future prosperity of countries at risk, according to them. Flexible work possibilities are cited by the OECD as one of the ways that having children can be more attractive and feasible.

Moreover, a study by the International Workplace Group (IWG) in 2019 found that 80% of workers across Europe would turn down a job that did not offer flexible working¹⁵. There is also a generational shift here. Many Millennials and Gen Z workers regard video calls as “face-to-face” meetings. The older segment of this group — born in the late 1990s, raised on social media and coming of age in the Covid-19 pandemic — value work-life balance above all other elements of corporate culture. Surveys and studies indicate a strong preference for flexible work among European employees.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

BT, for example, is an early adopter of a trend that is spreading. The best leaders have begun to re-design the eco-system and architectures of their companies. Many have started to partner aggressively to quickly scale talent while ensuring flexibility looking across wider horizons to ensure both relevance and access to technology. They know that twisting themselves, fellow workers and corporate structures into new shapes takes time and practice: it can also hurt. This evolution can be seen like going to the gym: initially difficult and painful but something that leads to beneficial results on a number of levels.

This trend can be seen as a corporate gigification of work. Companies are creating internal marketplaces where opportunities can be identified and applied for, and teams of experts can form and dissolve around projects like consulting firms and the entertainment industry have done for decades.

¹³ [Nicholas Bloom, Ruobing Han & James Liang “Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance”. Nature](#)

¹⁴ [OECD. “Society at a Glance 2024”](#)

¹⁵ [International Workplace Group \(IWG\). Annual IWG Global Workspace Survey.](#)

A dimly lit office desk with a laptop, mouse, and various office supplies. The scene is set against a background of vertical blinds. A white ergonomic office chair is positioned in the foreground on the left. The desk is a light wood color and holds a laptop, a mouse, a pen holder with scissors and pens, and some papers. The overall atmosphere is quiet and professional.

Regulatory framework in Europe

In this section we look at the current policy and legislative environment in Europe with a focus on Platform Worker Rights, the AI Act, and GDPR.

PLATFORM ECONOMY WORKER RIGHTS

The EU Platform Work Directive was intended to improve the working conditions of people employed through digital labour platforms. This Directive, proposed by the European Commission in December 2021¹⁶, wanted to address the legal uncertainties and perceived inequalities faced by platform workers by establishing a clear framework for their employment status. The Directive aimed to ensure that workers are granted the rights and protections they are entitled to, including social security, health benefits, and fair working conditions.



In March 2024, the EU Employment & Social Affairs Council met and reached a compromise on the Platform Economy Worker Rights Directive. This is now likely to be formally adopted in September and EU Member States will then have two years to implement the legislation. Given that the Directive is rather vague, it leaves significant room for national discretion when implementation begins.

A key aspect of the Directive left to the national level is the need for criteria for determining the employment status of platform workers. By setting specific criteria, the aim will be to distinguish between genuinely self-employed individuals and those who are effectively employed by the platforms. This is crucial in order to avoid workers being misclassified against their will.

With much of the crucial detail left to the national level, the Directive offers very little substance and no harmonisation across Europe as to the approach to freelancing and platform work.

AI ACT

The AI Act was proposed in 2021¹⁷ and intended as a European law on artificial intelligence (AI) and represents the first comprehensive law on AI by a major regulator globally. The law assigns applications of AI to three risk categories. First, applications and systems that create an unacceptable risk, such as government-run social scoring of the type used in China, are banned. Second, high-risk applications, such as a CV-scanning tool that ranks job applicants, are subject to specific legal requirements. Lastly, applications not explicitly banned or listed as high-risk are largely left unregulated.

In doing so, the Regulatory Framework defines four levels of risk for AI systems. All AI systems considered a clear threat to the safety, livelihoods and rights of people will be

¹⁶ [European Council. EU rules on Platform Work.](#)

¹⁷ [AI Act. COM/2021/206 final.](#)

banned, from social scoring by governments to toys using voice assistance that encourages dangerous behaviour.



The new legislation was agreed in May 2024, and it will be fully applicable 24 months after entry into force, but some parts will be applicable sooner.

For example, the ban of AI systems posing unacceptable risks will apply six months after the entry into force; codes of practice will apply nine months after entry into force; and rules on general-purpose AI systems that need to comply with transparency requirements will apply 12 months after the entry into force.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹⁸ is a comprehensive data protection law implemented by the European Union (EU) that came into effect in May 2018. It was designed to harmonize data privacy laws across Europe, protect the privacy of EU citizens, and reshape the way organisations approach data privacy. The GDPR establishes strict rules for how personal data is collected, stored, and processed, requiring organizations to obtain explicit consent from individuals before using their data. It also grants individuals significant rights over their personal data, including the right to access, rectify, erase, and restrict the processing of their data. Additionally, organisations must implement robust data protection measures and report data breaches within 72 hours.

One of the key aspects of the GDPR is its extraterritorial scope, meaning it applies to any organisation, regardless of location, which processes the personal data of individuals within the EU. This broad reach ensures that EU citizens' data is protected globally. The regulation also introduces hefty fines for non-compliance, with penalties reaching up to EUR 20 million or 4% of the company's global annual turnover, whichever is higher. This significant financial risk has pushed organisations worldwide to prioritize data protection and ensure compliance with GDPR standards. By enforcing stringent data privacy rules, the GDPR aims to enhance consumer trust and security in the digital age, fostering a more transparent and accountable data processing environment.

¹⁸ [GDPR. Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679.](#)

A photograph of three diverse business professionals in a meeting. A woman in the center, wearing a blue blazer over a yellow top, is smiling broadly. To her right, another woman is looking towards her. In the foreground on the left, a man's hands are visible, resting on a table. The background is slightly blurred, showing office equipment like a computer monitor.

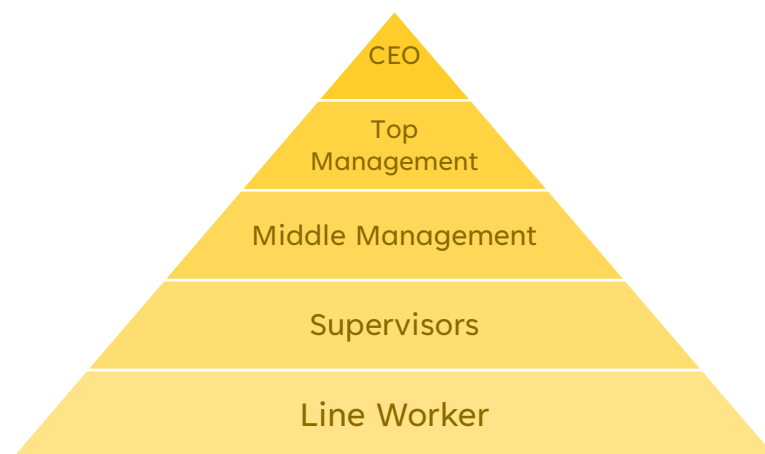
The changing face of leadership

Digitalisation and AI have changed the world of work and also the demands on companies, teams and how to lead. The command-and-control model has been replaced by that of a coach who needs to manage a matrix organisation in terms of locations and functions as well as full time staff, consultants and freelancers, fractional roles (and their rise). Furthermore, remote work presents challenges such as maintaining team cohesion, combating isolation, and managing work-life boundaries. However, it also offers opportunities for increased productivity, creativity, and employee satisfaction when managed effectively.

What is clear is that the days of a one-size-fits all leadership style is over and new hard and soft skills are needed. In this section we look at the transition of leaders from being a boss to a coach; the changes to the old model; the symbiosis of talent and technology; the development of a growth and change mindset; the ability to use data; re-purposing and re-skilling leaders; leadership and hybrid teams; as well as the relationship between AI and leadership.

FROM “BOSS” TO COACH

In many industries - particularly in the “white-collar” sector - the era of “bosses” is in decline. A “boss” can be traditionally defined as someone at the top of an organisational pyramid within a work structure who has a number of reports under them.



Source: [Alleywatch](#)

These individuals make the rules and take decisions while those underneath them in the hierarchical structure carry out these orders. With the world of work become more of a networked matrix in structure, rather than a top-down pyramid, leadership is being forced to change too.

As such, there is a rise in the need for leaders, guides, coaches, mentors, role-models, creators, and builders in the reality of the work landscape of today. Simultaneously there is less of a requirement for bosses, managers, controllers, monitors, evaluators, and other breeds of administrators and paper pushers. Leaders will need to focus on enhancing their craft, skills and relevance as allocating, delegating and monitoring grow less important.

As described earlier in this report, this shift has been driven by changing demographics, the spread of technology, the rise of unbundled and distributed work, new behaviour expectations, and a re-definition of what “work” is including the rise of fractionalised and free-agent talent who work for themselves or at multiple jobs and are expected to comprise most of the work force by 2030.

WHY CRACKS ARE APPEARING IN THE OLD MODEL

In the past a manager within an organisational structure controlled the flow of information, access to opportunities and was a font of expertise and knowledge as well as an example of superlative tradecraft within his/her field.

Today the half-life of knowledge is growing shorter and shorter due to technology and the “this is the way things were done” approach is often the opposite of what needs to be done today as new competitors and changing customer expectations increasingly disrupt whole sectors with increasing regularity, and are not bound by the often limiting structures and norms of the status quo ante.

THE SYMBIOSIS OF TALENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Leaders today need to facilitate talent working and integrating with machines, tools and applications to facilitate people’s strengths in addition to increasing efficiencies, improving results and reducing costs. AI will turbo-charge this change in the form, structure and meaning of leadership in ways deeper and faster than anyone of us can even comprehend as the cost of knowledge moves towards zero and enables talented individuals to combine, re-combine, scale and re-invent in new ways. Talent can also find information, opportunity, and knowledge at the click of a mouse, or via a sharply written prompt.

The unbundling and distribution of where and when we work has just begun and culture, teams and excellence will need to be cultivated across time and space with limited in-person interaction as the age of AI, Web 3, XR will make working anywhere and everywhere increasingly the default state in white collar industries making old-fashioned monitoring, controlling, and overseeing difficult and often irrelevant.

Thanks to technology, leadership has become a role and not a job title. It is a way of being infused with a passion for excellence and a quest for middle to long term multi-stakeholder growth (the company, community, employee and leader) versus a focus on the short term and emphasizing only investor/owner benefits. Today it is the ability to communicate and motivate in person and across space: making the most of every moment and interaction rather orders and physical proximity. By utilising technology, a leader today needs to inspire, guide, mentor, build, empathise and unleash potential. Most importantly it is about the continuous feedback and facilitating a growth mindset in others.

DEVELOPING A GROWTH AND CHANGE MINDSET

Leaders can develop a growth and change mindset through several key strategies. Firstly, they should embrace a culture of continuous learning, feedback and curiosity. Ongoing analysis of performance and results tied to projects leads to accelerated feedback loops¹⁹ whereby everyone can learn and redeploy these lessons learned immediately. This approach involves seeking out new knowledge, skills, and experiences and encouraging their teams to do the same. Leaders can participate in professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and courses, and foster an environment where learning is valued and shared among team members. By modelling a commitment to learning, leaders can inspire their teams to adopt a similar mindset.

Moreover, leaders need to cultivate resilience and adaptability. This means being open to feedback, learning from failures, and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles. Leaders can practice resilience by setting realistic goals, maintaining a positive attitude in the face of setbacks, and developing problem-solving skills. Encouraging a culture of experimentation, where taking calculated risks and learning from the outcomes is normalised, helps in building an adaptable organisation. In the same way, leaders should also promote psychological safety, ensuring team members feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns without fear of judgement or retribution.

THE ABILITY TO USE DATA

A vital element of leadership today is the ability to analyse data, since there has been an explosion in the amount of data available from an increased number of sources. Data-driven decision-making allows leaders to make more informed and accurate decisions. By leveraging data, leaders can identify trends, uncover insights, and predict future outcomes, which helps in formulating strategies that are grounded in empirical evidence rather than intuition or guesswork. This analytical approach reduces uncertainty and enhances the effectiveness of decisions, leading to better resource allocation, improved operational efficiency, and stronger competitive positioning.

In addition, data analysis enables leaders to understand and respond to the needs and behaviour of partners, customers and employees more effectively. Through the analysis of customer data, leaders can gain insights into customer preferences, behaviour and feedback, allowing them to tailor products and services to meet market demands more precisely. Similarly, analysing employee data can help leaders identify areas for improvement in employee engagement, productivity, and satisfaction. This understanding fosters a more personalised and responsive approach to management, improving overall organisational performance and morale.

Furthermore, the ability to analyse data is crucial for driving innovation and continuous improvement. Data analytics can reveal opportunities for process optimisation, cost reduction, and new business ventures. By continuously monitoring and analysing

¹⁹ [Matthew Coatney & Matthew Mottola. “The Human Cloud: How Today's Changemakers Use Artificial Intelligence and the Freelance Economy to Transform Work”.](#)

performance metrics, leaders can implement iterative improvements and innovations that keep the organisation agile and competitive. Additionally, data analysis supports risk management by identifying potential issues before they escalate, allowing leaders to proactively address challenges and capitalise on opportunities. In today's fast-paced and data-rich environment, leaders who excel in data analysis are better equipped to navigate complexity, drive growth, and sustain long-term success.

TEACHING OLD DOGS NEW TRICKS: RE-PURPOSING AND RE-SKILLING LEADERS

Those leaders with skills and mindsets forged in a different era can re-invent and re-wire their skills if they want to. This transformation requires three conditions:

Firstly, it requires today's bosses to accept that to grow and remain relevant they will have to change and while it may be difficult it is better than becoming irrelevant.

Secondly, it requires their leaders to ensure that new incentive systems that are more about zone of influence, growth of craft and people versus zone of control of budgets and team size are put into place.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need for coaching and training to help today's managers become tomorrow's leaders.

LEADERSHIP AND HYBRID TEAMS

When it comes to the practicalities of leading and motivating hybrid teams, it is important that processes are adapted to the realities of open talent structures, and do not shoehorn 9 to 5 practices into the new reality.

Some of the key leadership approaches can be summarised as follows:



Establishing clear rules of engagement and developing daily rituals so everyone knows what to expect, which in turn, increases inclusion within the virtual team as well as productivity.



Communication is the foundation of any successful team, but it becomes even more critical in a virtual and/or matrix setting. Leaders must establish clear and consistent communication channels to ensure that team members are informed, engaged, and aligned with the team's goals. This involves regular check-ins, virtual meetings, and using various communication tools like email, instant messaging, and video conferencing. Leaders should also set clear expectations regarding communication norms, such as response times and preferred platforms, to avoid misunderstandings and ensure smooth collaboration.



Avoiding virtual micromanagement and instead, trusting individuals to get the work done. The rise of “mouse moving” applications to imply activity and virtual spying are the wrong approach to management and leadership in the future of work.



Building on the previous point, trust is essential for the success of virtual teams, as team members often work independently and without direct supervision. Leaders can build trust by being reliable, transparent, and supportive. This involves delivering on promises, sharing information openly, and being available to assist team members when needed. Encouraging autonomy and demonstrating confidence in team members’ abilities also fosters a sense of trust and empowerment. Leaders should make an effort to get to know their team members - full time employees and temporary staff - personally, understanding their strengths, challenges, and motivations, to build strong, trusting relationships.



Promoting employee development by equipping employees with the skills they need to succeed now and, in the future, as well as empowering employees to contribute by connecting remote workers with their in-office and remote colleagues. Given the rise of talent clouds and elastic teams, these groups no longer just come together on an ad hoc basis but are increasingly a resource whose knowledge and expertise can be leveraged on multiple projects.



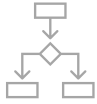
Ensuring employees have the right tools set up for each individual’s unique situation. Utilising the right technology is crucial for managing virtual teams. Leaders must select and leverage tools that facilitate collaboration, project management, and communication. This includes video conferencing software for face-to-face interactions, project management platforms to track progress and deadlines, and collaboration tools that allow for real-time document sharing and editing. Leaders should ensure that all team members are comfortable using these tools and provide training if necessary. Additionally, staying updated on technological advancements and continuously evaluating the team’s tech stack can enhance productivity and efficiency.



Treat full time employees and open talent - whether they be freelancers, contractors or part time staff - in the same way and give them the same access to information, tools and resources.

AI AND LEADERSHIP

AI is also having a clear and growing impact on leadership, from the demands that are placed on individuals to the efficiency gains that it can facilitate if utilised correctly. The AI elements linked to leadership cover:



Data-Driven Decision Making: AI now enables leaders to access and analyse vast amounts of data quickly and accurately, leading to more informed and data-driven decision-making processes. Leaders can rely on AI-powered analytics to identify patterns, trends, and insights that may not be apparent through traditional methods.



Enhanced Productivity: AI tools can automate routine tasks, freeing up leaders' time to focus on more strategic and creative aspects of their roles. This increased productivity allows leaders to devote more attention to high-value activities such as innovation, problem-solving, and team development.



Personalized Leadership: AI can help leaders personalize their leadership approach by providing insights into individual employee preferences, strengths, and development areas. By leveraging AI-driven assessments and feedback mechanisms, leaders can tailor their communication, coaching, and mentoring strategies to better meet the needs of their team members.



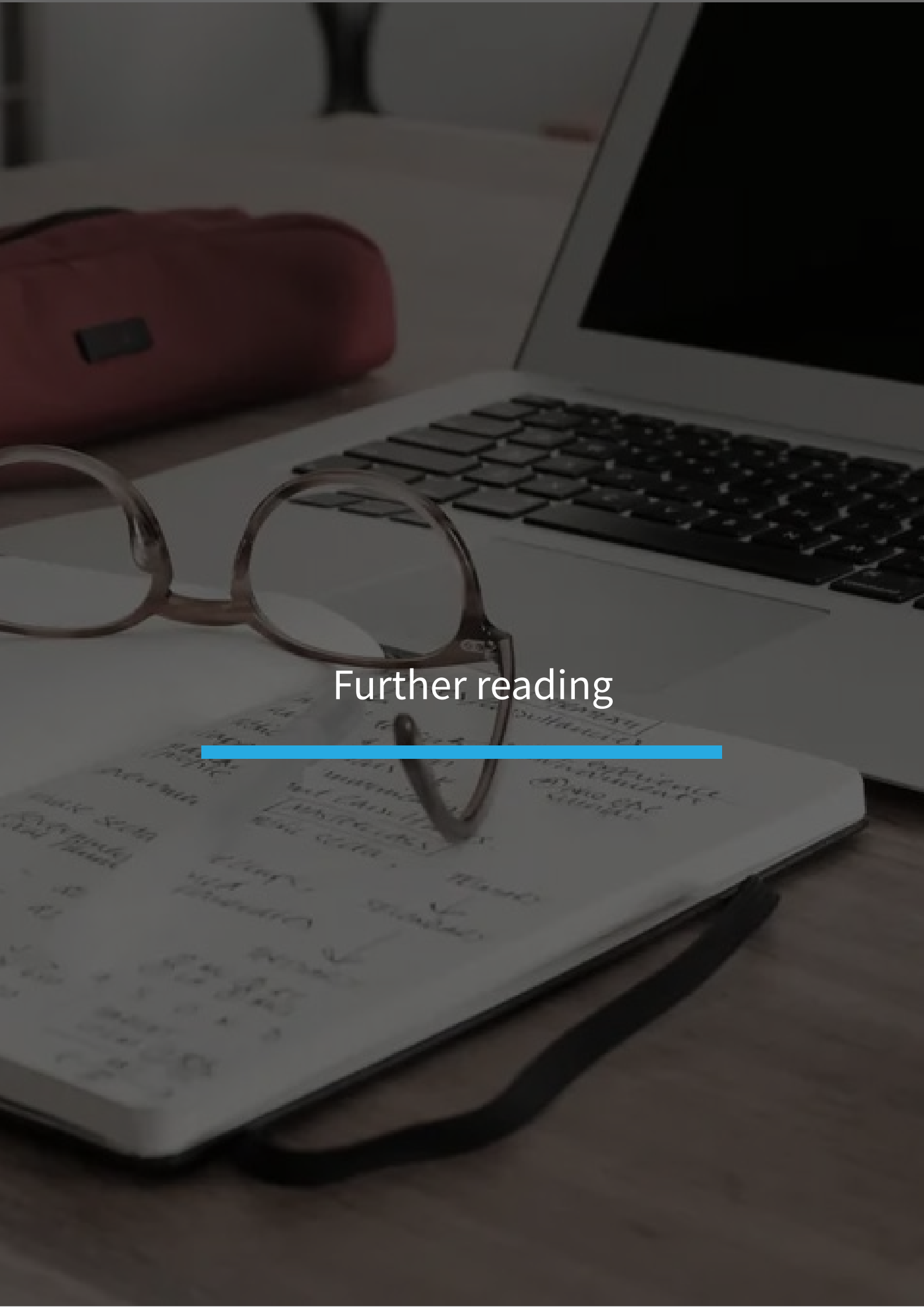
Predictive Insights: AI algorithms can analyse historical data and identify patterns to predict future outcomes and trends. Leaders can use these predictive insights to anticipate challenges, mitigate risks, and capitalise on opportunities, enabling proactive decision-making and strategic planning.



Augmented Decision Support: AI systems can serve as valuable support tools for leaders, offering recommendations and insights based on complex data analysis. While the final decision ultimately rests with the leader, AI can provide valuable insights and alternative perspectives to inform the decision-making process.



Ethical and Bias Considerations: Leaders must navigate the ethical and bias implications of AI in leadership. They need to ensure that AI systems are designed and deployed in a fair and transparent manner, without reinforcing or perpetuating biases. Leaders must also consider the ethical implications of AI-driven decisions, particularly regarding employee privacy, autonomy, and accountability.

A photograph of a desk setup. In the foreground, a pair of round, light-colored glasses rests on an open notebook with handwritten notes. The notebook is on a wooden surface. In the background, a silver laptop is open, and a red bag is visible to the left. The entire scene is dimly lit, with a dark overlay.

Further reading



[Digitalisation and the Labour Market of Tomorrow \(September 2023\)](#)



[The Voice of Freelancers \(September 2022\)](#)



[A Fair Gig: addressing the working conditions of platform workers and the policy approach to the Platform Economy in Europe \(September 2021\)](#)



[A New Hope: the role of the Platform Economy in facilitating migrants into the Swedish labour market \(March 2021\)](#)



[The Human Cloud: How Today's Changemakers Use Artificial Intelligence and the Freelance Economy to Transform Work \(January 2021\)](#)



About the authors

FREE TRADE EUROPA

Free Trade Europa is an independent think tank promoting the social, economic and political benefits of openness, liberalisation and free trade for governments, companies and citizens. Free Trade Europa has written extensively about the platform, gig and sharing economy and published the following studies: “Nordic Disruption: Analysing the Platform Economy in Sweden”, “A New Hope: the role of the Platform Economy in facilitating migrants into the Swedish Labour market” and “A Fair Gig: addressing the working conditions of platform workers and the policy approach to the Platform Economy in Europe”.



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EWORK GROUP

Ework Group provides total talent solutions by forming successful collaborations; connecting partners & professionals and clients in partnerships; as well as by bridging brilliant minds to great ideas, for the benefit of individuals, organizations and society. Ework Group believes that bridging, not broking, is the future of work and the future of business.



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Accace is a proactive consultancy and outsourcing partner who bridges the gap between needs and solutions. Combining smart and streamlined technology with a holistic approach, Accace provides accounting; payroll and HR services; tax advisory and compliance support; transaction and legal advice; as well as market entry support to companies and organisations. With over 800 experts and more than 2,000 customers, Accace has vast experience in facilitating the smooth operation and growth of small to large-scale, global businesses.



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HUMAN CLOUD

Human Cloud is the global advisory firm on the freelance economy. Fuelled with over a decade of experience scaling digital first models across various environments, Human Cloud bridges the gap between technology promise and commercial realization for digital first work models that will become the global default by 2030.

Human Cloud helps three major segments of the global economy. First, Human Cloud helps large, Fortune 500 enterprises integrate digital first work models within their talent strategy so they can scale digital first workforces. Second, Human Cloud helps industry solutions like talent platforms, talent providers, and talent applications adapt to enterprise needs, connect with industry peers, and access market intelligence so they can grow sustainable businesses. Third, Human Cloud helps governments and investment firms make strategic decisions into how their portfolios and initiatives should embrace freelance solutions.

Along with a proprietary knowledge graph that enables prescriptive intelligence on the freelance economy, Human Cloud has the #1 global podcast on the freelance economy, contributes to Forbes and major media publications, and published Agile Talent with Harvard Business Review Press and The Human Cloud with HarperCollins.



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Distributed is a platform which allows companies and organisations to build and deliver software projects faster and better than ever before through the employment of Elastic Teams. Distributed is rebuilding work in a way that's better for people and better for businesses through the flexible deployment of highly skilled talent, working remotely and coming together in teams that clients access through a private talent cloud.



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the companies, platforms, entrepreneurs, freelancers and independent workers from a whole range of sectors across Europe who generously gave their time and freely shared their thoughts, ideas, hopes and concerns with us. We also immensely appreciate the support of Atlas Network.

AI and flexible workforces are necessitating a change in focus for leaders as the very essence of leadership alters, yet these challenges are not insurmountable. They just require flexibility and a new mindset. Similarly, understanding where to regulate and where to stand back in order to facilitate opportunity, entrepreneurship and growth is vital for decision-makers, particularly as the European Platform Work legislation is implemented across the EU.

Future of Work Study 2024