

# The Future of Work: How Future-Ready Leaders Succeed in a World Reeling from Disruption

## Do you want to know what the future of work will be?

Of course you do. We all want to predict the future. We want a map to guide us to our destination: enter the address in our mobile so we can set our course for our business plans, strategic plans, change management plans, retirement plans... But, as a Danish politician once said, "It's hard to make predictions, especially about the future" when all we can see is the road winding off into the distance ahead of us.

I don't know exactly what the future of work will be, either. But I do see several key trends emerging that can give us insights into it.

I've often heard people say that work is changing because of a values shift—that our values changed because of COVID. I don't believe that. No, COVID prompted people to take action on their values—which is why we are seeing an increased demand for a hybrid workforce and the job market influenced by how employees are wanting to work. As we've seen, striking the balance between the needs of the organization and the needs of the individual is the ongoing tension both private and public sector organizations are experiencing.

In all the research and discussions with audience members, I've had over the last few years, I've come to the conclusion that the evolution of work has three main drivers:

1. Advancements in technology
2. The changing economic landscape
3. Shifting societal expectations

While it is difficult to predict the future of work, each of these drivers has several trends, though their impact may vary across industries, regions, and socioeconomic groups. Think about your workplace and how these have driven your work and how you work.

## 1. Advancements in Technology

**Automation and artificial intelligence (AI):** The integration of automation hasn't progressed as originally expected, but it is still happening. Routine and repetitive tasks can be automated, freeing up us human workers to focus on more complex and creative work. However, this also means that some jobs may become obsolete or require reskilling.

**Collaboration between humans and machines:** Because of this, the future of work is expected to involve increased collaboration between humans and machines. AI and automation can augment human capabilities, leading to more efficient and productive work environments.

**The human touch:** Skills such as critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving will become increasingly valuable as machines take over the more repetitive tasks. (For more information on mindset and engaging others to take action, see my latest book, *Spark Action* [www.sparkactionbook.com](http://www.sparkactionbook.com).) The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023 supports this: it finds that in addition to flexibility and agility, analytical thinking and creative thinking remain the most important skills for workers in 2023 and beyond.

## 2. Changing Economic Landscapes

**The rise of the entrepreneur, the gig economy, and freelancing:** Many employees were laid off as a result of COVID and had to figure out how to support themselves and their families. They applied their creativity and developed new products, services, and businesses, and more entrepreneurs were born. Many of them sold back their services to companies, as the organizations found it more cost efficient to hire per contract, rather than provide benefits or a guarantee of a steady income. This has fed into the growing popularity of the gig economy, characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work, as more individuals are seeking greater autonomy and more diverse experiences. But many organizations are having a hard time adapting to that, hence the talent shortage experienced world-wide. I've heard consistently from hiring managers, from banks to restaurants, "Where did people disappear to? Where are people working?" Platforms for connecting entrepreneurs, freelancers, and employers continue to emerge, providing new opportunities but also challenges related to workers' and employers' rights and protections.

**Emphasis on well-being and juggling work and personal lives:** The future of work is likely to prioritize employee well-being and to foster discussions around balancing the peaks and valleys of our work and personal lives. I don't believe it's a 50/50 split (or balance) between work and life. But I do know that everyone is different and requires a different mix of work and life—and has different ideas about what is and isn't work. Employees aren't in unlimited supply, and employers are having to recognize the importance of creating a positive work environment that promotes mental health, physical well-being, and work satisfaction. Flexible working hours, wellness programs, and engaging company cultures are some ways organizations are addressing these needs.

## 3. Shifting Societal Expectations

**Remote and flexible work:** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work, and it is likely to remain a prominent feature of the future of work. The effects of this are not only economical, as I've just mentioned, but also social and personal. Technology enables individuals to work from anywhere, fostering flexibility and the ability to integrate and separate our work and lives. In large urban centres, commuting times eat up much of a person's day, usually without compensation. Can't it be more productive to not spend only two or three rather than five days a week commuting? On the other hand, in-person time with your team members is also valuable, as often the most important conversations are the spontaneous ones that happen outside the meeting, which can't be facilitated via technology. This shift has led to the rise of hybrid work models, where employees divide their time between remote and in-person work.

**The rise of the robots:** With the rise of automation and AI, ethical considerations become essential. Questions surrounding data privacy, algorithmic bias, job displacement, and social inequalities need to be addressed.

**Diversity and equity:** Organizations are recognizing that a diversity of individuals, with differing backgrounds, leads to a diversity of thinking and problem solving, which enhances an organization's ability to continually shift and evolve to stay efficient, productive, and competitive in the future of work. It makes sense, then, that the future of work involves increased discussion around DEI initiatives and ensuring a fair and inclusive workforce. Of course, that is easier said than done in many places around the world.

## So how do we predict the future of work?

What does all this mean for us as business owners, as leaders, or as team members? Scan your environment both inside and outside of work:

1. How are you and others using technology in your personal and professional life? How do you search and retrieve information? How fast do you expect a response from a person? Are you OK with waiting several days or do you want to hear back right away? Are there things you expect a machine to do now that you would formerly have had done by a person—or not at all?
2. What's happening economically around you? How does that affect how you deliver your services? How does it affect your staff? How are your workers' expectations impacting your organization's budget? How is the economic landscape affecting your personal spending? Are you spending differently? Are you asking for and expecting different services?
3. What's going on societally? What are you seeing in diverse news sources (don't just pick one)? How has shifting societal expectation affected you personally? Where are you and your company in regard to the ethical considerations of work flexibility, automation and AI, and diversity and equity?

No matter how you look at it, the future of work is about change. The ability to adapt and embrace change will be critical for individuals and organizations. Keep an eye on these three drivers. You won't always know exactly where you'll end up, but you'll be able to see which way you're heading and plan accordingly.

### About the author:

Gregg Brown is an internationally recognized change expert, future of work strategist, best selling author and keynote speaker who empowers organizations to thrive in the future of work. With a career spanning 30 years, Gregg has thrived in multiple leading roles across diverse industries in the private and public sector.

Gregg's ideas on change, and the future of work have been featured in prominent publications such as *Forbes*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *Entrepreneur*, and numerous HR publications.

He has engaged thousands of individuals on hundreds of stages in some of the world's leading organizations - at Fortune 500 companies, governments, and humanitarian organizations worldwide, equipping them with the courage and practical tools to dive fearlessly into the never-ending waves of change.

Gregg has a graduate degree from the University of Leicester in the UK and is an associate member of the American Psychological Association. Gregg's latest book *Spark Action: How to Lead Change That Matters* is a #1 Amazon Bestseller and is recommended as "One of the top books to read in 2024" by Thinkers360.

