fuze

Workforce FUTURES

The role of people in the future of work

TABLE OF **CONTENTS**

Introduction.....1
1. Work-as-a-Service.....2
2. The World is Your Office.....8
3. The EmployMe.....15
Workforce Futures: The Top Four Trends.....20

Global research from **6,600 workers** across **9 countries.**

Research Methodology
Fuze commissioned research company Vitreous World to survey 6,604 knowledge workers employed by private sector organizations with 500 or more employees. Respondents were based in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Scandinavia, Spain, the UK, and the United States. The survey was administered online.

INTRODUCTION

Technology advancements, distributed workforces, and an overhaul in the way people think about work are driving a fundamental shift in the way that today's businesses must operate.

At the heart of this shift is a wave of new technologies that many businesses – and workers – do not yet fully understand.

From machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and edge computing to the Internet of Things (IoT), technological innovation is forcing changes at a rate that many businesses – and senior management teams – don't feel comfortable adapting to.

At the same time, companies are also adjusting to a rapidly-changing worker mindset. Where once, businesses worried that millennials would change their working practices, now many are witnessing a much more fundamental shift across all aspects of their businesses.

Demand for flexible working practices, open office cultures, and a positive work-life balance are no longer exclusive to a particular age bracket or generation, but are rather emerging across every level of the working world.

Despite this shift, too many business leaders are still standing in the way. Rather than allowing employees to work in a way that maximizes their personal productivity, too many businesses are enforcing rigid boundaries on the definition of work.

At the same time, IT leaders looking to innovate and drive technological change are also being held back, with many business leaders still seeing IT as little more than a cost-reduction function.

This report presents a vision for the future of work through the eyes of those on the frontlines. Drawing on global research carried out with 6,600 workers from companies of 500+ staff, the report provides a deep-dive analysis into the tools, trends and technologies that will define the working world over the years to come.

1. WORK-AS-A-**SERVICE**

Shifting employee demands

In the last 10 years, there's been a fundamental shift in the world of work. The concept of work as being 'what we do' rather than 'where we are' is now firmly cemented in the modern consciousness, driven by millennials and the generations who have followed.

Shifting employee demand for greater balance between their career and personal life is giving rise to a new way of thinking about work that removes the restrictions of what we are traditionally used to.

“The very nature of work is changing with significant growth in non-routine work over the last 30 years—especially project work—coupled with the technology-accelerated pace of business. This is dramatically changing employers’ emphasis on their talent and their need for workers to be flexible and adapt to the evolving marketplace. Leading corporations are recognizing that to achieve greater employee responsiveness, they must engage workers more, and discover when, where, and how they work best, as well as promote open mindsets. Increasingly aligned with employees’ desires for new ways of working, competitive employers are seeking to discover each person’s optimal work conditions so they can be as productive as possible.”

Sophie Wade
Workforce Innovation Specialist
Flexcel Network

SWITCHING ON **'WORK MODE'**

Work no longer has to be bound by set working hours, office walls, or company structures. Work-as-a-Service (WaaS) means workers can switch into- and out-of-work mode at the touch of a button, at the time, and location of their choice — whether it's to check emails for just 15 minutes, join a video call for an hour, or work outside of the company office.

This cultural shift is not about expecting employees to work additional hours, but rather to allow them to work when they are the most effective, avoid the hours when their productivity naturally dips, and give every opportunity to balance personal commitments.

The drivers for on-demand working

of workers say work-life balance is an important factor when searching for new job

of workers say flexible working should be how we work, not a benefit

employees work outside of their contracted work hours as they are more productive

*Being able to work **when they want to** is the most important element of flexible working for today's employees, above location.*

THE APPEAL OF **WORKING FROM ANYWHERE**

Today's employees are challenging established working practices, with 79% wanting to work outside of the company office. The majority of workers are willing to make sacrifices for the flexibility they seek, with more than half saying they will move jobs to gain greater flexibility in **where and when** they work.

What employees would give for greater flexibility

would move to another company

would take on a greater workload

would pay for their own technology

would give up company benefits

would take a pay cut or demotion

From the perspective of the modern workforce, the barriers for a 'work from everywhere' culture are low, with 84% saying they could work productively outside of a company office, given the right technology.

ADAPTING TO THE **GIG MINDSET**

The gig economy is part of a cultural shift within the business environment, where temporary positions are common, and businesses engage independent workers on short-term contracts.

For employers, there are a number of drivers for the gig mindset, with savings on office space, training and benefits, alongside the ability to 'flex' the workforce as demands the business requires.

While concerns by governments, businesses, and the media have been raised around job stability and long-term incomes for workers, it seems these aren't shared by the global workforce — particularly those aged under 45 years.

of workers say freelance and short-term contracts are an appealing way to work

of workers would prefer a job with no set hours

of workers would prefer a job that offers flextime

“Companies seem to be getting the message—they are less focused on retaining full-time employees and more concerned with improving key business processes that make everyone more successful. According to the Frost & Sullivan research, about one-third of respondents found reducing operational costs, improving the customer experience and improving their digital presence as top drivers for IT investment over the next two years. Improving digital presence was new on the list this year—and it involves deploying robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies, among other things.

What dropped? Attaining and retaining workforce, by eight points. That’s because even as companies look to digital transformation to change the ways they do business, they are realizing that employees want a change, too—and companies are adapting their priorities accordingly.”

Melanie Turek
VP of Research at Frost & Sullivan

THE PROJECT ECONOMY

Super mobile, super connected

“**We’re all in a ‘project economy’ now.** For the most recent measurable period, all net US employment growth came from the increase in independent workers, whose population jumped more than 50% while the number of traditional jobholders actually declined. And despite media portrayals these aren’t Uber drivers or Airbnb hosts - they’re strategists, designers, brand consultants, technologists, and specialists of the sort most organizations can’t afford or wouldn’t choose to keep on permanent payroll.

Executives – once alerted to look around their own businesses through this filter – suddenly notice they’re everywhere. The more our project teams include independents, the more every employee’s perceptions change about what a relationship with work can be like, about what we’re entitled to ask of it. Employees start reimagining work at its best—what we work on, who we work with, where we work, and how.”

Michael Hopkins
Work futurist and founder of
The Solo Project

2. THE **WORLD** IS YOUR OFFICE

The shifting role of the company office

The role of the physical company office is in the spotlight, as ongoing advances in technology open up increasing possibilities to work from everywhere.

Gone are the days when a commute to work at the same desk, from the same office, with the same people is required to 'get work done'. Yet, it's unlikely that we will see the eradication of millions of square feet of office space as the global workforce works from a home office, café, or airport lounge.

Today's workers see an opportunity between these two extremes—one that engineers opportunities for team work and in-person contact, and promotes the ideal blend between work and personal life.

The Death of the Company Office?

Not yet...

Introducing a remote or flexible working policy doesn't mean that your staff will instantly decamp to the nearest coffee shop. Workers of all ages place importance on being visible with colleagues and the value of creating work-focused relationships.

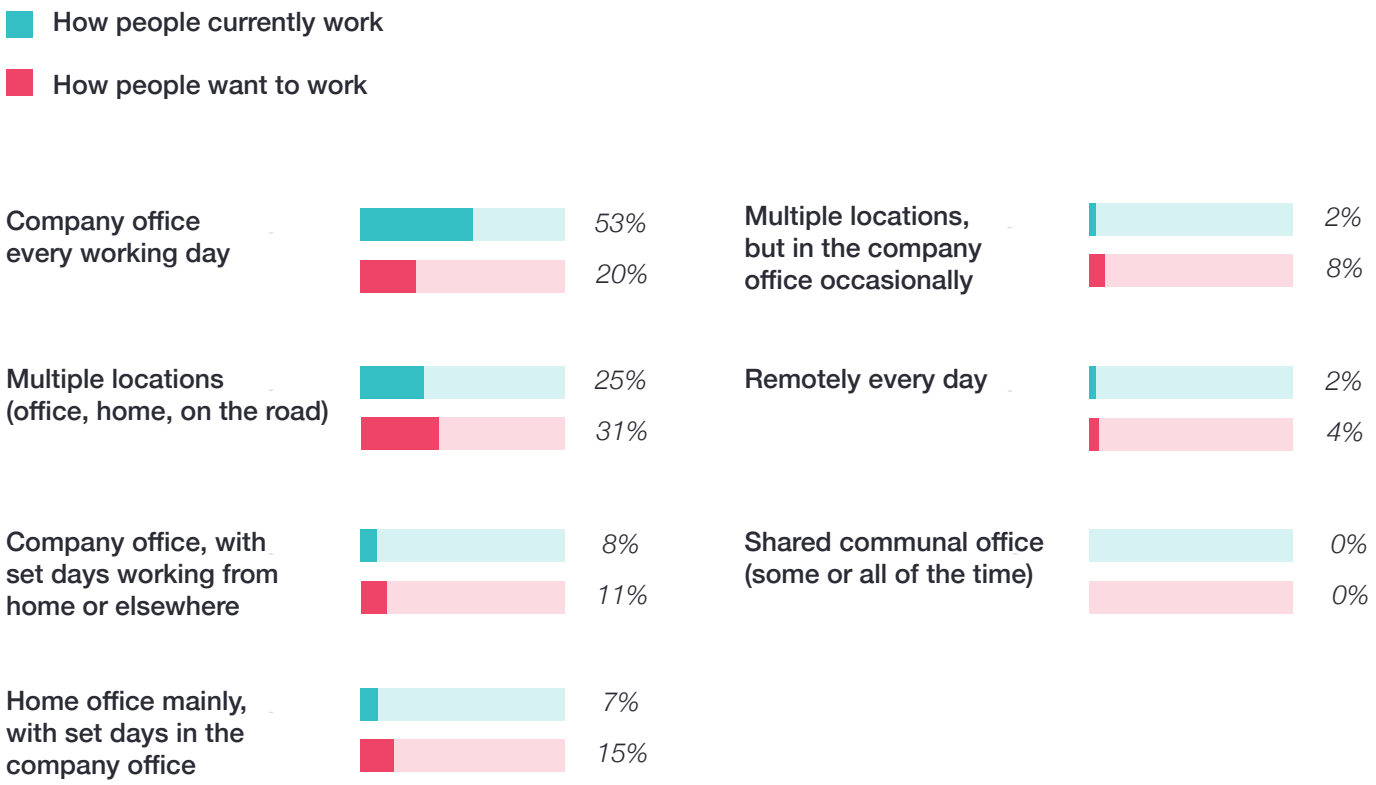
Today, 97% of workers currently work from a company office at least some of the time. But, more importantly, given the choice in where they work, a **significant 93% of employees would continue to incorporate spending some time at the main company office into their working week**.

The difference is in how a company office is balanced with other places to work. More than half of workers (53%) currently work from the company office every working day, but this is only desired by 20% of employees. Instead, employees wish to incorporate working from multiple locations, such as home, on the move, and from other locations.

work from the company office every working day

wish to do so

Preferences on Where People Work

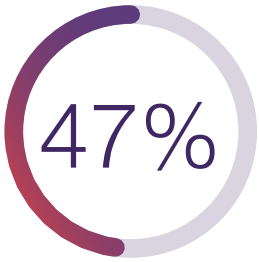


CHANGING OFFICE WORKSPACES

The company office isn't disappearing any time soon, but its role and characteristics will no doubt change. One recent report shows that up to 30% of corporate real estate portfolios will incorporate flexible workspaces by 2030[1]. Offices are more likely to be built around core hubs and comprising fewer locations, with environments that allow people to move freely and easily from desk to table to couch to collaboration space.

When workers do come into the office, they expect maximum collaboration time, focusing their energy on catch-ups, face-to-face time, and socializing.

of workers come into the office to collaborate face-to-face on specific projects



of workers come into the office to socialize

of workers come into the office purely to appear visible to their colleagues

[1]Workspace reworked http://ridethewave.jll.com/

"The 'tech vs human' mindset is coming to an end. Instead, workers are looking for the ways that technology can help put people first. Whether by enhancing their creativity, creating collaborative environments or building a better work-life balance, technology is now a supplement rather than a replacement to the human workforce.

Those businesses that embrace this fact and adopt the cultures and technologies that encourage such a mindset, will be the first to thrive in the new era of collaborative change.

When building their own way of working, four out of five workers would include some kind of communal working space. The appeal of shared offices and working spaces is high among those aged under 35 years, cited by 56%, while those most likely to want to work from the main company office are owners/partners (84%) and senior management (85%)."

Vikas Shah
Workplace Futurist

When building their own way of working,

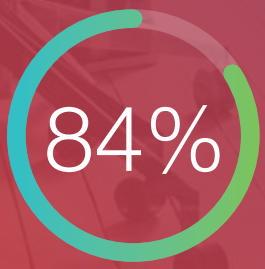
4 out of 5 workers

would include some kind of communal working space.

of workers aged under 35

would work from shared offices and working spaces such as a WeWork.

But the preference shifts towards working in the office for senior management and partners.



owners/partners

senior management

most likely to want to work from the main company office

BUILDING A WORKING ENVIRONMENT AROUND THE OFFICE

of workers would include working from a shared workspace, like WeWork

of workers would include working from a company office

Businesses today are beginning to redesign their office spaces to reflect the increasingly collaborative use of the space. Open plan offices, with added quiet spaces, are simply the start of something much bigger and an indication of how the modern workplace is evolving.

"The workplace is changing to accommodate the new ways of working, which demands collaboration and teaming in new and creative ways. To that end, half of the respondents in a Frost & Sullivan survey say their businesses use huddle room video conferencing, which is meant for small rooms of up to four participants. Clearly, communications and collaboration are still top-of-mind for most organizations around the world. When specifically looking at workplace communications, the top three priorities for spending include web conferencing, smart phones for business purposes, and social media/collaboration tools.

Furthermore, when asked the question 'how critical are the following investments for your organization's digital transformation success over the next five years,' data analytics and communications/collaboration tools integration with other business software came out ahead. About 75 percent of the respondents rated these as either somewhat important or very important—meaning they understand that information sharing on a human level affects every aspect of their business—and is driving business success today, and into the future."

Melanie Turek
VP of Research at Frost & Sullivan

THE **'OUT-OF-OFFICE'** SPACE

Demand for working outside of the office is high, with 77% of workers wanting to incorporate this approach into their work week.

Today, the rise of the cloud coupled with the proliferation of high-speed broadband and wireless communications makes it possible for workers to access the files, systems, and applications they need from any location. Yet, while 'work from everywhere' is possible, it's not quite the reality for every worker.

Alongside technology, employees face other challenges when it comes to company culture. The desire for flexible and remote work shouldn't negate the need to feel connected to the company, its culture, and the wider workforce. Businesses that engage their employees and make them feel like part of a team see an increase in staff loyalty, higher rates of productivity, less absenteeism and ultimately, an increase in profitability. By providing staff with the tools to work remotely, yet still feel part of the team, businesses can provide a best of both worlds approach.

Executives and middle managers still seem reluctant to provide employees with the freedom they demand – focusing on the importance of short-term processes rather than long term productivity. Yet the drivers for remote and flexible working are not based around doing less work, but rather creating opportunities to be more productive.

THE **'OUT-OF-OFFICE' TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE** FOR WORKERS

can access the same files as they could in the office

have the same conferencing and messaging tools

are provided with technology that doesn't work effectively

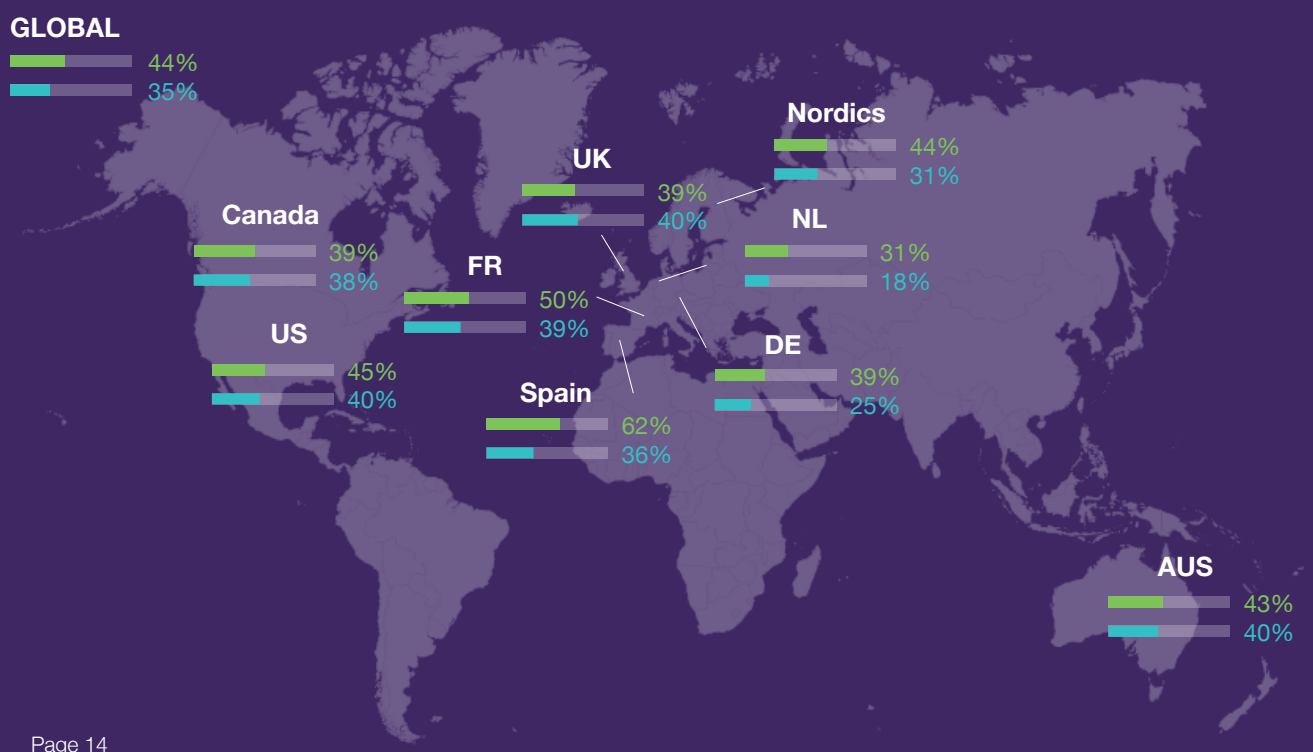
How to maintain culture in the age of remote working

Remote and flexible working can prove vital in making employees feel engaged and valued, and in increasing workplace productivity. At the same time, remote or flexible work policies have made it more difficult than ever to maintain a strong company culture. The secret to overcoming this concern, is in communicating that culture clearly and openly at every opportunity. Allowing employees to define the culture themselves is no longer enough. Instead, businesses must make a targeted effort to apply their culture, inspiring the right mindset across everything they do. By adopting an 'employee first' approach, businesses can make sure that their workforces are provided with tools, training and working styles that suit them. By combining the right mindset with the right technologies, today's businesses can actually use remote working tools to improve the spread of their cultural values, reaching employees all around the globe.

The Perception of Remote Work around the Globe

A remote-working culture is not being championed by executives at my company

Remote working is viewed negatively by colleagues



3. THE EMPLOY**ME**

Unleashing the individual in an age of machines

It's impossible to talk about the future of work without addressing the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, augmented reality, and automation and how it will impact the workplace of tomorrow. This impact doesn't have to be negative.

The wave of machine-led technologies has the potential to unleash the exclusively human traits of creativity, collaboration, and communication and these will come to define the new workforce and the future of workplace productivity.

The workforce of the future will not be about generations, but about giving every single employee the freedom to create their own, unique way of working. What was once the faceless 'workforce' will be replaced by the individual… the Employ**Me.**

"According to Frost & Sullivan research, about one-third of respondents say that improving their digital presence is a top driver for IT investment over the next two years—and that priority is new on the list this year. In addition, 40% of respondents say they are deploying next generation solutions. The drivers for investment in IoT include the need to boost customer service/marketing, collect customer usage data, and optimize field or on-site operations."

Melanie Turek
VP of Research at Frost & Sullivan

THE NEW WORKER **PRIORITIES**

Today's workers no longer see work-life balance as a 'perk of the job' but rather as a default expectation for the working world. Building working practices around day-to-day life is increasingly expected, with workers of all ages looking to ensure that work is a positive aspect of their lives as a whole.

Those companies that allow their staff the freedom to prioritize their families, social lives, and even their pets, are set to reap the benefits of a more relaxed, engaged, and ultimately more productive workforce.

for better health and wellbeing

to take care of familial responsibilities

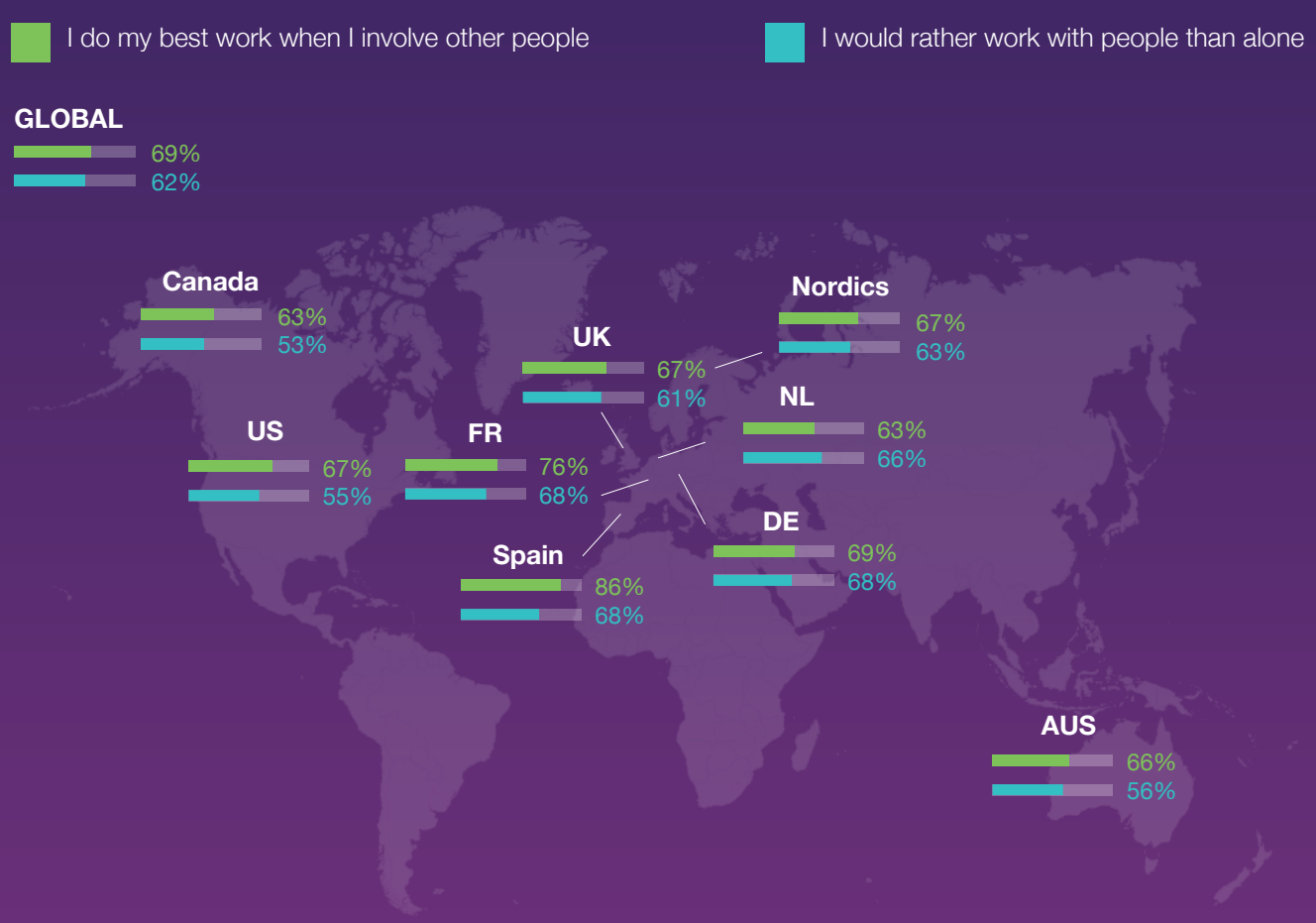
for healthcare commitments

to look after pets

PUTTING **PEOPLE FIRST**

In a working world driven and defined by flexible hours and remote working, it's easy to assume that interaction with colleagues is on the decline. In fact, despite working at different times and in separate locations, today's workforce is committed to communicating with their teams.

The modern employee sees themselves not as an autonomous individual, but an individual who thrives on social interaction and collaborating within teams.



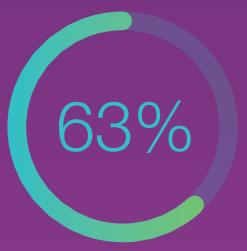
THE **HUMAN** FACTOR

It is estimated that robots and automation will take away more than **800 million jobs** by 2030. New technologies are also set to drastically reshape the day-to-day processes of the working world. Are these changes feared by employees or welcomed? When it comes to automation, the feeling is largely positive.

of workers believe automation will free them up for more interesting work

of workers welcome automation to free them up from manual, repetitive tasks

of workers aren't worried about the impact of automation on their jobs



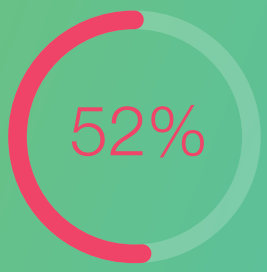
of workers aren't worried that automation will harm their business

Many of the processes that automation will streamline and replace are those that workers either don't enjoy or don't feel qualified to do. Based on existing skill-sets, the workforce welcomes machine-based technologies to free them up to focus on the collaborative, creative and, ultimately, more human aspects of work.

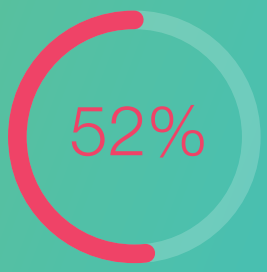
What aspects of work do people enjoy the most?

Problem solving:

Working with people:



Learning new things:



What workers say they are worst at:

Streamlining processes:

Learning new information:

Analyzing data:

"The positive attitude to change exhibited in these findings is very welcome. People recognize that there are parts of their jobs that are likely to be eliminated by incoming technologies, but they are focused on those aspects of work that they most enjoy and where they add most value. The important thing is that we face these coming changes head on, with broad conversation and conscious consideration.

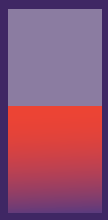
No one knows exactly what impact automation will have in the coming years, in part because the scale of that impact will be shaped by society's response once these technologies become more visible. Challenging and questioning with a positive mindset is exactly the right approach. Naivety and ignorance about the potential of these technologies, and the likely change they will bring, presents a clear risk, both to individual careers and to organizations."

Tom Cheesewright
Applied Futurist

A ROBOT UPRISING?

With advancements in machine learning technologies, a growing number of businesses are looking to supplement their business intelligence with the latest AI. While automation has left many employees worried about the future of their roles, artificial intelligence poses a more abstract concern.

Where automation supplements tactical processes, AI touches upon the more human aspects of work, augmenting creativity, problem solving, and even personal communication. Given this fact, workers are understandably more skeptical of AI technology.

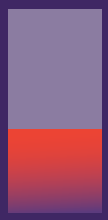


50%

of workers are skeptical about AI

84%

of workers would rather speak to a person than a machine



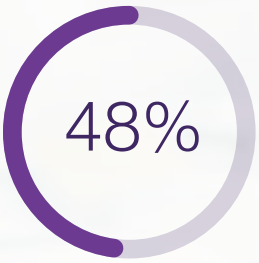
40%

of workers are already seeing AI play a role in the daily operations of their company

Who is skeptical about the future of AI in the workplace?

Under 35

35-44



45-54

55+

While it would be easy to assume that it is older workers who distrust AI, in reality it is the younger generation who are the most skeptical of artificial intelligence technologies. Perhaps this is due to the fact that workers aged under 30 appear to be more aware they are exposed to AI, with 50% say they are experiencing AI in the workplace compared to only 27% of those aged over 55. Or perhaps there is greater concern that developments in AI will likely have the biggest impact on those with a career of 20 years or more ahead of them.

> ***"Workers might be right to worry, according to Frost & Sullivan research: Currently, about 23% of respondents have replaced over 20% of customer service representatives with technology-enabled solutions such as AI powered robots. This trend will continue over the next two years, with plans to replace another 34% of agents with automated solutions."***

Melanie Turek
VP of Research at Frost & Sullivan

WORKFORCE FUTURES: **THE TOP FOUR TRENDS**

The way we work is changing. Technology advancements, distributed workforces, and an overhaul in the way people think about work are all driving this change.

Employees of every generation are demanding healthier work environments, greater freedom to collaborate, and more direct involvement in shaping the direction of their organizations. At the same time, feared visions of AI and automation have been replaced with positivity and optimism that these tools will bring out the best of work rather than the worst.

Whether by enhancing their creativity, creating collaborative environments or building a better work-life balance, technology is now a supplement rather than a replacement to the human workforce. Those businesses that embrace this fact and adopt the cultures and technologies that encourage such a mindset, will be the first to thrive in the new era of collaborative change. Here are four trends that your organization can embrace to be among those thriving in the new workforce future…

1. WORK IS **FLUID**

It has long been said that work has moved from being 'where you go' to 'what you do.' Now the concept of work is evolving once again. Thanks to mobile technology and a growing gig economy mentality, work is no longer what you do, but rather how you think. By treating work as a mindset that can be switched on and off, today's employees can truly work in any place at any time. To accommodate this shift, businesses must adopt an equally fluid approach, embracing the 'Work-as-a-Service' model, rather than attempting to define when and where people should feel their most productive.

2. WORK IS **OPEN**

With employees working at different times and scattered across the globe, true collaboration seems more difficult to achieve than ever before. This doesn't have to be the case. The definition of collaboration is changing, with advancements in technology rapidly altering the need for employees to be in the same room to share the same ideas. Businesses must work hard to accept this changing definition, making sure that management, and the wider company culture reflect the new mantra of open, unstructured collaboration. This doesn't mean the office environment is dead. Rather that new, hybrid offices must provide a space in which both physical and remote workers are able to collaborate and thrive.

3. WORK IS **BALANCED**

Today's employees see a positive work-life balance as a requirement rather than a perk, and businesses must start to do the same. Discussions about work-life balance are rapidly moving beyond just productivity and are now incorporating everything from employee engagement to mental wellbeing. Those employees who have achieved a healthy balance between work, hobbies, family responsibilities, and even pets, are those most likely to come to the table with a fresh perspective and broader base of ideas. As human creativity becomes the driving force behind the new workplace economy, encouraging this balanced mindset will prove vital for businesses looking to stay ahead of the competition.

4. WORK IS **PERSONAL**

For all the visions of robots rising up and taking jobs, the reality is that AI and automation are set to improve the nature of work. While many low-level, office processes will be replaced, the workforce is optimistic that this will simply free them up to focus on more interesting, creative, and more human tasks. People will be able to personalize their schedules and workstyles to enable them to do their most significant work. Today, the best work relies on creativity, collaboration, and communication, traits that are all set to grow in importance in the years ahead. Automation will supplement the workforce, but work itself, will remain fundamentally human.

About Fuze

Fuze is a global, cloud-based unified communications platform. Designed for the way people work, Fuze powers business conversations and insights across the modern enterprise. With a single unified voice, video, and messaging application, people can now communicate anytime, anywhere, across any device.

Learn more about Fuze: www.fuze.com

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