

Article No.

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# A Vision for the Future

*COVID kicked off a seismic but overdue conversation about where, how, and why we work. Change can be scary. It creates winners and losers. Change is also an opportunity.*

*This three part series focuses on the opportunities:*

- 1. To gain a competitive advantage in your market*
- 2. To do better, more fulfilling work*
- 3. To lead a more balanced and sustainable life.*

We Want Readers Of This Series To:

## Learn

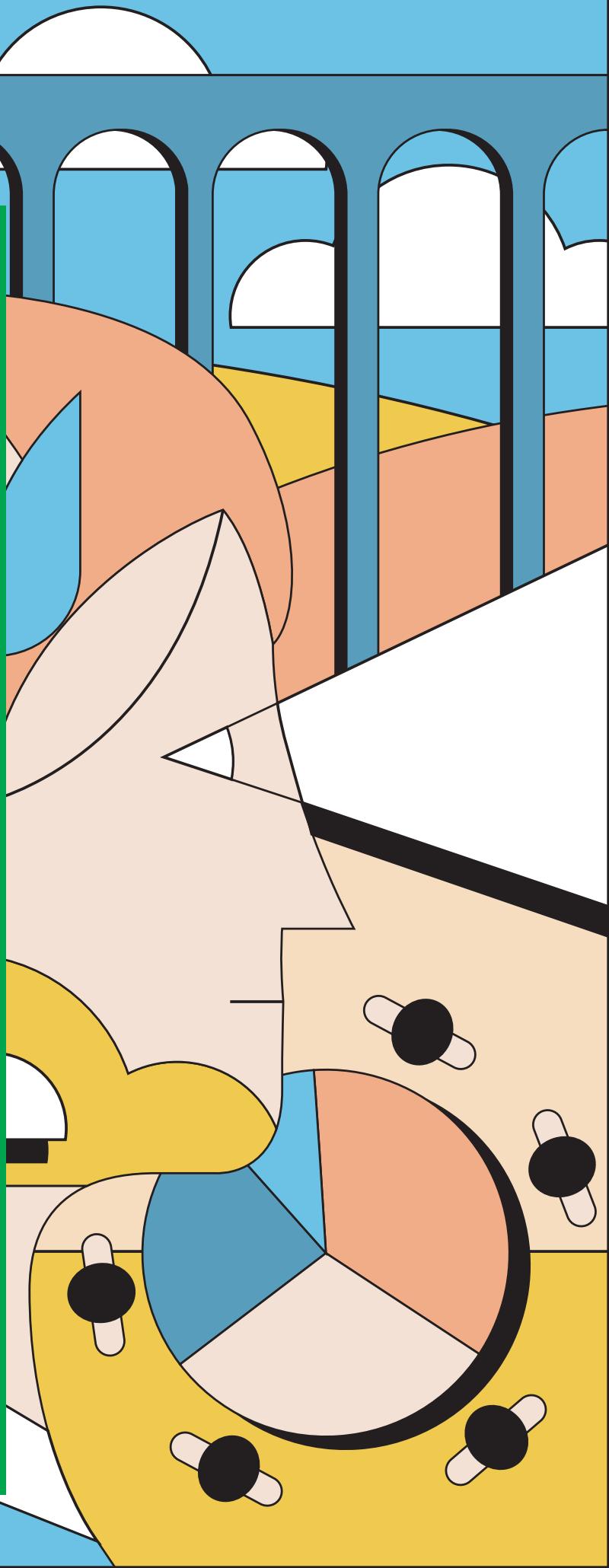
"Where the puck is going" - how to re-think and re-design work that works better - now and in the future.

## Feel

Eustress, the positive stress that comes from making a necessary change.

## Do

Develop a strategy that helps leaders and teams move forward and work better.



# Imagine doing the best work of your life.

## Where would that happen?

- In an office?
- At home?
- At a coworking space?
- It depends?

## How do you generate your best work?

- With others?
- In solitude?
- Both?
- It depends?

**We - employers and workers, entrepreneurs and free agents, managers, and leaders - have an opportunity right now to re-think how and where we work, and to make work work better.**

**We have an opportunity to leapfrog from mediocre to exceptional.**

## We Can Redesign Work To:

**Reduce friction** - like unpredictable commutes, pointless meetings, and poor communication - that prevents workers from performing at their best.

**Deepen customer relationships and increase revenue** by redesigning work around what our customers genuinely value

**Increase our team's skill and diversity** by broadening our talent pools beyond geographic boundaries

**Improve our teammates' physical and mental health** by designing places, meetings, and events purposefully.

**Become more sustainable** - for our people and the planet

## 1. This Series Isn't For Everyone.

It's for most of the working population that can work from anywhere at least occasionally, and is increasingly exercising that choice.

It's for executives who want to design better workplaces, but don't know where to start.

It's for managers who want to give everyone a good work experience, but are worn out trying to make everyone happy.

It's for HR directors and Chief People Officers who wish we could return to the Before Times, because M-F everyone-at-their-desks seemed much easier.

There is a way forward.

## 2. The Toothpaste Is Not Going Back in the Tube.

Remote and hybrid work are here to stay:

**It's a competitive advantage when hiring.** In a mountain west community in the United States, 60 candidates (of 63) withdrew their applications after learning the job they'd applied for would not offer remote or hybrid work.

**The Federal government, arguably the most stodgy and hard-to-change organization in the U.S. is requiring employees to come to the office once per week.**

**Research by Dr. Charlie Grantham suggests that Class A office space rental needs post-pandemic may be only 17% of what they were pre-pandemic.** Additional research shows that 30% of Class A office space in downtowns is now vacant, creating what the Economist calls "TWaT cities" - those that are bustling on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays when workers are in-office.

As AirBnB CEO Brian Chesky wrote in an all-employee letter in April 2022 when he announced that employees could live and work anywhere:

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*"Today's startups have embraced remote work and flexibility, and I think this will become the predominant way that we all work 10 years from now. This is where the world is going."*

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## 3. The Future will Include Three Classes of Employers

**Old school organizations** will demand that workers come to the office, and thereby be limited to a talent pool willing to live in or move to their communities. This will work for some organizations but not most.

**Next-Gen organizations** will figure out how to make remote work work, and will use it to diversify and deepen their talent pool, and therefore their competitive advantage.

**Schizophrenic organizations** won't make a clear decision. They will end up creating a Frankenstein workplace where the worst of in-person work (pointless meetings and endless interruptions) and the worst of remote work (isolation and lack of communication) prevail. The employees who stay will be those without other opportunities elsewhere.

We want to hire and retain the best people in the world (like you). If we limited our talent pool to a commuting radius around our offices, we would be at a significant disadvantage. The best people live everywhere, not concentrated in one area. And by recruiting from a diverse set of communities, we will become a more diverse company."

Making work work better can create more humane, equitable, and sustainable organizations and communities.

**Ready? Let's go.**

This doesn't have to be hard or cost a lot of money. Rethinking and redesigning how to work better doesn't mean all you've done to this point is thrown out the window. It means being open to building upon and expanding on the culture and environment you've created that worked until now. Some of those aspects will still work. Some won't. And some need to be tweaked and thought of differently.

Start small, and be honest. Consider these questions, or contact us, and we can talk it through. What's most important is being thoughtful and intentional:

**• For bosses and leaders:** What kind of culture do you want to create? How would you know for sure if you'd created that culture? What results would you see - among customers and among employees and partners?

**• For employees:** What kind of culture do you want to work in? How would you feel in that culture, how would people act in that culture? What results would you see - for customers, coworkers, and partners?

In our next two articles, we'll dive more deeply into how to make our workplaces work better and how to make our cities work better in this post-COVID chapter.

**We're glad you're here.**

### The History and Future of Work in Three Acts

*“Nothing can happen for decades, and then decades happen in weeks.”*

Scottish MP George Galloway

#### Let's briefly review "Work" in three acts:

**Act 1:** The Before Times (pre-COVID)

**Act 2:** The Disruption (during COVID)

**Act 3:** The Now Times (post-COVID)

#### Act 1: The Before Times

Let's accept that work is, has always been, and will always be a team sport. It's rare for a person to create saleable economic value on their own. Even "soloists" like social media influencers, superstar athletes, and Hollywood actors have agents, assistants, and teams.

Workplaces in the Before Times accommodated teams in central locations.

If you did manual labor, like assembling Harley Davidson motorcycles, your team was organized along an assembly line. If you were a knowledge worker, like a graphic designer or web programmer, your pre-COVID workplace accommodated your teams in offices and cube farms that gave everyone a desk, chair, and an ever-shrinking island of personal workspace. Knowledge workers originally went to offices because their computer and phone networks were physically wired together. This is important to remember.

Around these workplaces that accommodated large groups of people, infrastructure arose to serve them:

- **Parking lots accommodated cars** driven by employees who commuted from home to work.
- **Downtowns or central business districts offered places for workers** to meet their daily needs: for coffee, for breakfast, for lunch, for drycleaning and shoe shining, for drinks and meals after work.
- **Transit systems accommodated “rush hours”** before and after shifts with commuter lanes and extra mass transit assets at “peak times.”

Both manual and knowledge workers were expected to work from their assigned places during their shifts. “Work” was a place and a set of activities, e.g. “I have to go to work.”

Then along came cloud computing, DNS, and wireless networks. This quietly created two categories of workers:

1. **Place-dependent workers whose work could only be done in a specific location**, like those Harley workers; and
2. **Place-independent workers whose work required an internet connection and a computer**. These workers could work remotely but they mostly continued to commute to the office because that's what everybody did.

But Gen Xers and Millennials with in-demand skills flipped the script. They first picked a place to live - a place that had the right mix of amenities - and then found a job or freelanced. I wrote a book about this, *Live First, Work Second*, and Richard Florida's best seller *The Rise of the Creative Class*, gave community leaders a new focus: build the amenities that hipsters love, and the talent will come.

#### Act 2: The Disruption

COVID was an international shock to workplace norms. On a global scale, COVID proved that:

- **Remote work is possible;** offices are optional or may be unneeded
- **Remote work works, with tradeoffs**
- **Place-dependent workers have less workplace flexibility than place-independent workers.** This has caused rifts in some organizations that have place-dependend and place-independent workers
- **Place-independent workers have broad options for where to live and work;** this is driving up their value to employers
- **Offering remote or hybrid work can help employers** broaden their talent pools and attract and keep skilled and diverse talent

But everyone knows ^that stuff.^

There are two, deeper issues that will shape long-term fundamental changes in our workplaces:

1. **Workers faced their own mortality during COVID. What if we or our loved ones died?** This caused a massive re-evaluation of how and where workers spend their time. Americans deprioritized work and reprioritized families, relationships, and their own wellbeing. Beginning in April 2021, the Quits Rate in the U.S. passed four million people per month and didn't let up for over a year. This was epic; the nation that invented workaholism said, “No more.” This will be a net positive for people, families, and society. And it will have long-tail impacts in workplaces.
2. **Workers who could work from home did so at scale.** It was a national experiment that proved that remote work can be productive, fulfilling, and enables workers to have more time for themselves and more balance in their lives.

#### Act 3: The Now Times

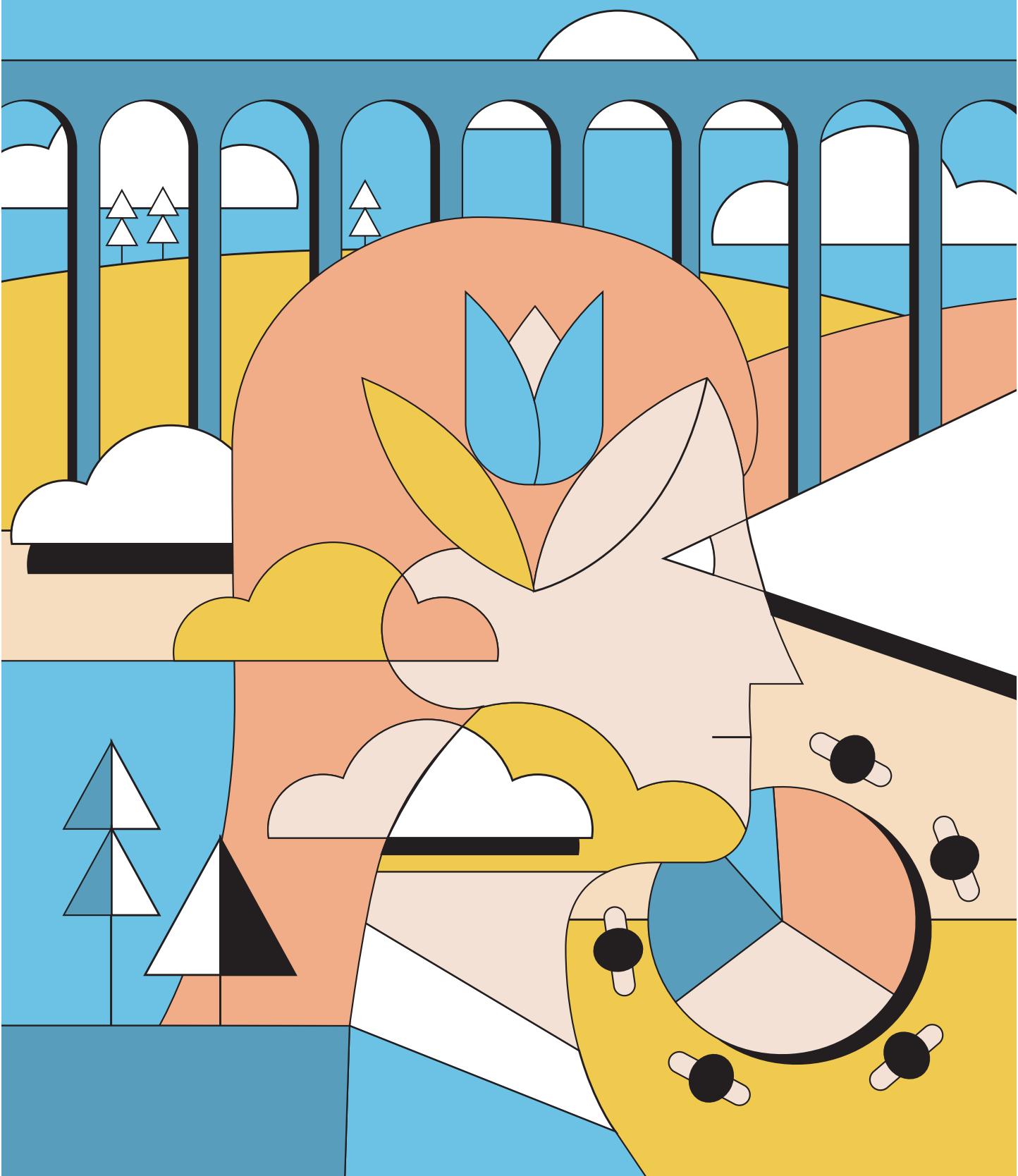
The lessons of COVID won't be unlearned or re-written. There is a new contact emerging between workers and their employers - one that recognizes the value that workers provide and the tradeoffs that employers are asked to make, between work and their personal priorities.

These two forces - how people value their time and the national proof that remote and hybrid work can work - will fundamentally re-shape the nature of work for years to come.

Some people ask, “When will it get back to normal?”

We won't. We can't go back and move forward at the same time. It's physically impossible.

**What we can do** - workers and employers - is accept that work is a team sport; question our former norms; and build intentionally for the workplace - the cultures, customer value, processes, and yes, offices - that can work better for more people.



FOR MORE INFORMATION



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