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THE CHANGING NATURE OF QUALITY OF WORK:

The Employee Perspective

Work Insights

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The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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WorkInsights was born from the curiosity and conviction that organizations possess the potential to tackle problems in a more effective manner, harnessing the collective strength of their people and transcending outdated conventional approaches. Developing deeply insightful and comprehensive diagnostic tools, we calculate the hidden strengths and threats to businesses in real-time. WorkInsights helps facilitate evidence-based decision making by understanding what really stands in the way of a company's optimum performance and wellness. Our passion is helping organizations support and energize employees to work and feel their best.

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Executive Summary

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of work has been completely reshaped. This unprecedented event forced many workers to transition to a hybrid or remote working environment, and it was unknown whether this new way of working was going to have negative or positive repercussions when it came to work quality. Now, three years after the beginning of a global pandemic, many workers are still enjoying the benefits of working virtually, whether it be shared with in-office time or completely remote, but the same concerns about work quality remain. With more people working from home than ever before, employers are starting to take notice of the benefits and drawbacks of different work arrangements. As satisfaction with work plays such a significant role in overall enjoyment of life, it is critical to assess the impact of the changes in working arrangements on the quality of the experience for employees.

The Changing Nature of Quality of Work: The Employee Perspective project was designed to understand the contemporary, post-pandemic quality of work experience. To accomplish this, the project set out to determine what factors influence the quality of work experience for hybrid and remote employees and how employers can best support positive implementation of these factors. Quality of work was defined for the project as the comprehensive measure of an individual's work experience: encompassing factors like job satisfaction, work environment, task significance, role clarity, opportunities for growth, and the alignment of one's values with organizational objectives. It reflects not just the output and efficiency of work performed, but also the well-being, fulfillment, and overall positive experience of the employee in their professional setting.

Several key findings stood out regarding the quality of work and changes since the pandemic:

1. **Remote Work Dominance:**
   - Remote workers reported a more positive experience across nearly all quality of work factors compared to their hybrid or onsite counterparts.
2. **Decision-making and Organizational Alignment:**
   - Employees' commitment and their perception of the quality of work were significantly influenced by their understanding of decision-making processes and how consistently these decisions aligned with the organization's vision and purpose.

3. **Mental Health Concerns:**
   - Pressures on mental health had a growing negative impact on employees' work experiences, with remote workers feeling this impact more than others.
4. **The Importance of Community and Belonging:**
   - Despite the pandemic-induced isolation, employees reported a relatively high sense of belonging within their organizations. Surprisingly, this sense of belonging was notably higher for remote workers.
5. **Job Satisfaction vs. Work Content:**
   - While there was a strong sense of community and acknowledgment for good work, 44.9% of employees did not look forward to their work daily. This suggests a potential disparity between enjoying coworker interactions and the actual content of the work.
6. **Uncertainty and Future Perspective:**
   - Employees expressed concerns about the future trajectory of their organizations. This uncertainty was linked to stress and perceptions of work quality. The clarity and alignment of an organization's vision were found to be crucial for improving work quality perceptions.
7. **Need for Clear Communication and Inclusion:**
   - Consistent and compelling communication was identified as a significant area of improvement. Engaging employees with a clear narrative of the organization's vision and strategy was deemed essential for enhancing the quality of work.

These findings highlight the evolving nature of the "quality of work" concept in the wake of the pandemic. The shift towards remote work, the importance of mental health, the need for clear organizational communication, and the challenge of aligning employees with a company's vision have all emerged as critical factors influencing the quality of work in the current landscape.

Introduction

Recent publications have positioned remote work as a major trend. In fact, "Remote Work Statistics and Trends In 2023" published by Forbes Advisors noted that 13 per cent of full-time employees work from home, while 28% have adopted a hybrid model of work. Furthermore, forecasts from the same publication suggest that by 2025 around 22 per cent of the workforce will be working entirely remote.[1] This prediction implies a steady move towards even more remote work arrangements than the workforce has ever experienced. This change, however, is something much more than a trend, it is a fundamental shift in our professional and personal lives. Worker insights, too, reflect this evolving preference: a notable 98% of workers have expressed a desire to work remotely, at least part of the time.[2] This strong preference demonstrates the value workers place on the flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance that remote work offers. This transition necessitates a change in work culture to support the evolving demands of the workforce, requiring rapid adjustments from organizational leaders to meet new talent attraction and retention challenges.

Today's diverse work arrangements have broadened quality of work to consider the job's role in an individual's overall life, the tech facilitating it, and the organizational culture in dispersed settings. This shift calls for a more inclusive understanding of work quality tailored to each model's unique challenges and benefits.

While it's acknowledged that not every role is conducive to a virtual environment, it's estimated that 40% of all Canadian jobs can be executed effectively from a remote setting.[3] From the perspective of employees, the inclination toward remote and hybrid work models is a clear preference: 65% of workers express a desire to work remotely full-time, while 32% of workers desire to work a hybrid schedule.[4] This evolution in work preference upsets traditional workforce planning, as the competitive landscape of talent acquisition and retention, offering hybrid or remote options can position companies as more attractive employers. Yet, it's crucial to acknowledge the challenges in this shift. Equity among employees, cybersecurity, and the potential dilution of company culture are concerns that organizations must navigate as they pivot to more flexible work models. Employees' commitment and their perception of the quality of work were significantly influenced by their understanding of decision-making processes and how consistently these decisions aligned with the organization's vision and purpose.

With the shift in how people want to work, employers must place focused attention on changing how leadership and the organization itself functions to accommodate this. The importance of the employee experience, as measured through perceived quality of work, is a critical aspect of organizational strategy. In work completed by the Gallup Organization, there is a clear and distinct relationship that links employee experience to customer experience, the fundamental determinant of the perception of value created that results in organizational success, from profitability to growth and innovation.[5]

Thus, to further understand the new challenges that are inherent in the transition to remote and hybrid working arrangements, it is important to consider the employee perspective, which involves recognizing what factors are important in these arrangements, how these represent a shift from traditional work arrangements, and how employers can proactively shape the employee experience in remote and hybrid settings. The Changing Nature of Quality of Work: The Employee Perspective project was designed to accomplish this through an employee engagement survey.

Critical findings gathered from the survey include factors that influence perceived quality of work for remote employees as compared to those in other working arrangements, such as excitement for work, work satisfaction, a sense of community, and the importance of an organization's vision and support for employees. However, stress, hesitancy to change, and openness to new job opportunities present considerable challenges. Underlying the key insights was a singular concern: the increasing levels of stress people feel in the working environment and the growing impact on mental health. While employers may have seen mental health as a personal consideration in the past, there is no question supporting employees' mental well-being is an organizational issue.

Research Project Overview

The Changing Nature of Quality of Work: The Employee Perspective project was designed to understand the contemporary, post-pandemic quality of work experience. To accomplish this, the project set out to determine what factors influence the quality of work experience for hybrid and remote employees and how employers can best support positive implementation of these factors.

Methodology

Aggregated data was gathered from a worker population survey involving 537 respondents in Nova Scotia. Of the respondents, 254, or 47%, self-identified as working fully onsite, while 196, or 36%, identified as working in hybrid arrangements, and 89, or 17%, identified as being completely remote workers. The respondents were not asked for gender or demographic backgrounds, although the distribution channels for the survey were to a white-collar workforce sample.

The survey posed 50 questions, 48 Likert scale questions and two open text questions, ranging from the respondent's perception of the meaning of their work, to their autonomy and flexibility, their trust in their organization, and much more (see Appendix One for Survey Questions). Patterns and trends were then identified and analyzed for insights on the impact on the quality of work experience, with specific attention to commitment, performance, and well-being. By surveying respondents on their work arrangements, we developed a deeper understanding of how location and flexibility impact the quality of work.

The study was carried out in five comprehensive steps:

1. A thorough literature review was conducted that revolved around pivotal research impacting work quality. This helped identify key issues for further investigation, particularly considering changes in work approaches following the COVID-19 pandemic. The review further guided the formulation of questions for the employee perspective survey (see Appendix Two – Summary of Literature Review).
2. A survey was crafted and circulated across a wide spectrum of employees working under different arrangements. The survey gathered data from 537 comprehensive responses (51 complete responses were excluded as not working in Nova Scotia), including ranked responses to specific statements and textual comments to open-ended questions, aiming to grasp the sentiment and tone.

3. The collected data was then scrutinized using several analytical methods. This included standard deviation and dispersion analysis for understanding the spread of perspectives, correlation analysis to discern the interrelation of questions, cluster analysis to identify groups of factors correlating strongly with work quality perspectives, and tone and sentiment analysis to evaluate the emotions conveyed in text responses.
4. The findings derived from data analysis were systematically arranged into a number of themes for deeper evaluation. This process led to the formulation of a comprehensive framework of findings.

The paper concludes with an outline of the potential implications for employers and offers recommendations for further development. This is aimed at shaping strategies to support work quality in remote and hybrid work arrangements.

The research methodology and questionnaire were unconditionally approved by an independent Research Ethics Board.

Findings

Summary and Comparison

The quality of work study was comprehensive, yielding a depth of perspectives on how remote and hybrid working arrangements have impacted how people relate to their work. From the data, the key insights outline a narrative of quality of work:

1. **Remote Workers' Satisfaction:** Remote workers consistently report a higher level of satisfaction across various work quality factors than their onsite and hybrid counterparts. This could be attributed to the flexibility and autonomy remote work provides, but there's also the aspect of clarity in roles and expectations that seems to resonate more with remote workers.
2. **Mental Health's Pivotal Role:** Mental health stands out as a critical determinant of the quality of work. The significant rise in mental health challenges since the pandemic, combined with the stigma associated with discussing these issues, has a tangible impact on work quality. While organizations are becoming more cognizant of the importance of mental well-being, the actual experience of many employees suggests there's a lot more ground to cover.
3. **The Leadership Clarity Imperative:** One recurrent theme is the need for clarity from leaders. Employees look for clear direction, understanding of organizational goals, and alignment in decision-making processes. When employees grasp the organization's vision and see how their roles fit into the broader picture, it enhances their sense of purpose and engagement.
4. **Managerial Impact:** Managers play a pivotal role in shaping the employee experience. They are the bridge between organizational strategy and its execution on the ground. Their relationships with team members, the trust they instill, and the clarity they provide significantly influence job satisfaction and overall work quality.
5. **The Central Question:** Given these insights, the pressing question for organizations becomes: How can leaders, especially in a remote or hybrid work environment, provide clearer direction and create a future that employees are enthusiastic about joining? This question is pivotal as it not only addresses the work quality but also delves into the broader themes of engagement, purpose, and organizational alignment.
6. **The Catalyst for Change:** Supporting managers emerges as the catalyst for driving positive change. Given their profound impact on the quality of work, equipping managers with the right tools, skills, and mindset becomes essential. Managers, being at the frontlines of employee interactions, can foster environments that promote psychological safety, clarity, and engagement. Investing in their development could be the key to unlocking higher work quality and improved employee well-being.

Relating the study results to the foundation of the literature review completed to shape the survey diagnostic, the perspectives of quality of work relate strongly to the elements of interest although with additional nuances and developments.

The original research highlighted three key areas of assessment for the shifting way of working.

> **Remote workers consistently report a higher level of satisfaction across various work quality factors than their onsite and hybrid counterparts.**

1. **Psychological Safety as a Basis for Team Effectiveness**
   - **Emphasis on Psychological Safety:** A psychologically safe environment promotes genuine emotional expression and views mistakes as learning opportunities, not failures.
2. **Importance of Manager Relationships**
   - **Manager's Evolving Role:** In today's changing work landscape, managers not only translate executive strategies into frontline actions but also shape the context in which teams operate, aligning with employees' evolving expectations.
   - **Impact on Job Satisfaction:** Research by McKinsey & Company highlighted the significant impact of the relationship between employees and their immediate managers on overall job satisfaction.
3. **The Rising Impact of Mental Health in the Workplace**
   - **Rising Emphasis:** Organizations now recognize the mental well-being of employees as integral to creating a supportive work environment, shifting from viewing it as solely an individual's responsibility.
   - **Alarming Statistics:** Mental illness rates have risen sharply, with the current estimated level at 41%, a significant increase from 25% before the pandemic. Moreover, 81% of employees now face some form of burnout or mental health issue.
   - **Stigma Concerns:** A significant 80% of employees feel a stigma around discussing mental health in the workplace, leading to nearly 37% of individuals not disclosing their mental health concerns due to fear of discrimination.

Reviewing the data from the study, the following findings relate to the specific areas of assessment.

Team effectiveness varied across different work environments, being highest among remote workers, followed by those in hybrid settings, and lowest for onsite workers. Psychological safety remains the foundation for team effectiveness although under present conditions, clarity was the most important aspect determining quality of work. Remote workers particularly value attributes like authenticity, flexibility, clarity, and opportunities for growth. Several factors drive this perception of effectiveness. Most prominently, clarity provided by managers (72%), cross-team collaboration (72%), ensuring employees' voices are heard (72%), maintaining a prejudice-free supportive

environment (71%), and clear understanding of organizational success (70%).

However, a significant concern across all working arrangements is the lack of psychological safety. Many employees, regardless of their setup, fear potential sabotage from colleagues and are anxious about past mistakes being held against them. While most remote employees find their work environments supportive and devoid of prejudice, trust issues persist, suggesting an urgent need for organizations to address these concerns.

> **Remote workers particularly value attributes like authenticity, flexibility, clarity, and opportunities for growth.**

The importance of manager and employee relationships was fully confirmed. The aspects of the manager interactions with teams had the highest combined impact on quality of work for all workers, from remote to onsite.

Remote employees tend to have a more positive relationship with their managers, perceiving them as effective role models who show interest in their careers and foster team connectivity. Remote employees who felt positively about their managerial relationship also had a clear understanding of organizational success, felt aligned with business goals, and believed that the right individuals were making decisions. This clarity fostered confidence in the organization's future.

The importance of the manager-employee relationship cannot be overstated. It was found to be the most correlated factor to work quality. However, organizations face a significant challenge: many managers are overwhelmed, with many experiencing burnout. This is concerning given managers' essential role in bridging leadership direction with team execution.

Without question, the impact of stress in the workplace is the greatest challenge for employers to provide quality of work experience. Mental health was named as a concern across all work arrangements, but most often by those working remotely. Specifically, 74% of remote workers believe stress is more detrimental than before, compared to 66% of hybrid and 68% of onsite workers. Interestingly, despite widespread stress perceptions, stigma around mental health discussions is relatively low across all working setups. However, for remote workers, a direct relationship emerges between heightened stress and an increased sense of mental health stigma. This suggests that remote work's isolation could intensify feelings of stress and the hesitancy to discuss mental health. Delving deeper, nearly half of remote workers feel stress has become more harmful than in the past, and approximately a third grapple with elevated stress levels. On a brighter note, around 60% of remote workers indicate no stigma around mental health discussions, paving the way for open dialogues. Hybrid workers have a slightly better outlook, with fewer perceiving stress as harmful and a significant 73% feeling free to discuss mental health.

Data also unveils a correlation between workplace stress and certain aspects of psychological safety, including a prejudice-free environment, the comfort in expressing feelings, and the freedom to voice opinions. Furthermore, higher stress levels correlate with reduced employee referrals, hinting at broader implications on team culture, connection, and overall job enthusiasm.

The crux of the findings suggests that while the stigma around mental health discussions is decreasing, stress intensity has surged, impacting the overall work quality. The challenge is particularly stark for remote workers. The study emphasizes that cultivating a work culture that fosters safety, connection, and engagement could be pivotal in addressing workplace stress.

> **With the pandemic's shift toward remote work, the lens through which we view team effectiveness and its impact on the quality of work experience has refocused from the collective to the individual.**

Changing Perspectives and Context

Analyzing the data gathered from the employee perspective survey, it is apparent that the dynamics of employment have been reshaped. The variations in employees' perceptions and experiences under onsite, remote, and hybrid models offer valuable insights into crafting more conducive and productive work environments.

For all three working arrangements, three key factors emerged with high ratings: firstly, the findings paint a picture of a workforce that is keen to contribute meaningfully, both to their organization and its customers, while upholding a respectful and fair working environment. Eighty-two per cent of respondents expressed clear understanding of their contributions to the organization's success, with more than half (52%) rating this aspect a nine out of 10 or above; secondly, 82% of respondents affirmed the zero-tolerance policy towards racially, ethnically, or gender-biased humour at work, with 66% giving it a nine or 10 rating; lastly, the role of employees' work in creating customer value was understood by 81%, with 52% rating this aspect a nine out of 10 or above.

Fully remote employees champion a high regard for their quality of work. An impressive 84% indicate a positive team culture. This positivity is 15% higher than the overall average, demonstrating the appeal of remote work conditions. Several factors contribute to this. Chief among them is the sense of clarity and direction from managers (78% success rate), fostering collaboration across teams and functions (82%), and the feeling of inclusivity where people feel heard (80%). An inclusive, prejudice-free workplace was also rated highly among fully remote workers (85%) along with a clear understanding of organizational success (83%). However, stress factors were identified as the primary deterrent to enjoying this positive culture.

For those navigating the hybrid model of work, the perception of a positive team culture also ranked high at 75%. The elements fostering this positivity shift somewhat, emphasizing interpersonal relationships and feelings of belonging. It is noteworthy that high-ranking factors involve connections with a team (72%), feeling a sense of belonging with the team (79%), and working with positive and supportive relationships (76%).

From the Collective to the Individual

With the pandemic's shift toward remote work, the lens through which we view team effectiveness and its impact on the quality of work experience has refocused from the collective to the individual. As work settings evolve, the factors influencing an employee's decision to change roles are not universal but vary according to their working arrangement.

All Work Arrangements

Across all working arrangements, a fading enthusiasm for daily work duties seems to be the most potent catalyst for employees to consider seeking other employment opportunities. The top five factors prompting job reconsideration are as follows:

- Lack of excitement for daily work: 64%
- Organizational vision that doesn't inspire: 61%
- Absence of a strong sense of purpose: 60%
- Feelings of not being heard: 57%
- Insufficient resources for optimal performance: 57%

Remote Workers

For remote workers, job reconsideration factors tilt toward the future's uncertainties and personal growth opportunities:

- Lack of daily work excitement: 66%
- No challenging growth or learning opportunities: 65%
- Poor role model behavior from managers: 65%
- Vision-inconsistent decisions: 65%
- Limited use of unique skills: 64%

Hybrid Workers

For employees navigating hybrid work arrangements, their job satisfaction hinges more on interpersonal relationships and recognition:

- Lack of appreciation for unique skills and talents: 58%
- Managerial inability to effectively communicate the state of the organization: 56%
- Unsupportive or negative colleagues: 55%
- Lack of daily work excitement: 55%
- Good work going unrecognized: 54%

Onsite Workers

Finally, for those working entirely onsite, there is some overlap in sentiment with remote workers however dissatisfaction stems largely from concerns related to the organization's direction:

- Lack of daily work excitement: 66%

- Absence of a strong sense of purpose: 65%
- Uninspiring organizational vision: 65%
- Decisions made by inappropriate personnel: 60%
- Ill-timed, uninformed decisions: 60%

These findings indicate that waning enthusiasm for daily work responsibilities is a significant driver leading employees to contemplate exploring other job opportunities. However, the specific factors prompting job reconsideration vary considerably depending on the working arrangement. For traditional, onsite employees, their job satisfaction and likelihood to remain with an organization appear more tied to the overall direction and purpose of the organization. On the other hand, remote workers tend to reconsider their positions due to uncertainties about their future and a lack of personal growth opportunities. For those in hybrid arrangements, job satisfaction largely depends on interpersonal relationships and the recognition of their unique skills and contributions.

Workplace Stress, Mental Health, and Stigma

A series of compelling insights have emerged regarding the relationship between workplace stress, mental health stigma, and various working arrangements. What becomes clear from this data is that there is no direct correlation between the level of stress workers experience and the stigma they perceive in their work environment. Workplace stress seems to have its own independent narrative, seemingly unaffected by the perceived stigma around mental health.

Analyzing the data, we find the perceived harmfulness of stress varies across all three working arrangements. Among entirely remote workers, 74% believe stress is more harmful, compared to 66% of hybrid workers, and 68% of onsite workers, while the perception of mental health stigma is relatively low across all working arrangements, with 44% of remote workers, 42% of hybrid workers, and 48% of onsite workers reporting stigma around mental health issues. Despite variations in the stress levels among remote, hybrid, and onsite workers, the stigma associated with mental health remains a distinct, standalone issue, suggesting that the root causes of stress lie elsewhere.

The data demonstrates that remote workers are more likely to experience higher stress levels and a greater sense of stigma around discussing mental health. This finding suggests that isolation in remote work could intensify both the experience of stress and the perceived stigma around mental health, calling for particular attention to the mental well-being of remote employees. Despite a decrease in the stigma around discussing mental health, the overall quality of work experience, largely determined by workplace culture, carries a significant weight on employees' sense of stress. High levels of stress are associated with a lack of positive team culture, insufficient connection with colleagues, and a diminished sense of excitement or energy about work. This insight underscores the importance of cultivating a supportive and engaging workplace culture as a strategy to mitigate stress and improve employee mental health.

Analyzing the factors contributing to a high quality of work reveals common themes across different working arrangements. For those working entirely remotely, aspects such as psychological safety, clarity, flexibility, and the potential for personal growth were of utmost importance. On the other hand, employees engaged in hybrid work arrangements emphasized the value of personal meaning and a sense of belonging. Across all work arrangements,

however, mental health stigma within the workplace remained a negative point of correlation and scoring. As the work environment evolves, it is crucial to accommodate these diverse experiences and perceptions.

> **Isolation in remote work could intensify both the experience of stress and the perceived stigma around mental health.**

Highs and Lows

The differences between remote and hybrid workers provide a valuable guide for structuring more productive and fulfilling work settings.

The highest ratings overall were seen in the following three questions:

- "I know how I contribute to the success of the organization" was rated at 82%, with 52% of people rating this aspect of quality of work at a nine or 10 out of 10.
- "Jokes related to race, ethnicity, or gender are not tolerated in the workplace" was rated at 82%, with 66% of all respondents rating this at a nine or 10 out of 10.
- "I know how my work creates value for our customers" was rated at 81%, with 52% of respondents rating this at a nine or 10 out of 10.

Alternatively, the lowest ratings overall were seen in the following two questions:

- "Decisions are made in a timely, informed, and thoughtful manner" was rated at 60%, with 48% of respondents rating their organization's decision making at a 6 or less out of a possible score of 10, indicating a disillusionment with leadership direction.
- "My compensation is competitive with the market" was rated at 59%, the lowest overall score of all factors, with 46% of people rating their compensation at a six or below of 10. Although the belief is that people move positions for reasons other than money, the rating indicates the importance of competitiveness as rationale for making the decision to shift to a new role.

These insights provide valuable guidance for employers seeking to improve employee retention and satisfaction. Addressing the distinct needs and concerns of employees, based on their working arrangements, can potentially boost employee engagement, productivity, and organizational loyalty. Ultimately, ensuring that employees feel excited, purposeful, and valued in their daily work is key to maintaining a committed and satisfied workforce.

Implications and Future Directions

In reviewing the survey data across all work arrangements, there are several areas of interest for consideration for leaders, managers, human resources professionals, corporate trainers, and other stakeholders.

Overall, remote workers report a 10% increase in work quality and 18% more energy than their onsite colleagues, appreciating the flexibility remote work provides. The survey results indicate that the factors most influential to a high quality of work across all three groups include:

- The presence of a strong vision. Employees find work more meaningful when a strong vision is consistently communicated. This feeling was particularly true for remote workers.
- A supportive, prejudice-free environment, and acceptance of individual identities.
- Poor decision-making, communication, and unfair compensation can undermine work quality.
- Lack of enthusiasm for work, specifically due to feeling voiceless in a position or increased workplace stress, can further undermine work quality.

Thus, work quality is significantly influenced by factors such as meaningful work, supportive environments, fair compensation, autonomy, and employee engagement. However, barriers such as poor decision-making, communication challenges, lack of enthusiasm, workplace stress, low trust levels, and resistance to change can undermine work quality. The flexibility of remote work and a strong connection with organizational culture can enhance perceived work quality. Ultimately, to maximize potential in the workplace, there is a need to address these factors effectively.

Several recommendations can be drawn for employers as they plan for the future of work, including:

- Adoption of Change Management Policies: With a high failure rate in organizational change efforts, there is a clear need for well-structured change management policies. These would include clear communication strategies, training programs, and support structures to help employees understand and adapt to new processes or structures.
- Development of Technology Integration Policies: As technology continues to drive business agendas, policies should be in place to ensure effective integration. These could include guidelines for digital transformation initiatives, training programs, and measures to assess the value created by such investments.

> **Remote workers report a 10% increase in work quality and 18% more energy than their onsite colleagues, appreciating the flexibility remote work provides.**

- Improvement of Work Environment Policies: The data suggests that a supportive, prejudice-free environment and the acceptance of individual identities are vital for employees. This calls for strong anti-discrimination policies, initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion, and programs that foster psychological safety.
- Establishment of Remote Work Policies: Given the positive feedback from remote workers, it may be beneficial to develop comprehensive remote work policies. These would cover aspects like flexible work hours, virtual communication norms, and provision of necessary tools and technology.
- Enhancement of Talent Management Policies: With talent being key to transformation, policies need to be geared towards attracting, developing, and retaining skilled individuals. This could involve strategies for fair compensation, professional development opportunities, and programs that make employees feel their work is meaningful and valuable.
- Promotion of Mental Health Policies: Given the reports of increased workplace stress, policies focusing on mental health and well-being are essential. This could include the provision of counseling services, stress management workshops, and the promotion of a healthy work-life balance.
- Formulation of Resilience Building Policies: As resilience is linked to the capacity to adapt to change, policies that build resilience could be beneficial. These might involve training programs that equip employees with skills to manage uncertainty and adversity.
- Communication of Vision and Strategy Policies: Since a motivating vision communicated by leaders influences positive energy and work meaning for many employees, policies ensuring regular, clear communication of the organization's vision and strategy are crucial.

In summary, the results and key takeaways can be used as a model for employers to shape a culture supporting quality of work in remote and hybrid environments. The suggested model includes establishing a clear vision and purpose that is communicated effectively to all employees, promoting psychological safety, and belonging, encouraging open communication, involving employees in the decision-making process, providing growth and development opportunities, recognizing, and rewarding excellent work, monitoring, and addressing stress and mental health, and adapting to new ways of working to maintain connection, engagement, and belonging.

To achieve the above recommendations, we put forth three action items employers can take to monitor and improve the quality of work experience:

1. The first action is a 15-question (plus initial filtering question regarding working arrangements) self-assessment and employer survey developed for all employees to maintain a common understanding of quality of work and the impact of interventions to improve the employee working experience. This survey can be found in Annex 2.
2. The second action is a dashboard developed from the survey for employers to monitor progress in a clear, focused, and compelling format.
3. Finally, the third action is a training program for managers to support the development of a high quality of work for their organization. A sampling of suggested areas of training includes remote work management, mental health awareness, and effective communication. A full list of suggested training programs can be found in Annex 3.

This project clearly illustrates the opportunity employers have to enhance the quality of work experience. Remote employees potential to revolutionize the way we think about work quality, offering employees the opportunity to apply their skills and strengths to something they love in a supportive and positive environment. By prioritizing these factors and addressing challenges around mental health and stress, organizations can build a stronger, more engaged, and more productive remote workforce for the future.

Annex 1: Literature Review and Sources

The Changing Nature of Quality of Work: The Employee Perspective

The New Way of Working Literature Review

The research project intends to present interpretations and insights from data collected from aggregated responses from a broad cross-section of employees to enable employers to better shape the working environments to support changing perspectives as to the quality of work.

The design of the questions used in the survey instrument for the project has been developed from the review of literature as outlined in this section.

In forming the survey instrument, questions have been developed from the literature review to enable:

- Rethinking assumptions about how employees work
- Designing work that people love
- How teams get their work done
- A structure that is not stifling to the needs of employees to perceive the high quality of work

Much of the literature review for the project resulted from the ongoing "Great Resignation" which continues to result in more than twenty percent of employees changing jobs and organizations, even higher for younger workers in Generation Z and Millennials.[6] How have the decisions to move employment been shaped by the sense of the quality of work?

Although many employers question if compensation is at the root of employee decision-making to move positions, studies show that other factors have been more important:[7]

- 47% - did not feel they could be their true self at work
- 44% - did not feel their job fulfilling
- 43% - did not feel their team cares about them
- 41% - did not feel listened to by their manager

- 38% - did not feel fairly rewarded financially

From Bain and Company's research study, The Working Future – More Human, Not Less:

"Much of the prevailing thinking about the relationship between workers and firms was forged in a very different world than the one we live in today, where workers were viewed simply as factors of production in the machine of enterprise. Today's firm requires a new mental model, one that rehumanizes the way we think about work."[8]

In the past, work arrangements remained in the industrial age where it was assumed people would simply comply with management requests, with employees viewed as movable parts. With the growth of knowledge workers and the declining levels of employee engagement in all sectors, organizations are seeing working arrangements from a more human perspective. Leaders are becoming more inclusive of employee opinions and planning the working environment around the feelings of people.

Many people have taken the opportunity during the pandemic to assess what work means in their lives, putting pressure on leaders and executives to develop a new value proposition for employees while at the same time staying apace with changes in technology and social movements. Re-evaluation is happening on both sides of the equation of work.

From the Bain and Company study, it appears the subjective importance we place on our jobs compared to other life factors has been declining over successive generations – younger generations place a lower importance on work relative to leisure time, looking for work to provide the financial means to spend time on other pursuits.
Compensation is declining as a motivator with interesting work for an inspiring company moving up the ranks of importance.

Work has become a more important source of social connection and a place to find a higher sense of purpose, people are shifting their motivation from survival and paying for lifestyle to finding meaning

- Question – how important is your work in your life?
- Question – would you stop working if you have the financial means to live independently?

"There are major divergences by age and other factors, so thinking about what the average worker wants from a job no longer makes sense in the modern economy – we are living in the world of personalization."[9]

As the quote outlines, like consumers desiring products and services personalized to their choices, employees are seeking more personalized working arrangements.

The abrupt shift to remote work due to the Covid-19 pandemic created a test for employees and employers. The move to working from home provided significant life advantages for employees, while at the perceived cost of missing out on promotions and project inclusion. For employers, initial cost reductions were attractive, yet there seemed to be a loss in productivity and commitment.

Forty-seven percent of workers surveyed by Bain and Company see their colleagues as friends. This is being tested in remote work and impacting the feelings of trust and connection needed for a healthy work environment. People want a community and work is becoming one of our main outlets for building a connection with others. Organizations are communities for employees with relationships amongst people and teams.

As the world has become richer, workers have increasingly shifted their focus from survival to meaning, with profound implications for how we think about work.

The forces reshaping work leave us with two questions:

1. What will it take for individuals to reach their full potential at work?
2. How can organizations close their talent gaps and build competitive advantage through a winning talent proposition?

Further from the Bain and Company study, rethinking talent strategy through the lens of the individual worker's full potential will be transformative:

- From talent taker to talent maker … the great reskilling is on the horizon and rather than defaulting to looking externally for talent more companies will need to develop from within
- Workers and machines – workers today are bringing far more mental baggage to their jobs than in the past – they are not machines and there is a challenge to the personal capacity of people.
- Out of many, one – is an emphasis on diversity of skills sets and experiences

There will be significant experimentation around work in the next decade.

For workers, the coming decade will feel like one of ceaseless change and disruption (readiness for change and stress and resilience factors) and it is more critical than ever for employers to understand and appreciate hopes and fears.

One, if not the greatest, challenge organizations are facing today is finding and retaining skilled workers. No matter the industry or sector, people are in demand.

Leaders have been sidetracked by the new workplace – hybrid working arrangements, colocation or remote, and how to bring people back to the office. That is not what is most important to people. Everyone is talking about the new way of working but focusing on logistics rather than the mindset of the worker in today's environment, and the quality of their working experience.

The pandemic has given people time and space to think about their work, and what they want from it.
Work is important to people accounting for 25% of overall life satisfaction, even more for many. What happens with work matters greatly.[10]

Employees want a greater degree of decision-making control, especially regarding flexibility over their work. It is about having the autonomy to make decisions about where, when, and how they do their work. It means being competent and learning to contribute in a more valued way. And it is about connection to each other.

Psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci challenged the notion of extrinsic rewards (such a compensation and benefits) as the main driver of motivation to being based on self-determination, that one's autonomous motivation for personal and psychological growth is the foundational catalyst for human success and fulfillment.

Self-determination is comprised of three components: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is the desire to be the causal agent of one's own life. Autonomy will therefore result in a higher degree of satisfaction, fulfillment, and engagement at work and to perform better. And autonomy is best exercised in the workplace through the flexibility of the work experience. Competence revolves around continued capability and being recognized for unique talents and skills. Relatedness, perhaps the primary factor of confidence, is the connection people feel to their work, their team, and their organization.

One thing is clear about the future of work: hybrid and remote working arrangements are here to stay, becoming the norm for how people experience their work.

How important is the need for flexible ways to work, whether where, when, or how?

McKinsey and Company research reports that "30 percent of employees said they would be likely to switch jobs If they were required to be fully onsite. And more than 50 percent of respondents said they would like to work at least partially remotely. In a world where talent is the scarcer of the two capitals – human capital being scarcer than financial capital – companies will have to adjust to what … talent wants."[11] How are these statistics affecting how people see quality of work, and in what ways?

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an immediate and massive shift from leaving the commute to work in offices to working from home. For many, it opened an ability to shape how they work to fit their lives, while others felt stressed by the loss of predictable work patterns and interactions. And more were not given an option, needing to be onsite. Engagement scores have been reported to be declining for several years, and like many trends, the pandemic seems to have accelerated and amplified the apparent dissatisfaction and disconnection with work.

What has been the impact of the new ways of working for quality of work, for the individual, for teams, for managers, and leaders of organizations?

Quality of work has been described as standards of performance, competence levels, and achieving results beyond expectations. That definition relates more to the past. The shifts in the way people work have also shifted the meaning of quality of work to be about the relationship we have with work, and how our role enables us to contribute in a meaningful way, connected to others, and be part of team-building outcomes that matters. Quality of work means more about finding a community where people feel they belong.

We have moved from performance to the contribution, with emphasis shifting from the organization to the individual to decide what quality of work looks like.

Why does quality of work matter?

With the intensified competition for talent, providing an environment where people experience a high quality of work creates a culture of aligned contribution, where employees find meaning and purpose, positive and supportive interactions with colleagues, for strong teams and strong organizations.

The abrupt and complete switch to a virtual working environment at the commencement of the pandemic, and the continuing impact, have greatly placed pressure on managers in their capacity to effectively support their teams.

For a manager named Indira, "…leading a virtual team has been stressful … it's tough to know exactly how or when people are having trouble doing their jobs … her 'real' work begins after a long day of video meetings. By the time she's able to focus on her independent tasks and bigger-picture thinking, she's burned out, and it's difficult to be productive."[12]

The comments in the quote indicate the heaviness many managers appear to feel currently and the increasing importance of the manager role as a critical connection for teams and the organization. With the extensive workloads managers face has there been a shift in how they impact people's perspective on their quality of work?

With managers overwhelmed, increasingly employees felt disconnected and began to question the role of work in their lives, and the purpose their jobs played. The introspective led many people to depart their jobs in search of a more rewarding position elsewhere, often without even having a new job to go to, which started 'The Great Resignation' as more than 20% of all workers left their jobs over the pandemic.

Without question, the quality of work appears to matter greatly.

With remote and hybrid forms of work, five trends have developed affecting how people work and interact with their colleagues, and become part of a team, or not.

Communication is not from the technology aspect of providing the means to communicate with each other, but rather how people relate to one another, their ability to speak openly, and feel part of a community. Does not being together physically affect the feeling of being part of a team?

Connection as the social fabric with dependable work patterns for comfort to be able to work well together to achieve meaningful outcomes individually and as a team, feeling related to others. With many younger employees onboarded virtually during the pandemic there was no opportunity to see and feel the norms of being with team members, and often there was a sense of being lost. Does the ability to connect to the team and organization rest on being physically present with each other?

Coordination with understanding roles and activities fit together to move projects forward, being able to see where creative contributions can be made, and access to sharing knowledge to be mentored and developed. Can people working remotely take the initiative to think ahead and leverage efforts from knowing who is doing what and when, or are they more adrift and singular?

Collaboration with colleagues to share challenges and opportunities, shaping how projects are executed, appreciating how to support others when they may be overwhelmed with heavy workloads out of sight, and seeing how to best contribute skills and talents to the team. Can people enjoy the meaning of building something together, leveraging talents, and working remotely, or are they limited?

Culture is from the perspective of the ability to develop the self-reinforcing norms of behaviors without being in the same location to see how people have relationships, approach work, and appreciate what is valued. Will people working remotely feel they belong, in a culture that supports their well-being, or experience stress from feeling detached from others?

The trends raise questions as to how organizations can be productive while providing a healthy working experience for people with the structure of remote and hybrid work.

There needs to be a measurement and evaluation of people's perspectives on the impact of being physically distanced, with analysis to determine the content and the patterns affecting behaviors, to test traditional assumptions about how we work together, and rethink, uncovering opportunities to shape roles with high quality of work.

The trends described as emerging during the pandemic place excessive stress on managers and team relationships. Managers and supervisors play a significant role in how people experience work, acting as translators, mentors, influencers, and expediters. The shifts in needed skills resulting from dispersed teams change the perspective from optimizing performance to coaching contribution, with greater emphasis on empathy and other emotional intelligence capabilities (those talents not conventionally strengths for managers promoted due to their own performance excellence).

There is a question to be addressed in how the changing expectation for managers is impacting the perceived quality of work for team members.

The cultural shift and new ways of working have resulted in new values regarding what employees want from their roles.

“Increasingly, the bar is rising, and people are saying, ‘My work has to be more than a job, it has to fit in with my life’s purpose.”[13]

Can managers provide the support people need in this journey of finding meaning in their work?

Leadership

Organizational leaders need to take a greater part in understanding and appreciating the shifting requirements of both managers and employees to shape healthy cultures that create benefits for individuals and the organization overall. If the internal storyline is not strong, the investment and belief in the external message of the organization to stakeholders and customers will not be consistent, hurting the reputation of the company.

In the leadership value proposition model developed by WorkInsights, the primary researcher for this project, there are significant shifts needed in how leaders approach the shaping of working environments, as discussed below.
Branding to a great extent has transitioned from the traditional focus on the position in the market to the value proposition for employees. What is the value people see in working with the organization?

The changing dynamic revolves around trust, do employees trust the organization to be a healthy cultural environment where they experience a high quality of work? Remote and hybrid working arrangements have strained the bonds of trust, and how it is formed between people and leaders.

With leaders facing transformation from external pressures, such as digitization, social responsibility, supply chains, and overall business models, the pressures internally from new attitudes and expectations for work have shifted how organizations work.

Leaders now face ambiguity (direction may unfold many ways), uncertainty (no predictability of what is next), ongoing change (the landscape keeps shifting), turbulence (events are disorderly), and acceleration (everything is moving more quickly). Setting a direction within these movable boundaries takes a new approach to leadership.

Responding to the new five forces requires leaders to be deliberate, despite the ambiguity, be future thinking, to adapt to uncertainty, be making sense of it all, to be resilient to change, be empathetic, support people through the turbulence, and, most importantly, be grounded in purpose, to provide stability while the world speeds up.

Much is expected from leaders, and this is a time when courage is calling. The “command and control” model, or those of “tell and sell,” and even “collaborative delegation” will no longer create results as we move forward. People want more, a foundation of purpose, clarity from future thinking and sense-making, and confidence in being deliberate and empathetic.

Leaders need to change to meet the new way of working. A new leadership value proposition is in order.
Where leaders could once predict and project, they face ambiguity, uncertainty, ongoing change, turbulence, and acceleration, where nothing is remotely linear. And yet a direction is needed, with clarity, confidence, and commitment.

Despite the noise, what is the best way ahead?

As the pandemic unfolded, leaders have been answering that question with other questions.

At first, leaders needed to address how to manage the risk to people and the business. How could they best lead to support the resilience of the organization and the workforce to respond to the upheaval of Covid-19?

What leaders found was that despite experiencing the worst crisis in recent history, they saw the best in their employees. People responded by stepping up and getting done what needed to be done, against the odds. Others took an entrepreneurial approach and experimented, tested, and reset. Everyone felt the lift of adrenaline to cross boundaries and be there for each other.

As events progressed, people returned to work with a different attitude about life and what they did with their time. They needed to see and feel purpose, experience empathy, and know leaders understood no one was 'snapping back' to the way things had been done. And people were tired – the initial surge of energy was replaced with the fatigue of the ongoing pandemic, with burnout hitting many employees, and despite seeing a positive economic response worries about the future, their future grew.

Engaging and including people in the decision of how to best return to work, and manage the physical and remote, provided the path forward.

But 'getting back to the office' is not the end of the story. Leaders found we are just starting their journey, and a different mindset will be needed to prosper and evolve.

The big question leaders must answer now is "How do we form a culture that adapts?"

And it is a question that troubles those in leadership positions. A recent survey by Bain and Company revealed that only 25% of executives believed their organizations had the culture to adapt at speed, while just 14% of leaders felt their workforces could adapt at scale.

The history of adapting to change has not been positive for organizations, with the general estimate that 67% of change initiatives will fail, some research even putting the number at 80%.

At the core of the question is the catalyst – change results from shifting behaviors, and that rests with understanding how people respond, and the choices they make, to move with the flow. To increase the motivation to have a workforce mindset ready for change is to measure the source of resistance, find the factors that influence the shifts needed, and invest time and attention in supporting those factors.

For leaders, the answer to the question of creating an adaptable working environment rests in a simple exercise – asking the people involved, employees. Analytics today enable leaders to assess what is happening, why, and how to move behaviors to those needed.

To answer the question, and proactively shift the culture to be adaptable, leaders need to just ask the right people – their employees.

Young, and not-so-young, employees want a sense of meaning in their work to connect with the purpose that keeps pace with the acceleration of everything. People want to see the impact of their work, and how they create value despite the ambiguity around them. And they need to be learning, upskilling, and taking on new projects to stay agile in the face of ongoing change. In their work, employees want a connection with people to get through turbulence with resilience. Critically, the foundation for all employees is to have psychological safety in the workplace, where they can be themselves, take risks, and say what they think without repercussions – this is where trust is built, and enables people to deal with stress and worry of uncertainty.

It is not pay, title, or even flexibility, the most important thing is to shape a working experience that attracts and retains great talent, founded in the ability to be themselves, in an inclusive culture, with work that creates value, the ability to grow, and finds their own sense of purpose in their role.

Leaders need to shape their own value proposition in creating and delivering value to employees in an organization that engages and empowers people to contribute their best.

The most important thing for leaders is to answer the new five forces with a working environment aligned to creating clarity, confidence, and commitment.

Work is important to people accounting for 42% of overall life satisfaction, even more for many. What happens with work matters greatly.[14]

So, what do employees want?

Leaders have been sidetracked by the new workplace – hybrid working arrangements, colocation or remote, and how to bring people back to the office. That is not what is most important to people. Everyone is talking about the new way of working but focusing on logistics rather than the mindset of the worker in today's environment.

People want flexibility in their work. It is about having the autonomy to make decisions about where, when, and how they do their work. It means being competent and learning to contribute in a more valued way. And it is about connection to each other.

With flexibility founded on autonomy, competency, and relatedness, people are more motivated to contribute their best, with a great sense of self-determination, meaning it matters more.
Is that possible?

Yes, leaders who make sense of the new five forces of ambiguity, acceleration, uncertainty, change, and turbulence, while looking forward to setting a direction that aligns people with clarity, confidence, and commitment, must go one step further to reach people.

It is about trust.

People wanted to be trusted, not mandated. They want to contribute, not be compliant. Employees want to be coached, rather than managed.

With trust, workers gain the flexibility to be productive on their teams, generating results as needed. The empathy leaders must show is about understanding that flexibility is really being able to take ownership of where, when, and how work gets done by the person doing the work.

The Workforce

It may seem frightening to leaders, even a bit out of balance, but it can work. It is not chaotic, falling into confusion and anarchy. People simply want to be involved in the decisions of how they work.

What happens when trust is established, and people take ownership of their work?

The return is an adaptable workforce, exactly what is needed in the environment we now face. People collaborate, are accountable and open to change, foster inclusiveness, and build resilience, all with a focus on connecting to creating value for the customer.

To create an adaptive working culture, leaders have an enormous opportunity to shape a healthier way of how people work together, gaining more from what they do in their roles, and, in turn, contributing more to the organization.

People have moved from performance to contribution.

Organizations are moving to a more employee-centered approach, shifting leadership to more social and emotional competencies. While digital skills are necessary and critical to growth, competitive advantage is now more about having "a crucial empathetic lens to strategy to help understand the wants and needs of individuals, specifically those experiencing and creating the product of service' of the organization,[15] namely, the employees. The pandemic years have emphasized the need for organizations to ask and listen to workers to understand and respond with understanding to how they feel – technical job skills need to be matched with capabilities of empathy and relatedness. People increasingly expect to see meaning in their work and are impatient to be able to grow and develop their contribution, to assess if the working environment is right for them.

Within the organization, technology is having a significant impact on meeting the new ways of working, with much of the communication happening through social media channels, videoconferencing, and electronic means where it is difficult to understand behavioral cues and the move to automation and artificial intelligence which creates questions of the future of roles and adapting skills to higher levels of emotional understanding and critical thinking.

The outcome is the focus on the employee-centered organization, where leaders appreciate the primary importance of people and their experience in working individually and collectively, to rapidly enable the response to ongoing change and continued turbulence externally.

Being employee-centered is about attracting and retaining talented employees "with maximum productivity … to support psychological safety, foster a diverse array of backgrounds and perspectives, and create opportunities for employees to feel engaged and heard."

At the core of the movement is creating jobs that inspire a feeling of meaning and purpose, valuing their unique talents and skills, and meeting them where they are, rather than expecting them to put on a "work face" to fit the organization. The skills of humanness, empathy, creativity, and community, take precedence.

While the focus is on humanness, the impact of technology is felt throughout the culture by connecting and shaping culture with onsite employees with those working remotely or on a hybrid basis. Can technology help achieve this goal, or stand in the way?

A study by Bain and Company, The Working Future: More Human, Not Less, identified five themes to advise leaders on reshaping the approach to working environments:

- Motivations for work are changing, raising expectations of what a job should provide.
- Beliefs about what makes a good job are diverging, people have different and unique sets of priorities, with the need to see the individual.
- Automation is helping to rehumanize work, as people can focus on human skills rather than routine tasks and activities.
- Technological change is blurring the boundaries of the firm, challenging cultural cohesion from people being at a distance both physically and methods of employment (gig and contract workers).
- Younger generations are increasingly overwhelmed, feeling the pressure of psychological strain that impacts their approach and engagement in work.

Deloitte completed a further study, The Future of Work, which highlighted the elements of an 'irresistible organization,' namely meaningful work, supportive management, a positive work environment, growth opportunities, and trusted leadership.

How do all these trends and elements shape what people see as the quality of work?

What is quality of work?

In the past, the definition veered toward productivity, and how competent people were in their roles. One description referred to the quality of work as meeting and exceeding expectations – of who? The employer played the primary role in working relationships in traditional settings. What was important for workers was to use their skills to create outcomes of the highest standard.

The shape of work has changed dramatically, amplified by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Quality of work has shifted to the employee experience.

The goal for employees in feeling a part of a team and an organization can be described as 'I see myself as a valued member of a community.'

Employees had time during the pandemic to question the role of work in their lives and what they wanted from it. The dynamic of power shifted from the employer to the people working in the organization, and the definition of quality of work shifted.

Feelings of being able to see a future, to fully participate in the creation of meaningful value for others, and be oneself, there is no work 'armor' to put on, where the context of the movement of the new way of working.

The lockdowns and distancing regulations of the pandemic also created an impact for people to see different approaches to working – not just where, but when, what, how, and most importantly, why.

With hybrid and remote work arrangements continuing, how we interact, and work together has shifted dramatically, and we must understand the equation for quality of work for people.

The question we want to answer is what shapes the quality of work, specifically regarding hybrid and remote situations.

The Critical Importance of Teams to Quality of Work

It may seem that individual experience is the most essential aspect of quality of work. But we are social beings, and we interact with others while we work, and those connections play a significant role in how we experience that work.

"I wanted to be part of a community, part of something people were building together."[16]

The quote clearly identifies the growing need of employees to find meaning and purpose in their work. Challenging assignments and learning opportunities are not enough to maintain commitment.

In 2012, Google engaged in the pursuit of perfection, identifying the formula for the most effective team. The company wanted to qualify and quantify the essence of what made for the perfect team, the environment that we all know when we walk into a group, and there is just an energy. There is a feeling. It is like magic, but it is not magic. It is something, or a group of things, which are done proactively.
The organization launched Project Aristotle.

The research team at Google believed effectiveness was the essential element of what people were looking for in a quality of work experience.

After assessing more than 180 teams over four years, Google pointed to behaviors as the key to unraveling the question of team effectiveness, the norms of behavior that shaped how people interacted with each other, whether stated or not. These behaviors were self-reinforcing, making the fabric of team culture.

In analyzing the interplay of these norms of behaviors, Google defined a set of five attributes that made an effective team.

1. Psychological safety: the ability to take risks and voice perspectives without fear of judgment or retribution, the comfort to be accepted for yourself bringing your identity to the workplace.
2. Dependability: people are accountable to each other, doing what they said they would with competency, the foundation of trust.
3. Clarity: everyone knows what is expected of them, is challenging yet attainable, and efforts are coordinated.
4. Meaning; Each person feels a sense of purpose in their work, knowing what they do is important and matters.
5. Impact: people see the contribution they make to the results achieved by the team.

The importance of psychological safety was emphasized as being more impactful than the other four attributes is a critical result of the research. Amy Edmonston, of HBS, found that to be fully present at work, to feel psychologically safe, we must know that we can be free enough to share the things that scare us without fear of recrimination.

The first step to an effective team culture was found to be a working environment founded on psychological safety. Where people have a voice and a choice, and can speak their minds, debate, and disagree without repercussions.

A psychologically safe workplace is not one of boundless collegiality, complete agreement, and smiling endlessly. That is not natural. We are human and have emotions, and to be able to express how we think and feel objectively and without personalization is what we need.

Psychological safety in cultures is moderate at best, with negative attention placed on making mistakes. We are afraid that any mistake will be remembered and held against us. We hesitate to try new things out of fear of making an error. And correlated to the fear of mistakes is high stress around meeting expectations and managing our mental health.

As we struggle to meet unrealistic expectations, we become anxious about making mistakes, that we will be called out for messing up, and we struggle to maintain our composure and not show the negative impact on our mental health. This environment does not bring the most effective teamwork or performance. Google spent years on Project Aristotle measuring what made high-performing teams effective. Their finding was that the single most essential quality, more than three times any other factor, was psychological safety.

Without the space to be ourselves, with the confidence to try new things, and voice our thinking will keep teams and companies stuck in not reaching their potential. And pressuring people to the point of triggering mental health challenges.

“Sorting out hybrid work arrangements will require managers to rethink and expand one of the strongest proven predictors of team effectiveness: psychological safety.”[17]

One critical component of psychological safety is about the degree of dependability people feel: trust is what employees need most from leaders.

Without trust, the culture will not provide the foundation for people to work collectively together with accountability, collaboration, and respect.

Leaders are the connectors of decisions to actions. How people interpret the intent of the decisions made translates to the commitment to contributing to achieving the desired outcomes.

Do people see leaders providing the support, guidance, and encouragement for deliberate and sustained effort? If yes, employees can contribute and collaborate to achieve the strategic goals of the organization – and reach their full potential together. If no, energy is lost, targets are missed, and talent walks away.

Start with trust, and the groundwork is in place.

How employees experience the organization starts with the executives and leaders. Trust is developed through three lenses – are leaders perceived as capable, are they coherent, and do they show consistency in their decisions?

Are leaders making decisions in ways that show they are capable, showing awareness and understanding of situations in their choices?

Capable leaders are authentic and aware, seek out and show respect for the perspectives of others, remain focused and deliberate, and make thoughtful and informed decisions that they communicate compellingly. They clearly think and feel about the direction to be set.

Once decisions are made, people look for leaders to be coherent – their actions are in line with the reasoning communicated. Fundamentally, are they making sense of what is happening inside and external to the business? Do they show empathy for the impact on others? And are they paying attention to the future, not being stuck in today?

People want leaders to set a direction and be consistent. Everyone appreciates that situations change, and decisions may need to be adjusted. But not jumping from one thing to another, moving from one side to the other, or dropping this for that. Decisions that are remade in ways to make the head spin limit the ability for people to work together at their best.

Trust gives people the footing to grow and develop, contribute to shared success, and commit to working together to achieve outcomes that matter.

Decisions cannot be simply made in the boardroom. To gain the trust needed to bring people together, leveraging the skills and talents of all, leaders need to make decisions in a way that involves, recognizes, and empathizes with respect.

Leaders need to earn trust through their decisions. It cannot be assumed or expected. And it can be lost quickly. When leaders start by trusting and respecting their employees, and engaging them in discussions, their decisions will in turn build trust and respect for their leadership.

This is the essence of trust, the capacity we rely on each other in our interactions working together. With it, we can leverage our strengths and accomplish multiples of what we each can do alone. Without it, our potential will never be achieved.

Proactively shaping the working environment to encourage and support interactions between employees that develop trust is critical work for leaders, and often overlooked in the rush and urgency to see results. The pressure places strains and tensions on the relationships we have with each other in our work, and trust can be eroded.

For trust to develop between people there needs to be accountability and transparency.

When we are open and direct, we know who we each are. Hiding our intent, or not revealing the full measure of our actions, we are hiding something which immediately puts others on edge. Why share themselves when they question what we are trying to do?

And if we are not true to our word, accountable for delivering what we said when we said we would do it, others will not believe in us.

Being honest and dependable are the two aspects of healthy work relationships and support positive interactions that move a business forward. With trust, people are motivated and inspired to commit more of themselves to work together for shared success. That is a value proposition the market can invest in.

Cultures can be friendly and collegial, with people enjoying their work, and the people they work with, and not have trust. Happy working environments do not mean healthy and trusting relationships, and the capacity to achieve the potential of strong people working together.

Psychological safety tells us we can be ourselves without judgment and coupled with trust that others will be there for us, we can achieve greatness together.

Understanding with clarity what needs to be done, by whom, and why supports the alignment of people on a team and with other functions in the organization. With an aligned effort, employees can leverage their energy and effort to achieve greater levels of success and a personal sense of accomplishment. Where efforts are not coordinated clearly, misalignment disengages people as targets and timelines are missed, and employees feel let down.

In a world facing unending uncertainty and ambiguity, people feel distracted and distressed. Clarity is the greatest resource a manager needs to bring people from places of fear and confusion to a sense of possibility and understanding. Clarity provides confidence that people can make sense of what is happening around them and know specifically how they contribute to the success of the team and the organization.

Clarity underscores what is important for an employee to do, what activities will provide the most value, who are the others to work with and what are their roles, and how can everyone best work together. Managers provide a clear picture of the executive direction and decisions to support teams to be effective and adapt to changes with an appreciation of the reasoning.

Without clarity, time and energy are wasted, and people feel they are not being valued for their effort. Quality of work would suffer if employees were not able to coordinate their work activities to make a difference, so their skills and talents can be used and support team and business success.

Being clear enables learning and development as there is a direction set and people can see what competencies and capabilities they can build for the future.
Teams are not able to work effectively together without clarity, people are unable to commit their best, and there will be fear that feedback, and performance conversations will be unfair as it was not clear what was needed.

With clarity, the work people do can take on meaning. Energy is applied to creating value, there is a purpose to what each person and the team are doing, which supports the resilience and sustaining success of a team through agility and renewal grounded in the ongoing meaningful work. Without a sense that the work matters, people disengage, question their commitment, and there is uncertainty as to the reason for working with the organization.

Meaning sets an enduring foundation of satisfaction and enjoyment and intrinsic reward from the work itself. Meaning is knowing deep down why it is that what you are doing matters to you and enabling others to tap into their own sources of motivation and purpose.

With a sense of meaning to the work being done, people have confidence in deliberate and thoughtful direction. With a clear purpose consistently felt in the work being done, people can connect, be empowered to contribute their best, collaborate effectively, and know where flexibility fits, or not.

Feeling meaning in work is about what we do, for whom, and why it matters.

With meaning for guidance, people gain an appreciation of where deliberate attention needs to be focused to support outcomes that matter.

There is a sense of energy from knowing clearly what matters to you and where you feel attention should be focused to capture the greatest opportunity, build on the key competitive strength, and enable other team members with the needed collaboration for effectiveness.

Having meaning in work gives a sense of purpose and resiliency that strengthens the feeling of being able to take agency. There is a great deal that cannot be controlled in the workplace, where finding meaning and the purpose that radiates from it are within the control of the employee supported by the team culture.

To be effective as a team, people want to see the impact of their work, and the value created for the organization, the customers, and for communities. Knowing that the work done will create benefits for others builds pride of accomplishment and the commitment to make a difference.

Careers are the cornerstone of lives and seeing the value of the effort enhances engagement and resilience. Having an impact brings out the uniqueness and strengths in people, further raising their confidence.

When workers connect to their contribution, see the impact, and hear positive feedback, the quality of the working environment is incredibly enhanced.

Team culture has changed with the remote working arrangements of the pandemic, and effectiveness has been augmented by the need for relatedness and the capacity for development.

Culture evolves and adapts, and with the increasing relevance of the micro-culture of the team, the ability to connect becomes more important. How teams interact, share progress, make decisions, and provide support and feedback to each other makes a difference. This is how people relate to one another and form a community. In a world that is more disconnected physically, being able to emotionally connect makes a considerable positive impact on the quality of work.

Rather than how to excel as a performer, more people are now asking how they can be a great teammate.

The Importance of Relationships with Managers

Managers need to look at their teams differently, asking "How can I create connection and trust and awareness of where we're going and cohesion so that our group can, in real-time, stay together and change?"

Being able to relate to one another and to sense relatedness with the team is essential for quality of work.

With the opportunities for moving to new jobs becoming easier, the question needs to be asked as to what keeps people with a team. Feeling related to one another forms a bond, and the second piece that unites a remote or hybrid team is access to development. Development is one of the few things research has shown that will keep people attached to a group.

"We live in an age of hypermobility and hyper flexibility where people can and will work from everywhere … what keeps them there is this opportunity that "I'm going to get better in ways that I can't even imagine. This place offers me an opportunity to get better that I can't find anywhere else."[18]

Employees can move quickly and often from positions, the demand and flexibility are in their favor, although the clarity of the opportunity with their role helps retention, knowing they have more ahead of them in their present organization rather than taking the risk of a move to another job. The discussion of opportunity with employees is essential in the workplace.

More than ever, team effectiveness is about the micro-culture of the team. And the quality of work builds from the connection people feel with each other and as a team, the future they see for continued growth and development, in an environment where they feel psychologically safe to be themselves.

"It's about microculture. Every team has its microculture. It's about talking about that and co-creating the language you're going to use to describe answers to the questions, 'What are we doing?' What are we about? How do we connect? Why does our work matter?"[19]
With the move to remote working arrangements, the experience people have of the culture has moved to the team level even more so as these are the colleagues that workers are most in touch with, there is no longer walking around the office to see others.

In assessing the quality of work, the study intends to test the continued relevance of the five factors of team effectiveness as uncovered in Google's Project Aristotle with the changing context of hybrid and remote working arrangements, and the new factors of team microculture with relatedness and development.

How have perspectives changed, and does trust remain at the core of the team's role in providing quality of work for people?

The role of managers and supervisors has always been seen as important, although, traditionally, more of a link in translating the strategy set at the executive table to actions executed on the frontline.

However, the pandemic has enhanced the understanding of the impact of managers on how employees experience their work. More than allocating workload and aligning workflow, managers shape the context of how teams work individually and together. And the skills needed by managers to meet the changing expectations of people for their quality of work experience are expanding their role and the difference they can make in the work lives of teams.

The engagement has been conventionally used as a default for job satisfaction, and although important, it explains one part of the overall employee experience and how the working environment impacts and brings people together.

Despite the enormous concentration placed upon the concept of engagement, little improvement has been seen over several decades of much research, raising the question of how effective engagement is to quality of work.

But it does explain a concept essential to the effectiveness of an organization's culture.

Engagement connects how well managers can translate the decisions and direction set by leaders for teams and employees with the interpersonal connection to create a positive work experience. Although we continue to have great reverence for leadership, almost worshipping the inspiration, vision, and motivation we believe great leaders bring, all that is matched in importance to how effectively managers can coordinate, connect, and support people to find meaning in their work and perform individually and together.

Being a manager matters greatly to the quality of work.

Research published by McKinsey & Company reveals the significant impact of the relationship between employees and their immediate manager, or supervisor, being almost 34% of overall job satisfaction.

Managers are true levers to organizational effectiveness and have a clear connection with how people perceive their quality of work.

The reporting of falling engagement levels has continued throughout the pandemic, highlighting increasing skills needed from managers.

With Gartner reporting that 46% of the workforce intend to remain in hybrid working arrangements, even fully remote, there needs to be a deeper assessment of the relationship between the changing competencies valued in managers by employees and their impact on the perceived quality of work.

We have highlighted five key trends in skills needed from managers for assessment of how people experience their working environment.

1. Providing a sense of belonging for people with their teams and the organization. As more employees work remotely, the need for enhanced effort to create relatedness between people and their colleagues has become essential. In the era of the great resignation and turnover of employees, feeling connected to others plays a significant part in the perceived value of staying in a role with a specific employer as McKinsey & Company reported that one of the three top reasons people leave was that they 'didn't feel a sense of belonging at work.'

2. Linking the work individuals do to create a feeling of purpose, gaining meaning from what they do for an organization they respect for their position. Nearly 70% of people find their purpose in the work they do, and the bland statements of purpose promoted by corporations do not help people feel the importance and relevance of what they do.[20] While organizations do not provide purpose for people, managers help employees see how their role supports the organization and fulfills their needs and longing to contribute in ways that matter to them.

3. Showing empathy to understand how people are faring in their work and role. Quality of work is about positive energy and if people feel alone and not cared about, they become isolated and feel alone. Managers need to take a greater role, particularly in remote and hybrid working arrangements, to ask questions to understand where people are and truly listen and help individuals find their connection with colleagues and teams. Relatedness has become a critical need for people to remain satisfied with their work.

4. The pandemic opened a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy in how people did the work of their position, and they want to continue that path. The manager is essential in finding the balance of oversight with empowerment to enable people to feel in charge of their work and have a high perception of the quality of their work experience.
5. Coordinating the capacity for people to contribute at their best, coaching, allocating, and opening links with other teams and functions in a dynamic way provides people the space they need to have a high quality of work, and focus on achieving results, rather than following a process.

We want to measure and understand how managers have reshaped their roles and strengthened (or not) their relationships and impact with individuals and how they perceive their quality of work.

With new ways of working, what matters most for a high quality of work experience?

Leaders are struggling to find the balance to attract and retain talent during the great turnover, or resignation, and falling short of what is key for people to connect to the organization.

The answer may lie in how we connect as human beings, not human capital – we need to connect to other people. We need to feel we belong. A sense of belonging is the emotion that connects us to the people we work with and the organization itself.

To belong means to have the security and confidence that you are accepted and valued for who you are, your authentic self.

Despite the increase of empathy in leadership, the feeling of belonging has not translated to people as those considering leaving their role for another continue to rise. And some are simply leaving a business with no other work ahead. The fundamental need for belonging is not being fulfilled.

The reasoning for people moving from their roles includes the lack of belonging, and the other two top reasons are connected: not being valued for my unique talents and skills and not sensing a clear purpose in my work both add to not feeling valued for who you are.

The root of providing the feeling of belonging lies in managers and leaders acting with greater emotional intelligence, shaping a space of psychological safety for people. It is not just empathy and understanding how someone feels, it is proactively taking action to build the feeling. Questions need to be asked and researched:

- Is there discrimination of any form in the working environment?
- Is there recognition of the accomplishments of people in their work?
- Is there acceptance of people's identity as they are?

Or do we put pressures, known or not, for people to change, to be seen as different; to not be included in major projects and promotional tracks? Are we too busy to notice what people are doing well?

Belonging is a fundamental need – it is not going away. With more choice, and time for assessing what life and work should be, people do not want to simply work a job, they want to belong and be valued for their contribution.

The pandemic gave people time to reconsider the role of work in their lives and started a search for a purpose at work. In understanding purpose at work, McKinsey & Company defined purpose, as 'individual purpose can be thought of as an enduring, overarching sense of what matters in a person's life, people experience purposefulness when striving toward something significant and meaningful to them.' It would make sense that the work we do, and the quality of the working experience, would be a significant part of gaining a sense of purpose.

Where organizations have responded by intently expressing corporate purpose, this is not translating to employees. The link is provided by managers who can help employees find that overarching sense of what matters in the role they play, the activities they do, and the value they create in their work. People want to understand how the work brings meaning to their individual needs and how they contribute to the success of their team and the organization, and see the impact of what they do for the customer.

We are looking for managers to make the connection between purpose and quality of work for each person in their working experience.

Empathy in support of quality of work experience for employees calls on managers to be genuine and authentic, be able to show vulnerability, and seek perspective (asking questions, listening, and caring about the impact). Traditional employee performance optimization focused on meeting targets, deadlines, and continuous improvement has shifted to relatedness, experimentation, and development. Being understood is essential in supporting people to work and contribute. These capabilities are a major shift for managers, who were most likely promoted for their performance rather than their people skills.

And how well have managers made the shift and how has their success in the switch of skill focus affected the perceived quality of work for their teams?

Flexibility has become a buzzword rivaled in prominence only by the novel work model it is so often used to describe - hybrid work.

These words have taken over the way we speak about the future of work and constitute a whole series of new ways to think about further integration of work and life.

Many different interpretations of flexibility are beginning to arise.

- The ability to connect and get work done from anywhere.
- The ability to work from home for a couple of days and the rest in the office.

What people truly mean by flexibility is autonomy, the ability to be the primary decision-maker of where and when they do their work.

Employees want flexibility by way of autonomy:

A study through the Harvard Business Review showed what people wanted from their work arrangement – 59% responded that flexibility was more important than salary or benefits, and 77% preferred to work for a company that gives them the flexibility to work from anywhere. And 61% of employees wanted to have the choice to come into the office when they need to and work from home when they need to, and this is conditional on their ability to exercise it in a way that best fits them. It is conditional upon autonomy.[21]

"Mandates feel like a violation of autonomy, which is one of the most important intrinsic drivers of threat and reward in the brain."[22]

People no longer are open to compliance; they want to assess the working environment to measure the degree of contribution they will commit. And return to the office mandates result in a more pronounced employee reaction – 59% felt a sense of aversion to the point they said they would not work for a company expecting working in an office for five days each week.[23]

People feel "not just unheard, but at times actively ignored."[24]

Working remotely offers many benefits for flexibility although with a challenge to the coordination of individual work and collaboration with others on the team, and in other parts of the organization. Managers play a crucial role in helping people make sense of what needs to happen, and how to make the desired outcome happen.

When people begin to feel lost in the translation of what is required of them, they disengage and feel detached from the team, and company. The sense of belonging is impacted, and the departure risk increases.

Managers act as influencers in helping to shape the connections of people to their work and expectations for outcomes, collaborate and work effectively with colleagues within and outside the team, and move projects forward for the organization.

With the increased demands on managers, how do individuals feel about their ability to coordinate their work? Studies have reported that the likelihood of completing projects and initiatives has fallen over the pandemic period to slightly more than 20%, and we want to explore the manager's role in leveraging or limiting teams' capability to deliver results.

The changing expectations of people for their managers have also stretched their capabilities and capacity, as "the relationship between employees and their managers have started to shift to be more emotional and supportive. Knowledge workers now expect their managers to be part of their support system to help them improve their life experience, rather than just their employee experience."[25]

This shift is an enormous change in mindset for managers from a place of focusing on performance and the execution of work to coaching and supporting the overall well-being of people in their work lives. And with the rise of remote work, managers do not have the same visibility into what their individual team members are doing, and how they are working (or when), and this creates either intense oversight attempts (which will not be positively received) or increasingly focus on the outcomes of work, not the process.

In providing the coaching support employees are seeking, a much higher degree of empathy is required, an increase in emotional intelligence for managers. Empathy lays the foundation for high levels of trust and care in a culture of acceptance for people within their team and between those colleagues in other teams. One question to be addressed is the success of managers being able to provide the needed level of empathy to maintain a high quality of work.

The essential and intimate role that managers play in the lives of people at work will be measured to assess the alignment and impact on an individual's quality of work, assess what aspects are most important, and how much the pandemic and remote worker trends affect people's sense that their work matters.

The question is critical based on the McKinsey research on the importance of the relationship with managers, and how the shifting expectations for those relationships may affect the departure risk for people. Have managers been able to shift their skill set to provide the psychological safety and emotional well-being people are looking for in their work? Are workflow, workload, and expectations fitting with people as coached by managers? Are resources being allocated by managers to account for increasing technology needs and digital skills to be able to work remotely? Combining technology and empathy will be a part of the research, and intriguing to assess the impact on the quality of work and highlight strengths and challenges, where development is needed to support people to engage in their work.

We expect managers to provide a community for people, bring a sense of relatedness that we are looking for more than ever, and then coordinate the projects and workload aligned to strategy. And from there, do their own tactical work!

We place excessive expectations on managers to engage people without doing the same for them.

Managers are facing greater responsibility and engagement measures the context of where they need to be supported to have a positive impact in their roles. And with engagement sagging, those relationships seem not to be working positively.

We want to understand the changing manager role and relationship impact on employee quality of work. Do managers have time to build relationships, recognize the unique talents and skills of employees, and outline developmental opportunities? Or can they explain the shared sense of success for the organization to teams and how it all relates?

The Importance of Mental Health in the Workplace

The mental health of employees has become a top agenda item for organizations. While in the past, corporations may have seen psychological well-being as an individual responsibility, leaders see the importance of providing a working environment supportive of mental wellness.

"… mental and emotional health of the company's employees to be [the] biggest challenge coming out of the pandemic." Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks[26]

Studies now show the rising incident rate of mental illness, moving from levels of about 25% before the pandemic to estimated levels of 41% at present. MIT Sloan reported that nearly 81% of employees are facing some form of burnout or mental health issue with 68% of people seeing their work being interrupted by these challenges.[27]

Quality of work is unlikely to be achieved in an environment where the employee experience is challenging to individual mental health. Supporting the psychological wellness of people is an essential element of assessing the needs of employees in their roles.

With the added intricacies of remote work on relatedness and the sense of belonging, or alternatively a feeling of being isolated, the importance of mental health in the workplace is here to stay, a permanent fixture in organizational strategy.

Where mental health was once relegated to human resources as a benefits issue, it is now understood to be an overarching cultural consideration, "Change needs to happen within the context of culture, where conversations about mental health are encouraged and normalized."[28]

Not considering mental health can lead to heightened absenteeism, workplace accidents, employee turnover, and declining productivity can escalate – all of which would be estimated to reduce the quality of work perspectives.

With stress within the workplace increasing from never-ending internal and external, personal, and organizational change, the strain and tension people feel has escalated substantially placing pressure on the ability to cope and to experience challenges to their mental health.

A key factor amplifies the impact of mental health on employees, assessed to be a key element of the perceived quality of work – stigma.

Recent studies show that 80% of employees feel there is a stigma to talking about mental health in the workplace, which keeps people quiet despite the increasing severity of the pressures they feel. Nearly 37% of people do not disclose their mental health issues, suffering in silence, in fear of the stigma they will face in the working environment.[29]

What is stigma? Stigma is a level of shame, prejudice, or discrimination toward people with mental health conditions. Stigma means people with mental illnesses are viewed differently than those with other chronic health conditions, such as diabetes. Stigma impacts interpersonal interactions – inclusion, access to projects, and promotion, not belonging.

"When we leave stigma alone, it transitions quickly to discrimination, and discrimination translates quickly to lack of access and unequal services and support."[30]

Much of the sense of stigma can be amplified due to extenuating issues of lack of diversity and inclusion, where those from marginalized communities have a heightened feeling that they cannot talk about their mental health.

People experiencing challenges to their mental health fear the reactions of their colleagues. In a recent study, employees articulated what they expected from the people they work with if they spoke about their mental health:[31]

- 47% believed "people will think I am worthless if they know"
- 50% believed "people will doubt my talent and skills if they know"
- 53% believed "people will doubt my character if they know"

And the study found that these fears were well founded as 73% of employees would prefer not to work with a colleague experiencing a mental illness, while 55% chose not to work with a team member recovering from a mental health issue.[32]

Understanding the stigma in working environments is critical to creating a space where people can experience the quality of work. Much can be changed through awareness and normalizing the conversation and we want to understand the connections.

Adding to the rise of challenges to mental health is the remote working arrangements. Despite the benefit of increased freedom and ownership of time, people based in their homes can feel a blurring of work and personal lives, isolation from their colleagues and supervisors, and stress from feelings of loneliness.

"Diseases of despair – including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and addiction – were already rampant" prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and since, "every aspect of life has required added work … we've had to juggle parenting, caregiving, and working without our traditional structural supports."[33]

Challenges to mental health were always a part of work, and with the increased pressure from the pandemic on many aspects of life, from financial to family care to social interaction, there have been more triggers to unresolved aspects of employee mental health and increasing incidences of illness.

Stress has a cumulative impact on people in the workplace, and the fixation on busyness and being seen as productive (particularly if working remotely) amplifies the pressures employees feel. We believe the degree and perspective on the factors of stress in the working environment greatly affect the quality of work that people experience. The feeling that stress is higher and will last also impacts people's ability to cope and place strain on resiliency.

The inherent sense of stress in the working environment needs to be measured to assess the relationship with the quality of work.

Engagement is an outcome that is constrained by the degree of stress felt by people in the workplace. We want to assess the correlation of other positive factors of quality of work with stress experienced in the culture.

The impact of working remotely started with the promise of increased productivity coupled with the benefits of greater flexibility and reduced stress from commuting and demands on time. As the pandemic wore on, the stress impact shifted to the blurring of work and personal lives, and people felt a deterioration in the balance between work and life.

As traditionally predictable work patterns were upended by the pandemic, a higher degree of stress was experienced, which impacted the capacity of people to contribute. Employees needed more space and time to manage their overall well-being and the challenges to maintaining balance in their life impacted their perception of overall quality of work.

The impact of stress on well-being has been estimated to be much higher for Generation Z employees, onboarded virtually and distanced from forming workplace relationships.

"One in four Gen Z respondents reported feeling more emotionally distressed (25 percent), almost double the levels reported for millennial and Gen X respondents (13 percent), and more than triple the levels reported by baby boomer respondents (8 percent)."[34]

The introduction to the workforce for Gen Z has been troubling and creating challenges for finding their place, and their identity, in the now more hybrid working arrangements. Gen Z employees feel adrift. How does this added psychological pressure impact their perception of the quality of work? We want to filter responses by age to provide comparative data for insights.

Having supportive colleagues in the workplace is key to feeling less isolated when working from home. In particular, the quality, frequency, and nature of interactions change when team members are physically distant and there is less dynamic and spontaneous communication. Neuroscience research has found that only in-person interactions trigger the full suite of psychological responses and neural synchronization required for optimal human communication and trust building and that digital channels such as videoconferencing disrupt our processing of communicative information. Such impoverished virtual interactions can lead to static and siloed collaboration networks, workers with a diminished sense of belonging to their organizations, and social and professional isolation.[35]

Reaching to support team colleagues and the importance of connecting with managers impacts the quality of work regarding job satisfaction, working experience, and loneliness sets in. The importance of the team and the manager has never been higher.

"It is help from colleagues, not from managers, which is vital to improving the hybrid work experience, especially when it comes to loneliness."[36]

The shifting to remote work has placed greater importance on the ability of teams to support their members, forming relationships that bring emotional connection and reduce the separation of colleagues working remotely.

Annex 2: Future Directions Survey

Suggested questions for a self-assessment and employer survey developed for all employees to maintain a common understanding of quality of work and the impact of interventions to improve the employee working experience:

Initial filtering Question:

0. Do you work completely onsite, completely offsite, or in a hybrid arrangement?

Quality of Work Measurement Questions:

1. Are you excited to go to work each day?
2. How do you perceive your compensation?
3. Do you feel positive about the decisions being made in your organization?
4. Do you believe your managers effectively communicate the state of the business?
5. Do you enjoy flexibility in how you perform your tasks?
6. Is the working environment supportive and free of prejudice?
7. Is there a clear and motivating vision and purpose for the organization?
8. Would you refer friends and peers to work for your organization?
9. Are you able to apply your skills to something you love each day?
10. Are you able to use your unique strengths each day?
11. Do you enjoy the experience of your organization's working environment?
12. Have you experienced higher levels of stress in the last several months?
13. Do you feel there is a stigma around mental health in your organization?
14. Do you feel a sense of belonging with your team?
15. Do you see an exciting future for you with the organization in three years?

Annex 3: Areas of Training for Managers

Full list of suggested training programs for managers to support the development of a high quality of work for their organization:

- Remote Work Management: Training in managing remote teams, focusing on communication, trust-building, and fostering a sense of community in a virtual environment.
- Mental Health Awareness: Employers should be trained on the importance of mental health in the workplace, how to identify signs of stress or mental health issues among employees, and how to handle these situations empathetically and effectively.
- Promotion of Flexibility: Training on how to create a flexible work environment that caters to diverse needs and preferences of employees, enabling them to work at their best.
- Effective Communication: Emphasizing the need for clear and consistent communication, especially regarding organizational decisions, company vision, and strategy.
- Cultivating Diversity and Inclusion: Training to understand the importance of diversity in leadership and management teams, and how to foster an inclusive work culture.
- Stress Management Techniques: Employers should be trained on how to manage their own stress and how to support their teams in managing stress, particularly in remote or hybrid work arrangements.
- Building a Positive Work Culture: Training on how to foster a positive work culture, where employees feel valued, recognized, and able to apply their skills and strengths effectively.
- Psychological Safety: Employers should be trained on how to create a psychologically safe environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning rather than failures to be held against individuals.

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