Institute
of Internal
Communication

The power within

Scenario planning: four futures of internal communication

Working
the*future*
INSIGHT • STRATEGY • CHANGE

CONTENTS

How we communicate with colleagues underpins the essence of good work.

Communication is integral to social connection and the extent to which we feel respected, connected, safe and secure in our social surroundings. These elements each have an essential part to play in our ability to give our best and deliver great work.

Effective, empathic and mutually inclusive communication is key to both engagement and high performance. As commercial landscapes become ever more complex and uncertain, how we communicate with one another within our organisations has great bearing on longer-term operational success.

The ongoing pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine and now chronic fuel inflation have combined to reinforce the normalisation of working from home, at least part-time. The ability to work flexibly and remotely is now expected by the workforce in those segments of the economy that can accommodate it.

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> **The escalating climate crisis will inevitably drive a return to localised working, while increasingly prohibitive energy costs will make distributed working mainstream practice.**

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With so many external factors at play, uncertainty and change are the new normal.

Over the course of the 2020s, the ways in which we work will be utterly transformed.

In increasingly turbulent and fluid economic landscapes, agility is key to longer-term survival. At an individual level, mental agility is essential for successful adaptation to ever-changing circumstances. At the organisational level, strategic goals must be set with agility in mind, so that priorities can be reset as soon as market forces demand it.

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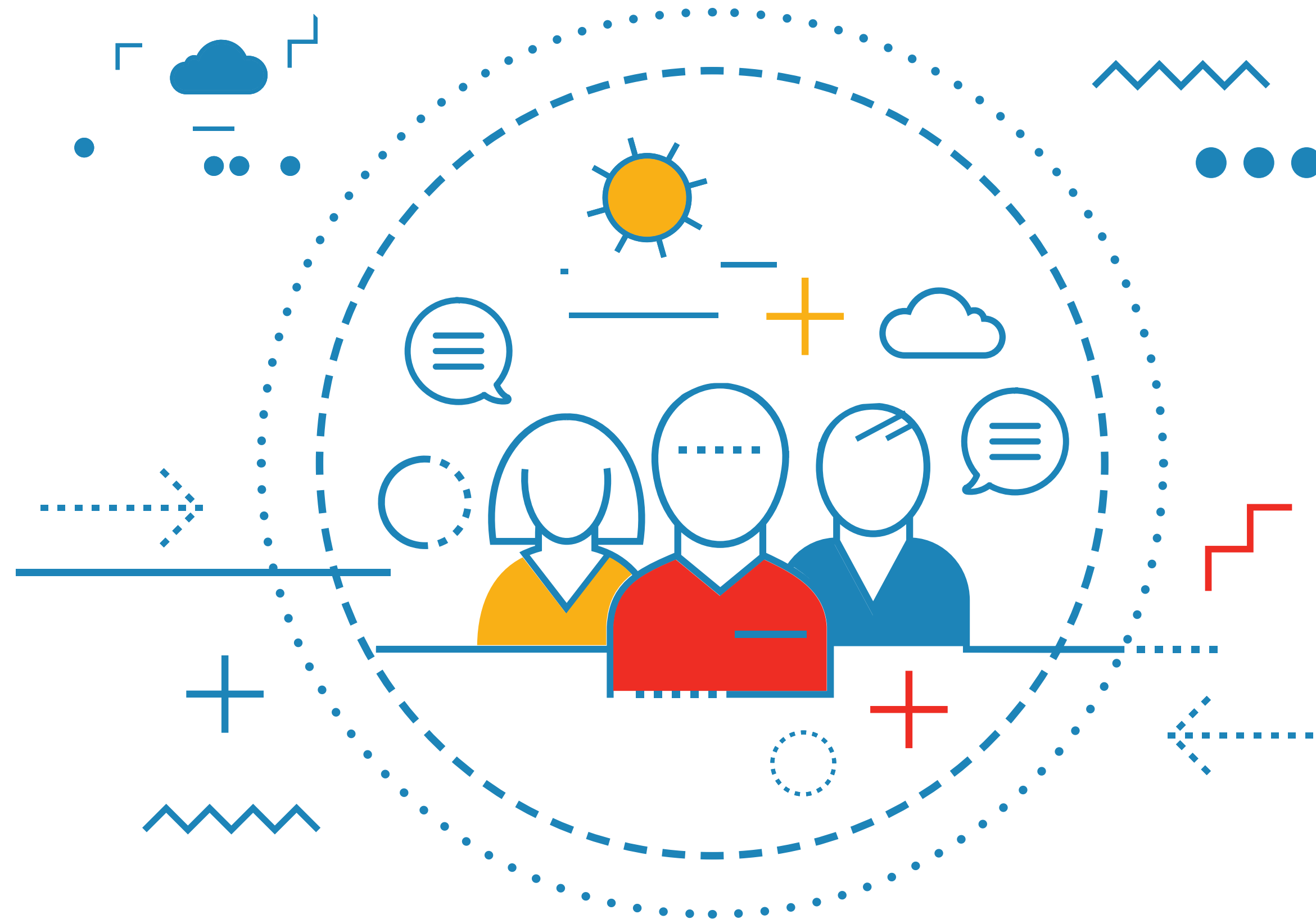
At every level, preparedness is key to resilience.

In the last twenty years, we've made huge gains in our understanding of humankind as a social species. We're hardwired for connection and belonging; feeling seen and heard is integral to personal wellbeing.

This, of course, means that how we communicate with one another is key to how well we successfully navigate uncertain and volatile futures.

The internal communication profession has a pivotal role to play in helping organisations navigate these uncharted waters. It's only by nurturing our relationships and connections that we'll successfully overcome the challenges ahead and build a better collective future.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SCENARIO PLANNING

Scenario planning is a strategic planning method used within some organisations to make long-term plans.

Because operational environments in the 21st century are increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA), forward-thinking organisations use scenario planning to imagine different future pathways.

Pioneered by Shell in the 1970s, scenario planning is often based on the application of systems thinking. By analysing emergent realities that have real-world potential consequences, scenario planners explore the myriad complex ways in which external forces might combine to create often surprising futures.

The 2020s have already thrown up unprecedented scenarios that few could have fully foreseen. A global pandemic, war in Europe, political instability, commodity shortages and the escalating consequences of climate change are combining to present game-changing consequences for how we live and work.

While no one can accurately predict the future, undertaking scenario planning exercises allows organisations to better prepare for what could lie ahead.

By shifting out of "business as usual" mode, organisations that practice scenario planning are able to better contemplate and explore "what if" possibilities. Such activities help to develop a more detailed understanding of the key trends that are more likely to effect change over time, but which may have hitherto seemed inconsequential.

Scenario planning allows participants to play with crafted possible narratives.

By simplifying a wealth of data and information into a forward-focused story, scenarios provide a richer and more engaging context to explore, for enhanced resilience and strategic decision making.

Organisations that both maintain a focused eye on the future and undertake intentional analysis of potential repercussions are most likely to proactively adapt and meet market opportunities as they arise.

Find out more about scenario planning:
https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/
organisation/strategy/externalanalysis/
scenario-planning/scenario-planning#

THE META-TRENDS ACCELERATING CHANGE AT WORK IN THE 2020s

In 2019, the Institute of Internal Communication commissioned Working the Future to write it's *Future of Work* report. Our aim was to outline for IoIC members the primary trends transforming work in the 2020s.

Little did we know that Covid-19 would emerge so soon thereafter and have such a colossal and global impact on both life and work. 2022 has been another game-changing year, as Europe comes to terms with its largest military invasion since World War II and the ensuing social and economic consequences.

These two events alone have created – and continue to create – various other sociocultural aftershocks that are yet to be fully made sense of.

However, war and pandemic aside, our *Future of Work* report outlined key trends already disrupting and transforming organisational effectiveness. In the **full report** we covered trends including:

#1 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Technology is evolving at lightning speed. Worldwide, IT spending is projected to total $4.5 trillion in 2022 – an increase of 5.1% from 2021[i].

Developments in enterprise technology have huge ramifications for both the work we do and how we organise ourselves in the workplace. Software automation, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) are already bringing huge efficiencies to organisations. In 2017, PWC forecast that AI would potentially contribute US$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030[ii].

Emergent technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), web 3.0 and distributed ledgers (blockchain) will create further disruption.

Pandemic-enforced social distancing and remote working has poured rocket fuel on digital transformation activities, creating new risks and opportunities for organisations across the board.

In the digital workplace, it's increasingly hard to predict the skills requirements of the future. Nonetheless, it's clear that how we think about learning, both in educational settings and in the workplace, requires a complete overhaul.

US$15.7 trillion

In 2017, PWC forecast that AI would potentially contribute US$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030.

US$4.5 trillion

IT spending is projected to total US$4.5 trillion worldwide in 2022.

#2 GLOBALISATION, GEOPOLITICS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The mobile Internet has accelerated a highly complex web of globalisation. Within the space of a few decades, it has become possible to source goods and services quickly and easily from pretty much anywhere on the planet.

This doesn't come without its complications, however. With economic growth comes increased power and, as we're learning fast, power is often intoxicating for those who hold it.

Currently, at the beginning of the 2020s, half the world's wealth is held by just 1% of the population[iii]. Social inequality is increasingly problematic for countries and governments worldwide. Inequality accelerates social unrest and political instability, which in turn has huge implications for a globalised economy.

In parallel, world power is shifting away from the West towards the East. China is set to become the world's biggest economy by 2026.

As globalisation destabilises previously powerful economies, nationalism increases.

We're witnessing what *The Economist* has called "slowbalisation"[iv], and very possibly a retrenchment back into localisation, as countries struggle to shore up jobs and a baseline standard of living for citizens.

EXPLAINER

Slowbalisation: the slowdown of global integration.

1%

Half the world's wealth is held by just 1% of the population.

#3 CLIMATE CRISIS AND RESOURCE SCARCITY

The 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stated categorically that human activity is undeniably responsible for the changing climate. Furthermore, the window of opportunity for humans to take remedial action is fast running out.

In April 2022, the UN announced that global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025, to stave off the worst-case scenarios of climate breakdown.

Since organisations are responsible for 85% of total carbon emissions[v] (once scope 3 emissions are included), how we work must radically adapt to embrace carbon neutrality and economic principles based on circular and regenerative thinking.

In addition, the escalating crisis will see widespread climate refugeeism, placing pressure on nations and economies to respond and adapt.

> The window of opportunity for humans to take remedial action is fast running out.

85%

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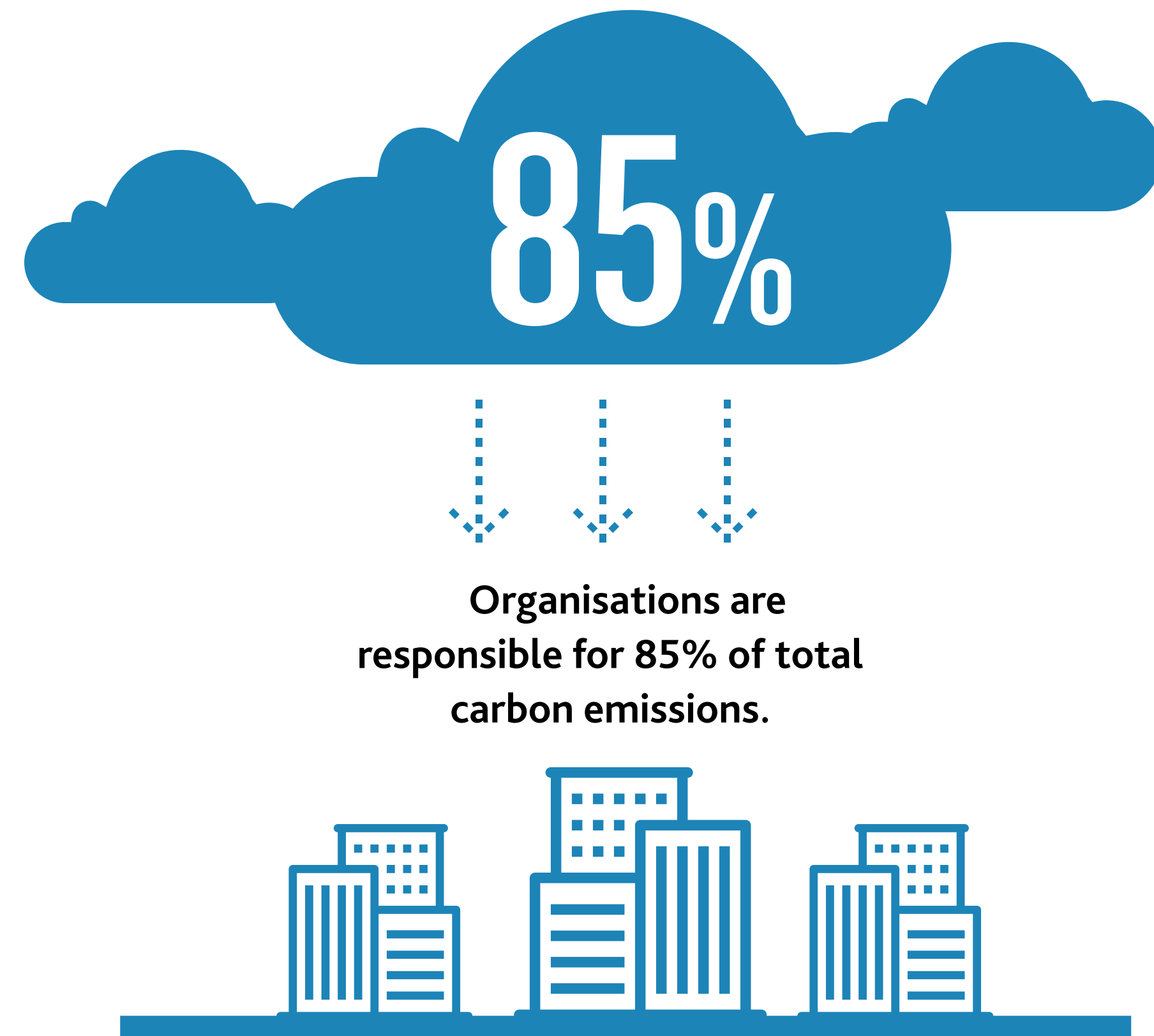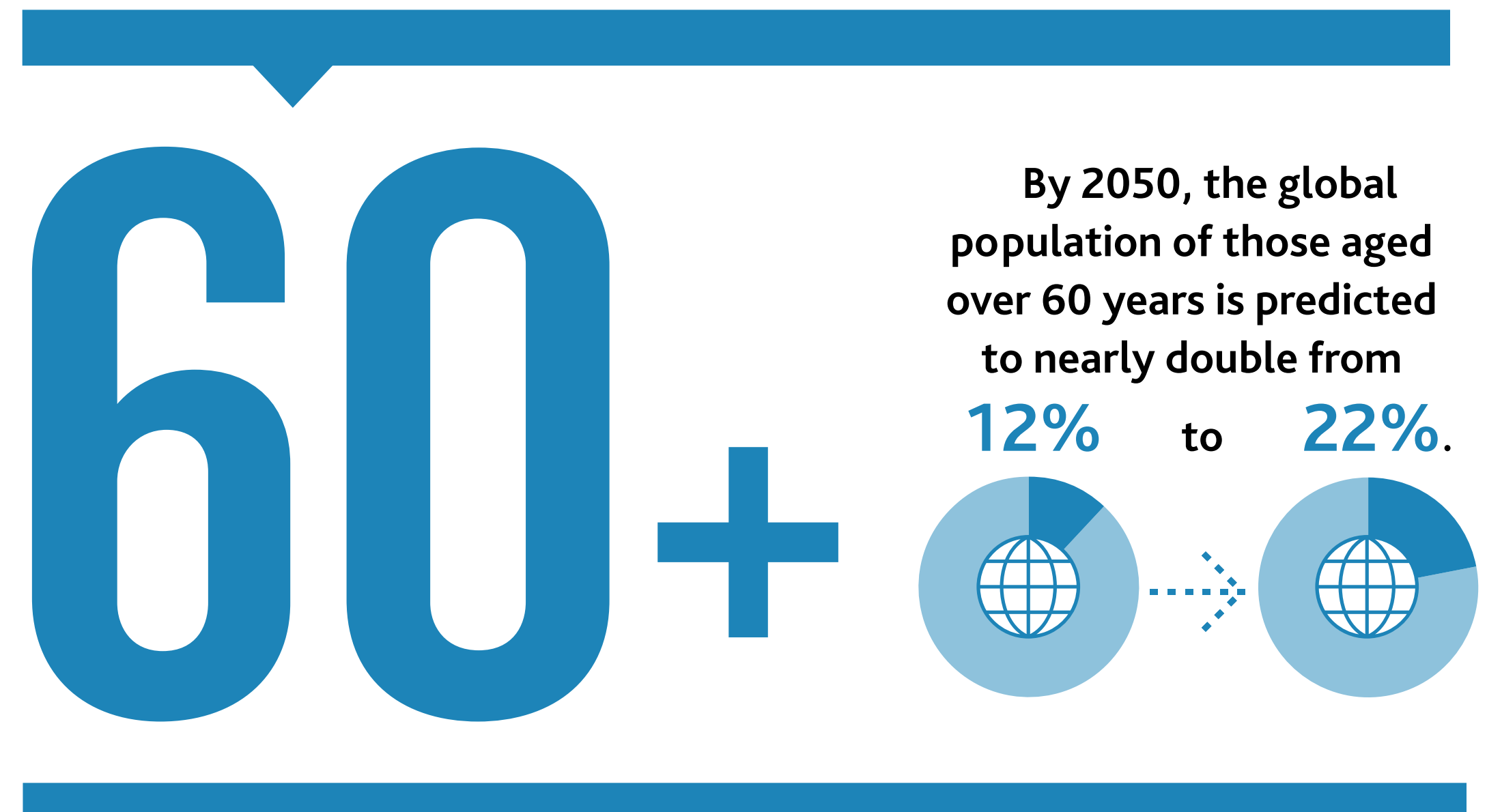
#4 AGEING WORKFORCE AND LONGER LIFESPANS

The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2050, the global population of those aged over 60 years will have nearly doubled from 12% to 22%[vi]. In addition to an ageing population, global birth rates are on the decline[vii].

This has huge implications for the future shape of the workforce. It also changes the nature of the work we most need people to do. To create ongoing value in our communities and societies, caring work must be reprioritised as a matter of urgency.

In 2016, Andrew Scott and Lynda Gratton published *The 100 Year Life*[viii].

The book explores longevity and analyses the economic consequences for longer life, outlining optimal pathways for individuals, communities and societies.

With declining birth rates, a radical overhaul in how we think about age and work is required. At an organisational level, a shift in thinking about how we optimally engage with a multigenerational workforce is needed for enhanced work outcomes.

60+

By 2050, the global population of those aged over 60 years is predicted to nearly double from 12% to 22%.

#5 CHANGING SOCIOCULTURAL ATTITUDES

The 2020 pandemic unleashed a dramatic response to how we work that was unforeseen by economists.

The overnight pivot to remote working has forever changed the place of work. Those who can deliver work outcomes independently of location are now resolute in their quest to improve work-life balance by blending flexible and remote working with office life.

The destabilising impact of Covid-19 has also led to a mass awakening. The search for meaningful work and more balanced ways of working is now a prerequisite for most people of working age. The much-touted "Great Resignation" indicates that many will change employers in pursuit of improved work experiences.

These attitudinal shifts, combined with post-Brexit labour market shortages, have fuelled the most turbulent job market in decades. Employers must now work far harder to both recruit and retain the staff they need to deliver organisational results.

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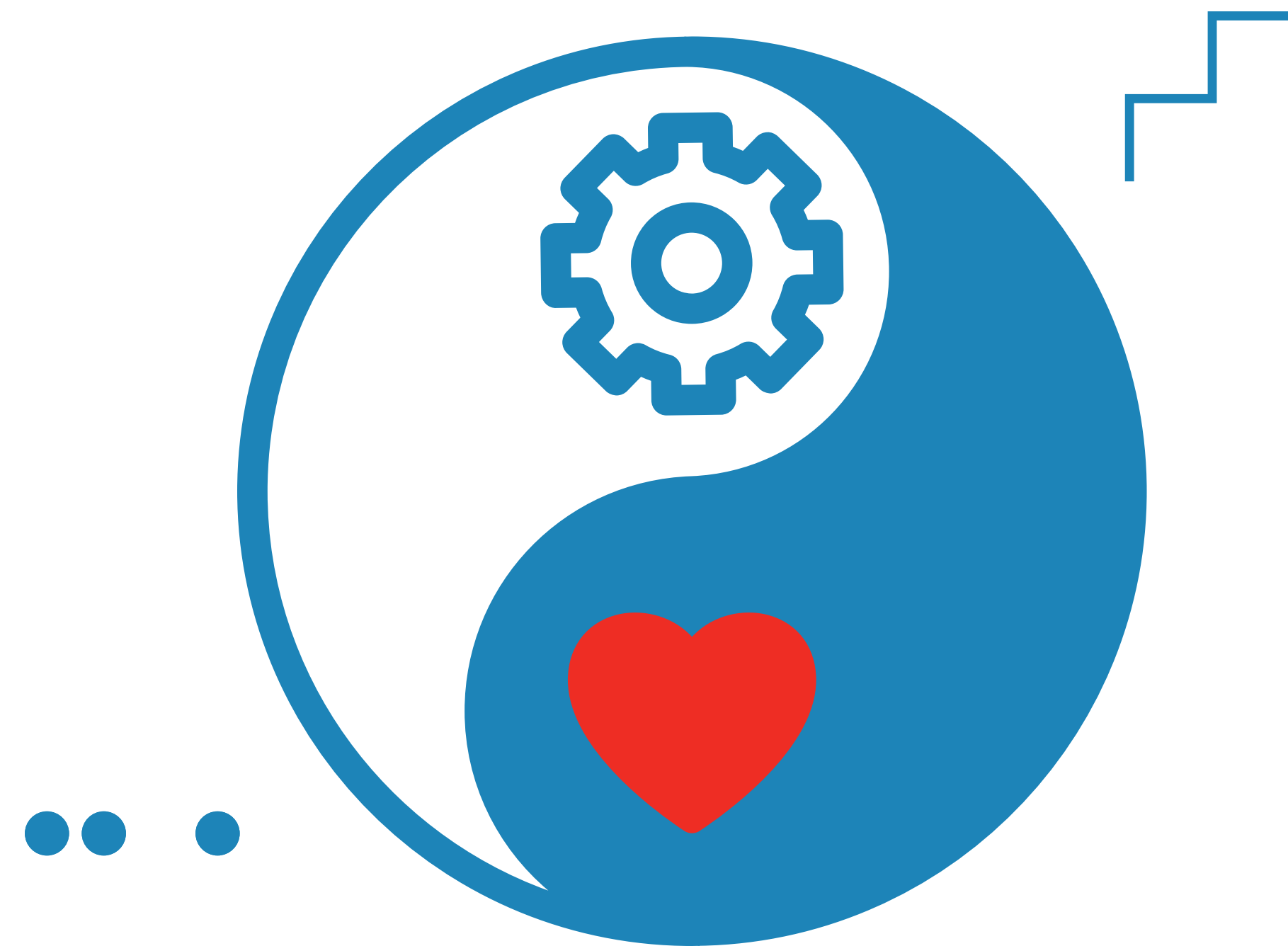
#6 NEW OPERATING AND ORGANISING MODELS

With so many shifts and undercurrents in play, the whole construct of employment and how we work requires an overhaul.

Most organisations are designed and structured using thinking that's no longer fit for purpose in the digital, hyperconnected 21st century world.

Modern workers seek far more autonomy and inclusivity at work, and simply put, most organisations are far too hierarchical, authoritarian and dismissive of personal differences for high performance to occur.

Market forces place huge pressure on boardrooms to rethink the traditional employee-employer dynamic, and to deliver organisational outcomes that go beyond conventional capitalist thinking.

As external challenges escalate, so does social pressure for organisations to deliver results that work for people and planet alike.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE SCENARIO PLANNING

The trends and scenarios outlined here are intended as "food for thought" rather than an exhaustive analysis. They're not prescriptive, nor are they a definitive statement of what is to come. When looking at emerging sociocultural trends through a relatively broad lens, invariably contradictions and counterarguments arise. And, of course, the future can often be very hard to predict accurately.

On the other hand, it is possible to create the future we want. But this involves being aware of all the external forces at play.

Myriad factors are driving change at work, each one almost certainly underpinned by another less obvious trend. Change is continuous and often only apparent with the benefit of hindsight.

The scenarios we present here are based on an overview of global events underpinned by key shifts, undercurrents and predictions linked to work's evolving future. They're each supported by expert analysis to provide the most relevant insights.

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The report is designed as a conversation-starter. It has been commissioned to offer future possible scenarios, to enable you, as an internal communication professional, to imagine, design and plan for a future of work in which internal communication is an essential ingredient of organisational success outcomes.

FUTURE SCENARIOS

In 2019, the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) produced its Four Futures report. It used scenario planning to present four possible futures of work, based on in-depth study and evaluation of market forces then in play.

Of course, a huge amount has happened in the world since then.

The United Kingdom has left the European Union, although the full impact of this has yet to play out. The global coronavirus pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have intersected to drive a game-changing scarcity of key resources that were hitherto taken for granted.

The requirement to reimagine how we work in the future has never been more urgent.

Rather than start this exercise from scratch, we've chosen to "borrow with pride" from the RSA and use that as the starting point from which to build on the four futures originally published.

We've attempted to integrate the key changes that have taken place in the world since 2019, and to present the scenarios in a way that allows internal communication professionals to explore the risks and opportunities present.

The RSA's four futures of work are:

1. The all-digital organisation
2. The surveillance organisation
3. The regenerative organisation
4. The socially responsible organisation

#1 THE ALL-DIGITAL ORGANISATION

The 21st century has been a golden age for computing and digital technologies.

As the Internet and mobile communications technology converged, anyone with access to a data-enabled smart phone could both consume and produce electronic content. We witnessed the dawn of the "prosumer". Futurist Alvin Toffler coined the term back in 1980 to describe the technology-enabled rise in user participation to shape, hone and innovate commercial products and services.

Customer feedback suddenly became critically important, enabling corporations to identify how best to evolve and adapt. Communicating this feedback within organisations to achieve agile market responsiveness became integral to commercial survival.

In the 2020s, the finance available for technology investment is vast. Gartner estimated a whopping $4.2 trillion was spent on IT worldwide in 2021 alone, up almost 9% from the previous year.

The global economic backdrop has been bleak, however.

The combination of the Covid-19 pandemic, associated population lockdowns, Russian aggression in Ukraine and climate change-induced crop failures has led to worldwide supply chain shortages of essential resources and products. This has included gas, oil, essential foodstuffs and electronic hardware. The impact on nations and communities has been immense.

Consequently, inflation has skyrocketed. As prices rise and shortages continue, nation states have stopped exporting core products in a bid to protect their own nations first. A global recession follows.

As consumers reduce all non-essential spending, companies explore ways to cut costs while maintaining revenue streams. E-commerce is deemed key to the facilitation of cost-effective and ongoing customer service, and with new digital applications launching all the time, all-digital soon becomes cheaper than human capital.

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Traditional approaches to sales and marketing are entirely reshaped in the 2020s. By 2025, 80% of B2B sales take place online and without human interaction. Unfortunately, all-digital communication channels undermine the quality of feedback loops between organisations and customers, often leading to costly mistakes and oversights.

As the climate emergency becomes ever more pressing, huge global investment is made in green technology.

The convergence of 5G, IoT, wireless sensors, cloud computing, robotics, AI and other smart automation leads to even more money pouring into the research and development of new

80%

🛒

By 2050, 80% of B2B sales will take place online and without human interaction.

technologies. Collectively known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), these technologies are designed and developed to (among other things) protect the natural and built environment, create new ways of farming and food distribution and significantly reduce human dependency on carbon-emitting fossil fuels.

Technology is regarded as the solution to complex societal and environmental problems, and fast becomes the primary focus of international investment. 4IR is considered as integral to sustainable life on Earth.

"

In the all-digital organisation, all-digital channels undermine the quality of feedback loops between organisations and customers.

"

IMPACT OF ALL-DIGITAL ON THE LABOUR MARKET

As mainstream investment in the non-technology arena all but dries up, a two-tier economy emerges.

Billionaire technology tycoons have the financial resources to be able to spend vast amounts on lobbying, which keeps traditional investment funds focused on technology as the solution to complex planetary issues.

Technology doesn't, however, take into account the psychological benefits of work, and the sense of dignity, connection, belonging and wellbeing that emanate from good work.

The all-digital economy prioritises profit maximisation over the positive social impact of work on individuals, families, communities and economies.

Technology focused hard skills become highly sought after in the all-digital domain.

And as the pace of technology evolution accelerates, on-demand ways of working go mainstream. For optimal market responsiveness, organisations rely increasingly on the "alternative workforce", described by Deloitte as outsourced teams, contractors, freelance and independent workers, gig and crowd-workers[x].

Continuous, agile innovation leads to increasingly fluid organisations that consist of largely impermanent teams and workers. These organisations are shapeshifting in nature. Innovation teams form around new projects, experiments and initiatives and then disband once activities are complete.

The same trusted team members pop up elsewhere, but in the spaces in between projects, their continuous engagement relies on communication, rather than any financial retainer.

Efficiency is everything and there's minimal financial waste within the all-digital organisation.
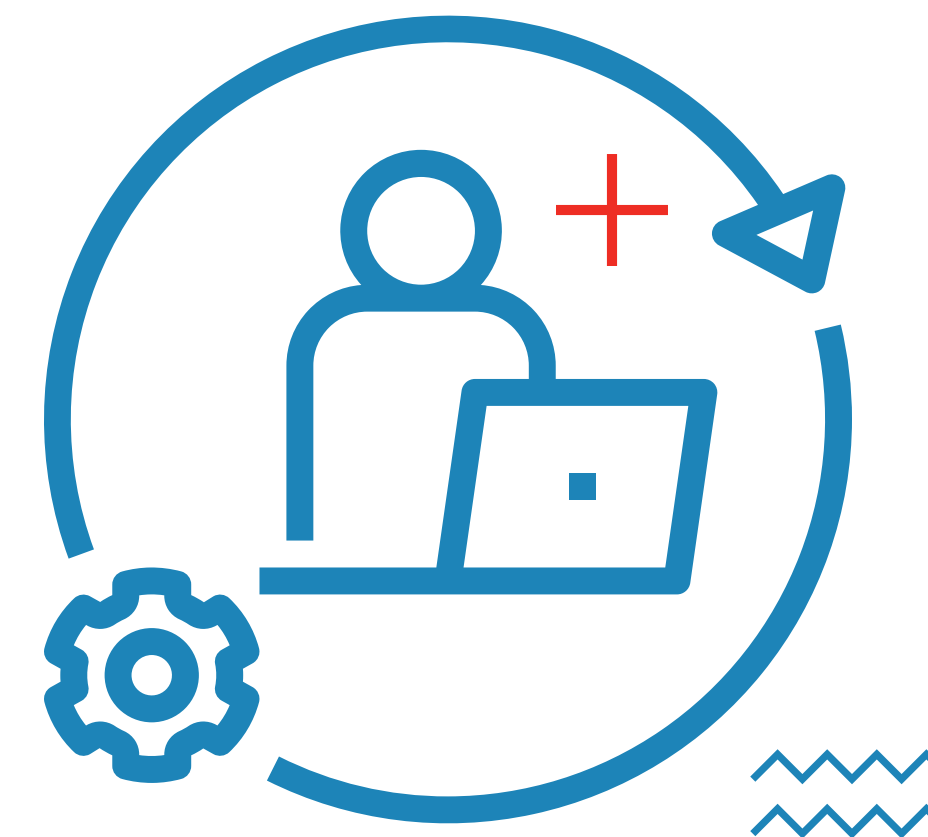
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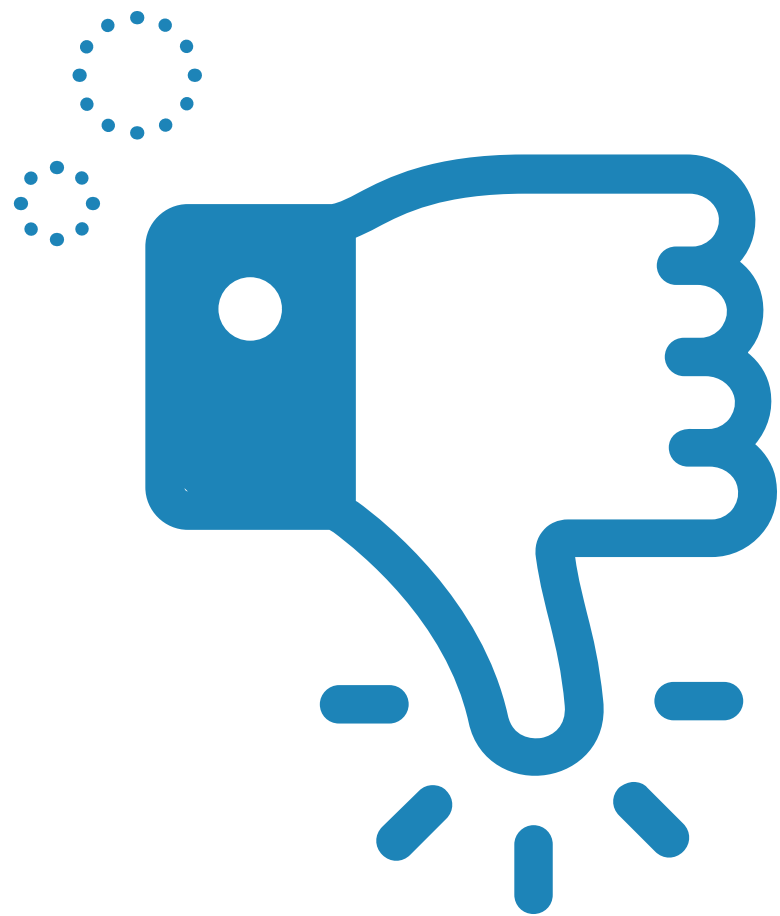
Because technology is perceived as the solution to complex challenges, those running all-digital organisations tend mostly to rely on digital communication channels for the effective dissemination and sharing of information. Human-to-human communication is prioritised only once digital channels reach their limitations.

But these channels lack nuance and context. They also lack the ability to build connection and anchor itinerant work teams to both the organisation and its purpose. Because of this, the highly skilled technology engineers working within the all-digital economy feel little or no loyalty to the organisations they work for. Employment in the all-digital economy is fast-paced and highly transactional.

Soft skills hold little value in the all-digital economy. With such pace of innovation and continuous change, learning agility is a prized asset. But with little emphasis on human connection, there's little incentive to share knowledge or participate in peer learning.

While financially, work within the all-digital economy is fulfilling, psychologically it's a pretty lonely world.

> ❝
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> ❞

IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

21st century technology evolves at such a rapid pace that organisations become increasingly lean in the quest to remain agile and competitive. Conventional thinking around organisational structures becomes outdated. Fluidity and adaptability are now regarded as key to product and service innovation. Those organisations that demonstrate the ability to pivot to meet shifts in market demand are highly revered.

The average longevity of a modern organisation has reduced rapidly since the early 2000s.

According to growth strategy consulting firm Innosight, creative destruction is now mainstream. This continuous "process of industrial mutation that revolutionizes the economic structure from within"[xi] means that organisations come and go far faster than at any other time in recorded economic history.

Gone are the days when organisations focused on metrics other than profit maximisation. With no regard for social or environmental impact, life in the all-digital economy is dynamic and cut-throat.
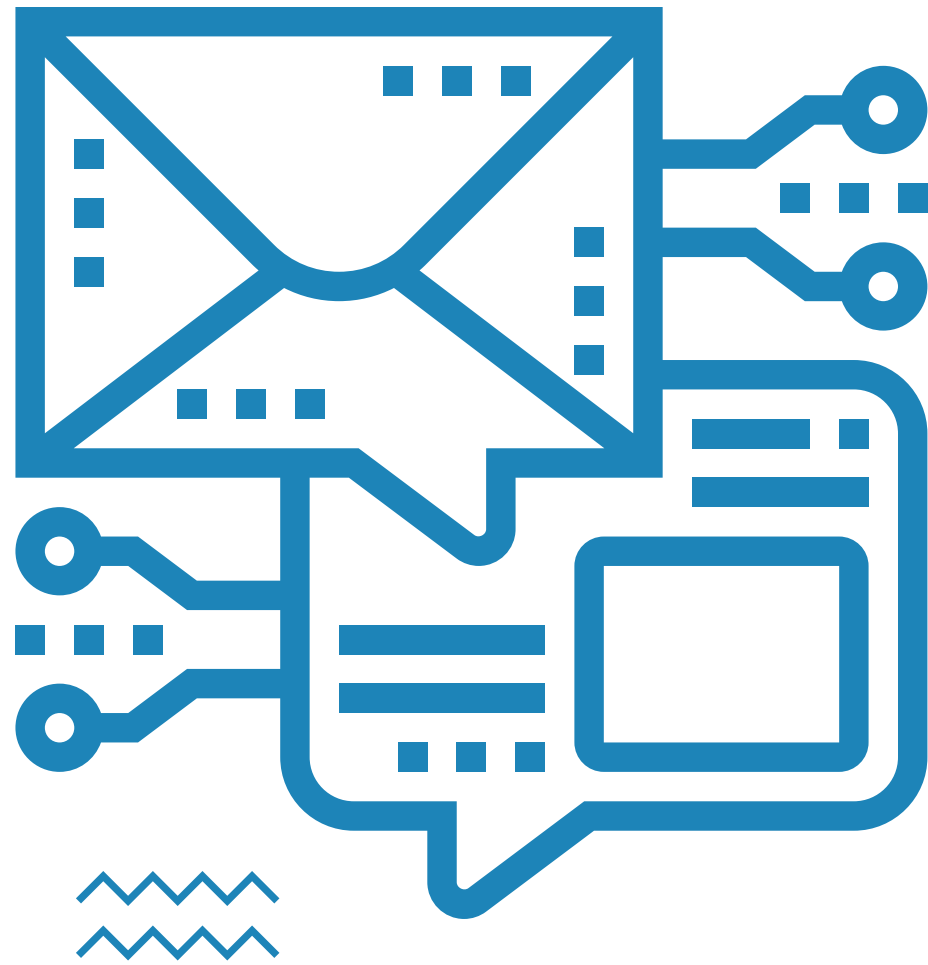
To move at pace, organisational structures within all-digital organisations are flatter. Traditional organisational hierarchies are perceived as inflexible. Anything that inhibits rapid market responsiveness is shunned.
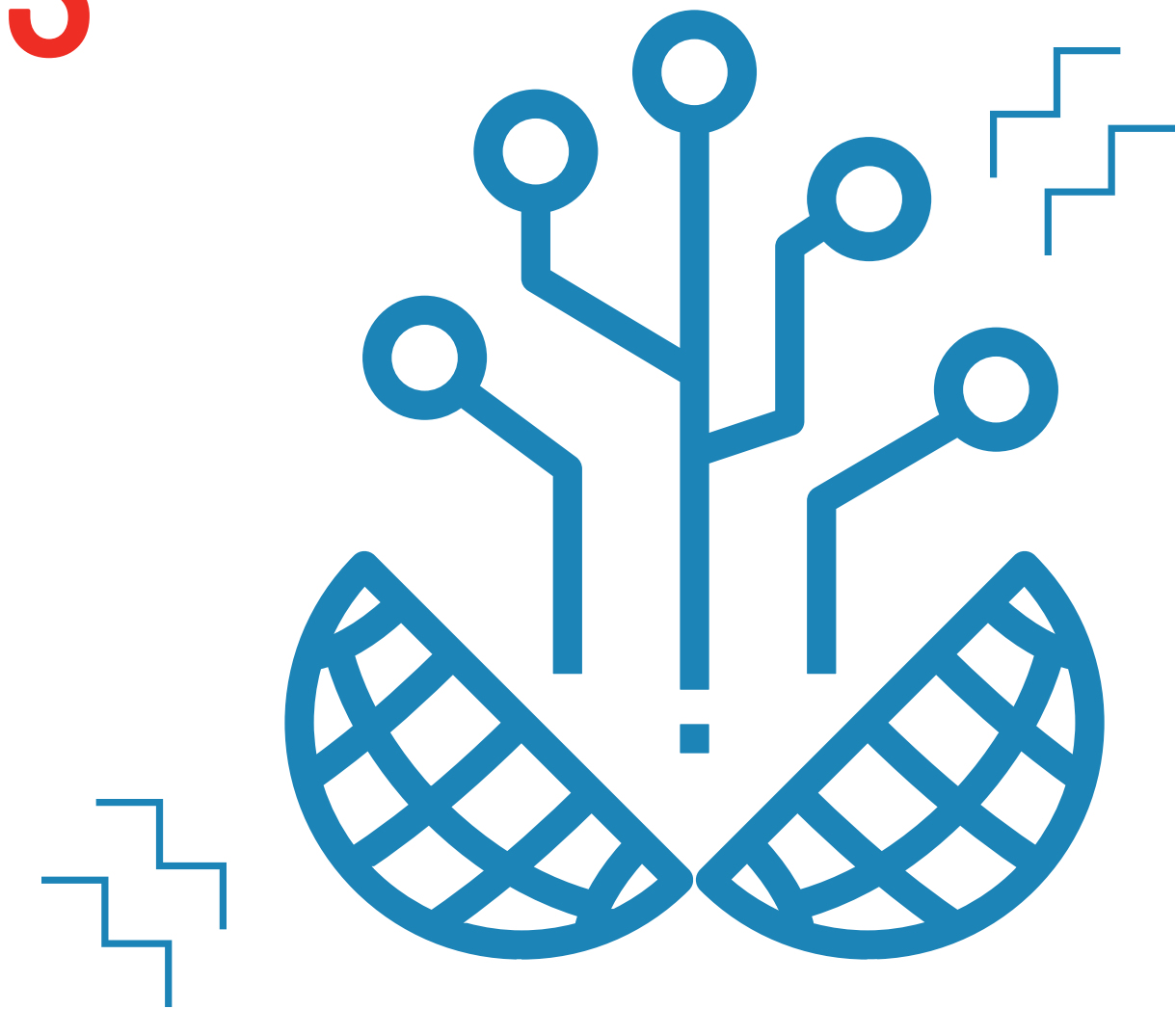
> **With no regard for social or environmental impact, life in the all-digital economy is dynamic and cut-throat.**

Within these fluid and shapeshifting operating environments, all but the most essential skills and capabilities are deployed "on-demand". Permanent employment is now perceived by most to be either the realm of super wealthy entrepreneurs or a throwback to another time and place.

But those with the most niche and in-demand technology skills are highly sought after. They can pick and choose their roles, working on a just-in-time basis to get projects and deliverables over the line.

And in an economy with reduced emotional connection, loyalty is a rare thing. Bidding wars for in-demand and prized skillsets are common.

In this fast-paced world, organisations

> ❝ Within these fluid and shapeshifting operating environments, all be the most essential skills and capabilities are deployed "on-demand". ❞

need to work far harder to convey a sense of purpose and to retain the interest and attention of transient work teams.

Digital communication channels are considered the most cost-effective means of managing the flow of

information. But of course, with human attention at an all-time premium, too often critical messages are lost in the maelstrom of continuous online noise.

All too often and all too late, communication consultants are hired to try and regain effective communication flow. But it's a perennial challenge for anyone invested in the field of communication for connection to convince the technology entrepreneurs that sometimes digital technology simply isn't the answer.

In this somewhat bleak all-digital landscape, technology is very much complemented by humans. And humans, increasingly, are sadly beholden to algorithms.

#2

THE SURVEILLANCE ORGANISATION

#2 THE SURVEILLANCE ORGANISATION

As the global environmental crisis escalates, technology is deemed to hold valuable solutions for a greener, reduced-carbon world.

During the 2020s, sensor-based networks become big business, with huge amounts invested in the development of ever-more sophisticated technology solutions that combine sensors, the IoT, 5G and big data. The race is on to drive efficiency and eliminate wastage in complex global supply chains.

Wireless sensors capture data about changes in the environment and send this information to other electronic devices within a wider communication network. As 5G technology allows faster and faster transmission of ever-increasing bundles of data, the possibilities to track resources seem endless.

Within the field of energy supply, huge investment is made in smart metering. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine revealed an oil and gas dependency on Russia that escalated the threat of a global trade war and destabilised the world order in a way that hadn't been seen since the Second World War.

The fight to reduce economic dependency on warmongers is on.

Intelligent capture of electricity, gas and water consumption and distribution data allows utility companies to significantly reduce the number of

As 5G technology allows faster and faster transmission of ever-increasing bundles of data, the possibilities to track resources seem endless.

resources that are lost or wasted in transmission. Smart meter data also encourages consumers to become more efficient in their utility usage, which has a significant positive impact on the reduction of total global carbon emissions.

The evolution and expansion of the IoT brings huge benefits to how we live and work.

As more and more electronic devices become interconnected to transmit and exchange data within and across networks, by default the built environment becomes smarter and more effective.

The smart home shifts from the aspirational to the mainstream. In most modern households, electrical and electronic appliances are increasingly advanced in their ability to communicate with one another for seamless and efficient living.

At a municipal scale, cities also get much smarter. The widescale adoption of IPv6 allows and enables smart

> **With a global ageing population, looking after the elderly is a growing concern for nations and governments.**

transportation systems within urban environments. These are designed specifically to optimise smooth traffic flow, thus enhancing fuel efficiency.

Sensor technology and IoT allow energy and resources to be directed to where they're most needed within the built urban environment – enabling more "on-demand" distribution of critical resources. Towns and cities across the world leverage technology to decarbonise and become green.

Elsewhere, the data captured by sensors brings myriad benefits.

With a global ageing population, looking after the elderly is a growing concern for nations and governments. With no end in sight of the global pandemic, those over 70 remain vulnerable and national healthcare systems are increasingly overstretched and fragile. New and affordable ways of providing social care is a key priority for all governments.

In the field of health and social care, wireless movement sensors allow surveillance and monitoring systems to be installed in the homes of the elderly. Alarms sound and response teams are activated, should movement cease. Wearable devices also enable those with health issues to monitor and report medical data to their clinicians, eliminating the cost involved with vast swathes of out-patient appointments.

In addition to reducing unnecessary transport pollution, these technologies also add a layer of safety and allow people to live independently for longer. In turn, this significantly alleviates an otherwise overburdened geriatric healthcare system.

Global organisations use surveillance technologies to track and trace products as they travel through increasingly complex international supply chains. This improves efficiency, eliminates loss and theft and ensures more care is taken of goods during shipping and transportation.

In addition to the expansion of technologies to map and track physical resources through distribution channels, surveillance technologies become commonplace to monitor the productivity of humans in the workplace.

In office environments, computer-monitoring software entered the corporate mainstream at the start of the 2020s[xii]. Bewitched by the promised gains of technology, organisations increasingly use "bossware" to keep track of employee activity. Initially dressed up as measures to address wellbeing and prevent overworking during the pandemic, it's soon clear that surveillance software is used to monitor productivity.

In warehouse and factory settings, it's not long before scanners, CCTV and sensors are used to track physical activity. Those thought to be shirking their work targets face disciplinary action. While unions attempt to intervene, the increasingly precarious nature of work means that dominant employers can continue to dehumanise employers can continue to dehumanise work in this way.

Employment is increasingly focused on outcomes. And while for those operating within the knowledge economy this can imbue a sense of autonomy, for those working in more manual roles, work is increasingly fast paced, demanding and stressful.

As the decade progresses, wearable devices and even microchip implants are increasingly common at work, to track human activity.

Line managers now spend a significant portion of time analysing all kinds of performance metrics, including inactivity and sales conversion rates. Work becomes increasingly transactionalised and HR analytics is a booming sector. Privacy and data protection are seemingly things of the past.
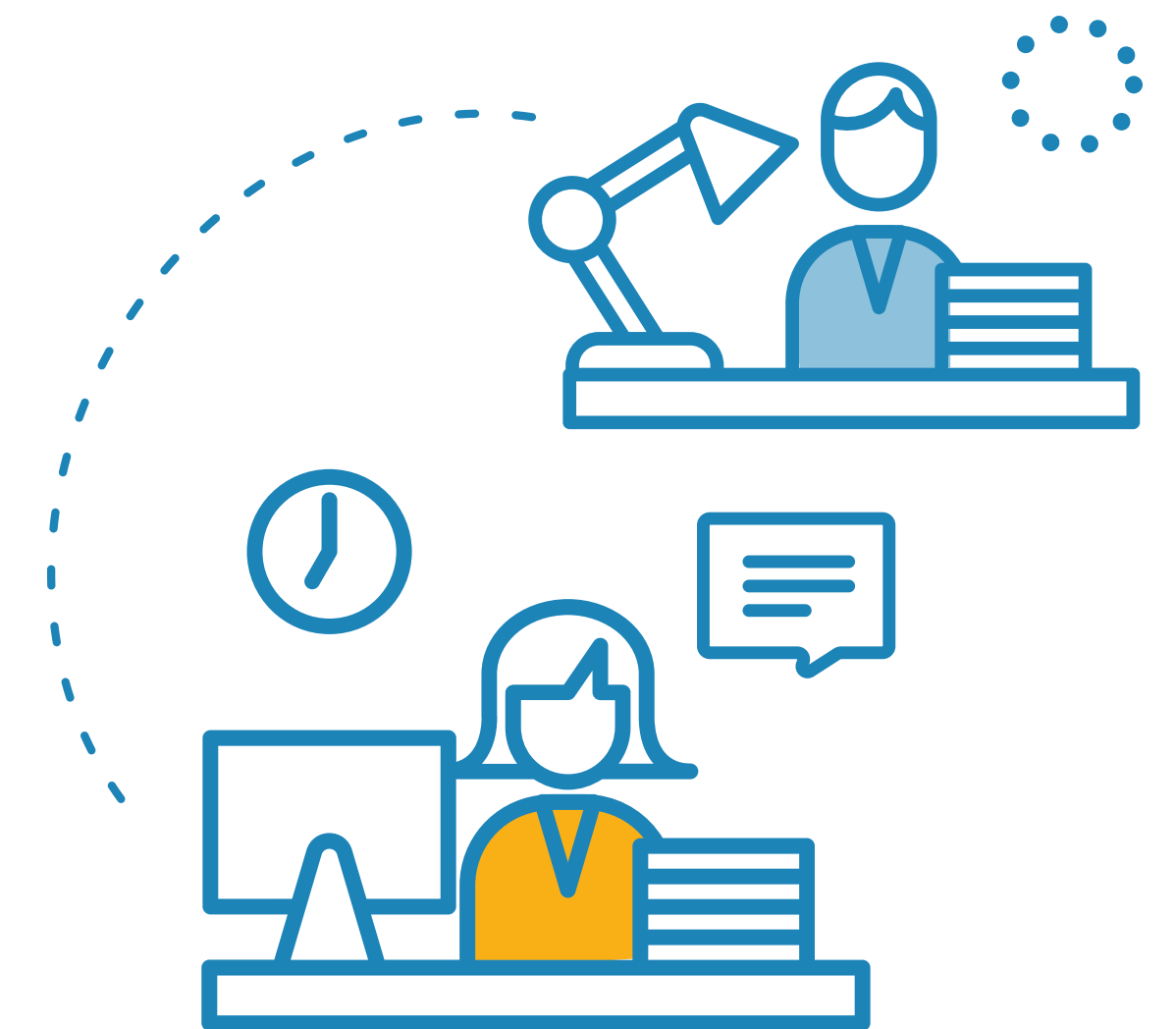
EXPLAINER

Bossware: Digital tools that allow employers to surveil employees.

IMPACT OF SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGIES ON THE LABOUR MARKET

As the use of monitoring and surveillance technology takes root in the world of work, trust diminishes.

Because productivity is increasingly measured by algorithm and based on hard data, workers feel increasingly psychologically disconnected both from their employers and the work that they do. There's little room for emotional attachment in this unhappy new world.

To add insult to injury, the data collected by workplace surveillance and monitoring systems fuels the adoption of worker rankings. Enthralled by data analytics, employers prioritise productivity over all other employment

metrics, and staff are increasingly pitted against one another in an effort to increase output.

But this backfires and leads to cut-throat competition for the most

financially lucrative projects. It also constricts the flow of tacit information and knowledge within organisations. It's increasingly felt that work life is now "survival of the fittest", both

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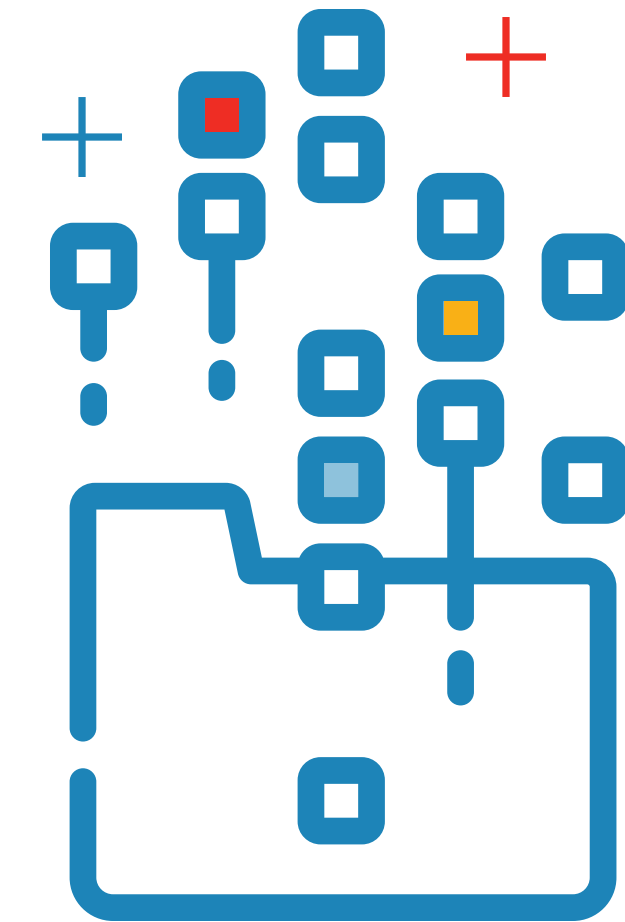
physically and mentally. Collective endeavour and alignment around shared goals feels increasingly like a thing of the past.

This shift in attitude at work spills over into wider society, with unfortunate consequences.
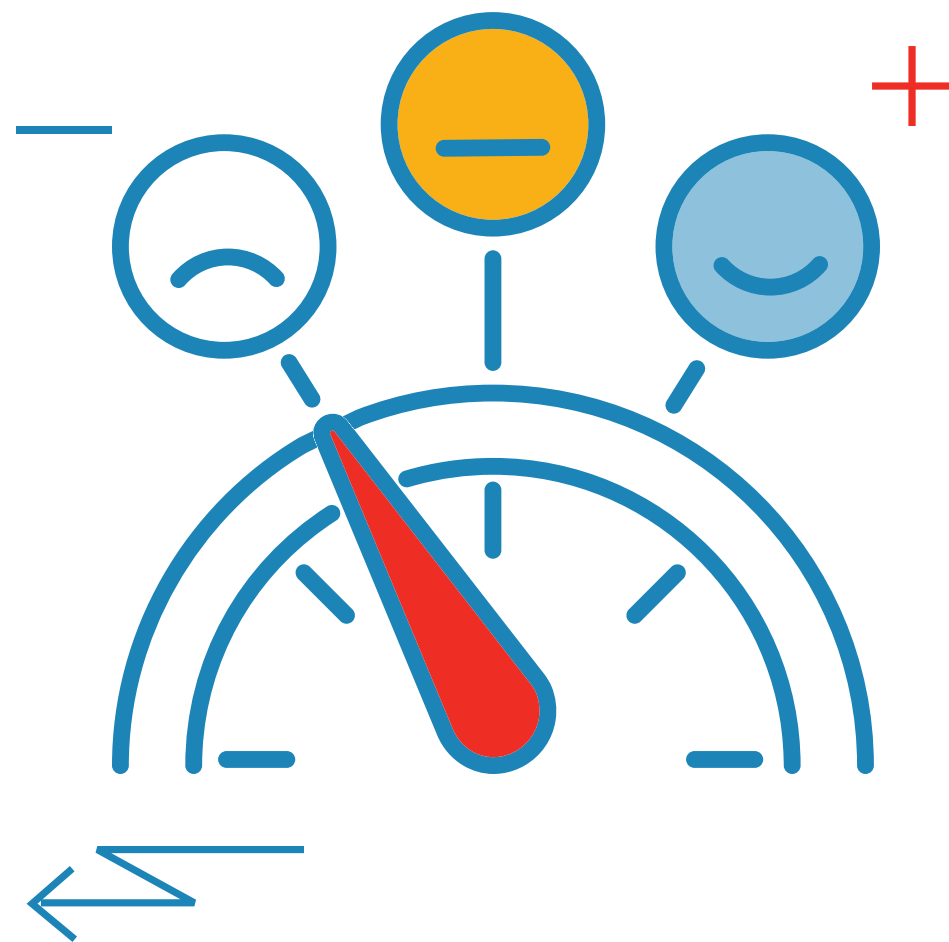
As the global economy falters, the focus on productivity accelerates. In the surveillance age, work fast becomes increasingly transactional. While employment remains high, the standardised 40-hour workweek has become outdated. With excessive focus on output, work becomes ever more piecemeal.

Average hours worked per week fall to half what they had once been. A 20-hour workweek seems far less the exception than the norm by the end of the 2020s, and this adds pressure to already stretched household budgets.

As the economy spirals downwards, the overarching mantra of the surveillance economy is that of resource efficiency and minimum waste. As this mindset embeds, employers continuously seek out new ways to get more done with less.

This unfortunately has dire consequences for the labour market, with adults of working age feeling disengaged and disconnected like never before. The construct of work has been stripped of emotion or meaning.

> **In the surveillance age, work fast becomes increasingly transactional…with excessive focus on output, work becomes ever more piecemeal.**

IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

As in the case of the all-digital economy, productivity and revenue are primary metrics used by the surveillance organisation to measure success.

As workers of all levels and skillsets feel increasingly dehumanised, trust evaporates. Back in the early 2020s, Edelman's annual Trust Barometer indicated that citizens had lost their faith in Government to tackle the big issues of the day, preferring instead to trust business leaders as the last bastion of hope.

In the wake of escalating societal and environmental issues, it had been widely hoped that CEOs would step in to take action. Organisations were regarded as being the entity best able to positively combat rising inequality and carbon emissions.

And on the one hand, this has been the case. Innovative green technology and developments in mobile healthcare have led to huge gains, mitigating the worst of what could have been.

But on the other, access to good work has tanked.

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The Government-commissioned 2017 Taylor Review[xiv] was hailed as a landmark evaluation of the UK labour market. Its intent was to initiate systemic change and improve baseline protections for workers in the digital age.

Fair pay, employment quality, access to education and training, working conditions, work-life balance, consultative participation and collective representation underpinned the recommendations. For a while there was hope that finally employment would be brought into the 21st century.

Regrettably, little has changed. The *status quo* is just too entrenched, clearly.

If anything, the rise in popularity of surveillance technologies leads to business leaders prioritising metrics that provide little insight into the real-world experience of those working for them.
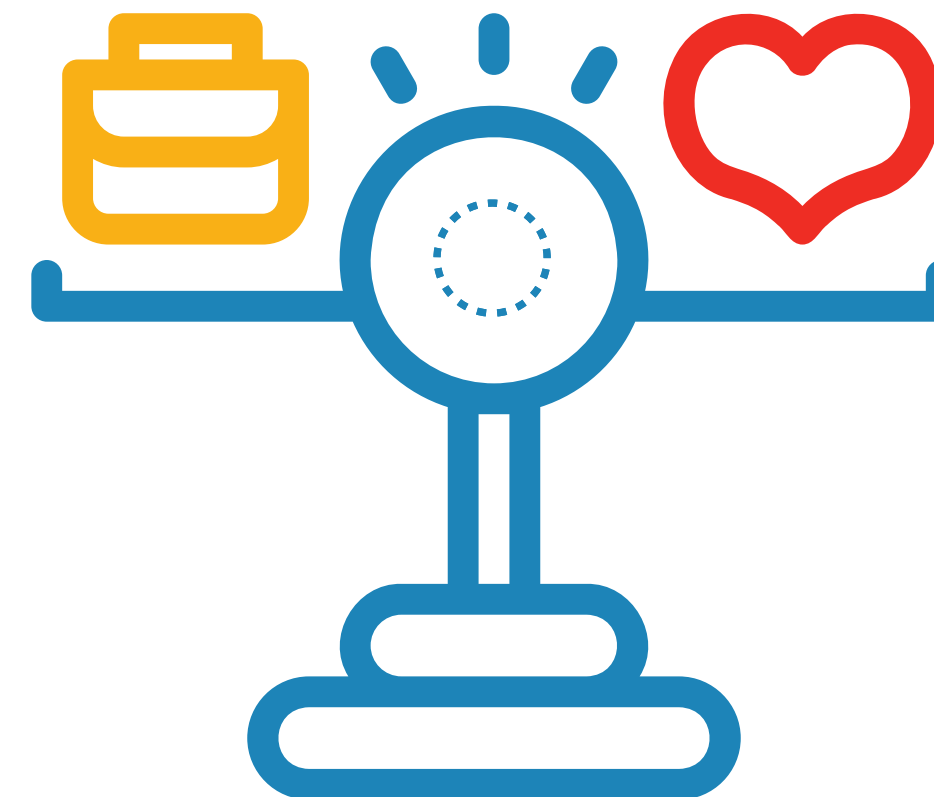
Employee engagement continues to prioritise dashboard data, rather than focus on nurturing human connection. Honing the art of connective conversation and relationship might have gone some way towards appeasing the discomfort arising from consistent monitoring and scrutiny.

As the popularity of AI-enhanced HR analytics gathers momentum, staff are increasingly encouraged to compete for ratings, lured by the promise of more hours, or less precarious work.

But the ensuing environments are acutely stressful and ripe for burnout.

Worker turnover is high, and loyalty is negligible.

Occasionally employers bring in communication and relationship consultants in an attempt to ease staff burn and churn rates. For the most part, however, the effort involved in rehumanising workplaces is deemed just too much.

> **Employee engagement continues to prioritise dashboard data, rather than focus on nuturing human connection.**

#3 THE REGENERATIVE ORGANISATION

#3 THE REGENERATIVE ORGANISATION

The global economy had scarcely started to feel the socioeconomic effects of the coronavirus pandemic when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

The toxic combination of these two convergent events pushed an already distressed global economy over the edge into severe recession.

In the years leading up to the 2020s, credit and debt had become entirely normalised. With the introduction of tuition fees in tertiary education, most working-age adults became accustomed to living with loans and loan repayments.

Global interest rates had remained at an all-time low since the financial collapse of 2007. Because of this, when recession hit in 2022, traditional monetary policy measures to kickstart spending were ineffectual.

Worldwide public, commercial and consumer debt are at their highest levels on record[xv], [xvi]. Global food shortages are fuelled by both climate change-induced crop failures and the Russian war.

Other pandemic-induced supply-chain pressures mean that "just-in-time" delivery efficiency fails. It fast becomes a thing of the past.

As governments strive to shore up resources, political agendas become increasingly nationalistic, localised and inwards focused. Geopolitical tensions are palpable. Globalisation has finally reached its limits.

While economic growth is maintained in sub-Saharan markets, it's by no stretch comparable with what was witnessed in the western world in the post-war years.

As inflation bites, any commercial sectors underpinned by disposable income contract sharply. Retail, hospitality, leisure and tourism all suffer.

With so many organisations riddled with toxic debt[xvii], business collapse is inevitable. Those organisations that manage to survive adopt increasingly mercenary staffing practices. High-precarity, contingent working practices become commonplace, offering no protection to increasingly vulnerable

> **High-precarity contingent working practices become commonplace, offering no protection to increasingly vulnerable families and households.**

families and households.

In the UK, unemployment rises to double digits for the first time in one hundred years. The scale of national poverty is vast, and homelessness reaches levels unseen in the modern era. Hampered by its own poor economic planning, the Government is unable to intervene.

Within the labour market, supply exceeds demand, eliminating any bargaining power that workers once had.

As the availability of investment capital constricts, the much anticipated and lauded Fourth Industrial Revolution in technology is compromised.

While Silicon Valley billionaires continue their growth trajectories, impoverished millions awaken to the idea that they've been gamed and manipulated. There's a rising contempt for the ultra-rich and indeed anyone perceived to have prospered as the inequality gap widened.

Consequently, there's now widespread disengagement from and rejection of the digital platforms that led to such vast wealth accumulation.

As anger and resentment grow, some people opt to protest and agitate. Once idolised, materialism and ostentatious consumption are now reviled and rejected *en masse*.

As the population wakes up to the enormity of its challenges, something unexpected happens. People start to lean back in and recognise the social value of community and connection. Working together to problem solve is seen as far more effective than working in silos. It's also noted that collaboration within trusted group settings fuels kinship and solidarity. This in turn underpins a sense of wellbeing as people recognise that together is far better than alone.

Almost at once, mental health figures improve.
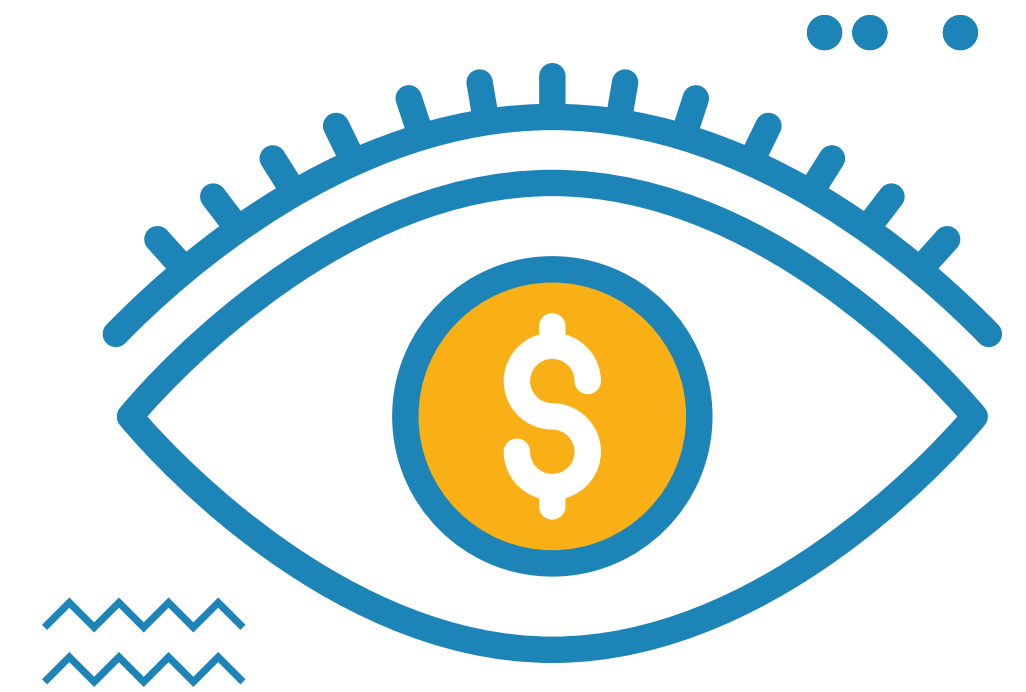
> As the population wakes up to the enormity of its challenges, something unexpected happens. People start to lean back in and recognise the social value of community and connection.

Instead of investing savings with conventional financial institutions, socially minded individuals club together to crowdfund social and environmental impact investments. Their focus is ecological restoration and the improvement of human wellbeing and community through work.

As people leave the cities in search of land on which to grow food produce, local sustainable and regenerative living quickly become the foundation blocks of resilience and recovery.

The exodus away from hitherto densely populated areas redistributes both wealth, talent and national economic activity. It breeds an organic

"levelling up" that no government could have orchestrated by design.

The crowdfunding of impact investments takes off in a way that was previously unforeseen.

New and alternative economic

> **While organisations still have leaders, hierarchies and hoarded power and control are a thing of the past. All profits are reinvested back into local communities to provide support for more vulnerable members of society.**
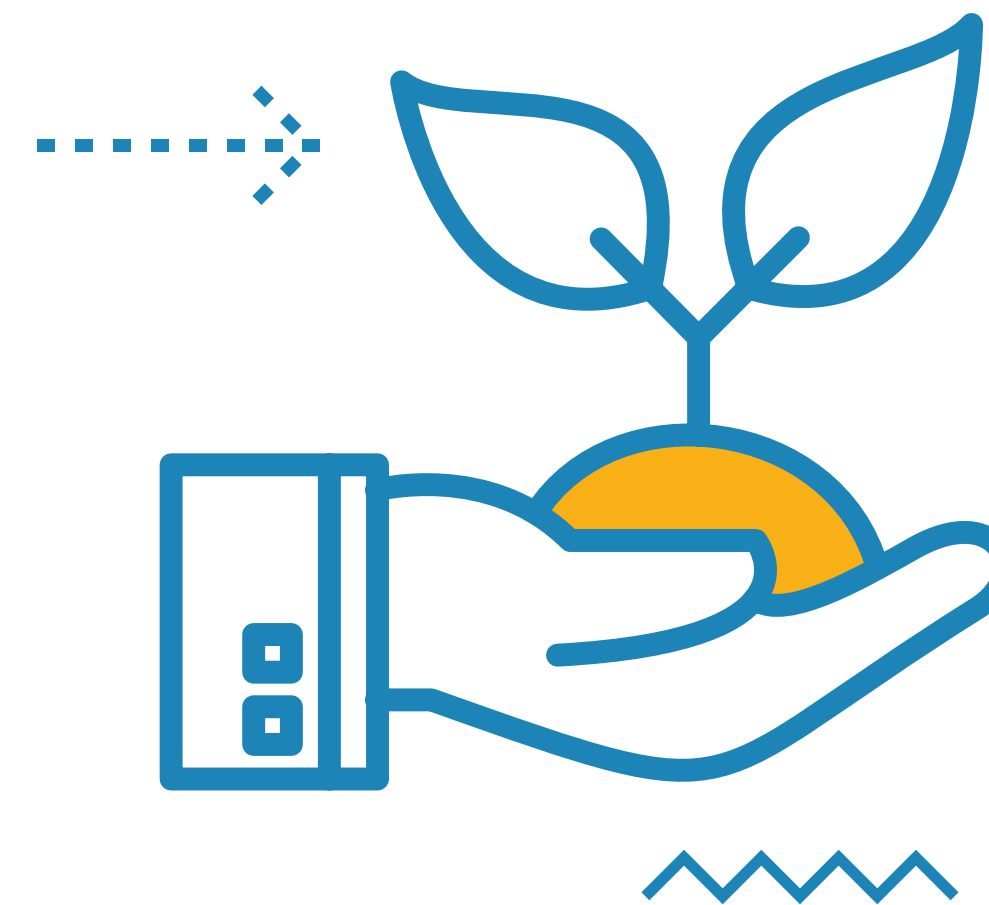
institutions emerge, based on traditional tenets of shared ownership and mutuality. They're widely applauded after years of cultural obsession with rugged individualism.

For-profit business increasingly becomes a thing of the past. While organisations still have leaders, hierarchies and hoarded power and control are a thing of the past. All profits are reinvested back into local communities to provide support for more vulnerable members of society.

Self-sufficiency and respect for the natural environment take root as values to live by, and slowly both people and planet begin to recover.

IMPACT OF REGENERATION ON THE LABOUR MARKET
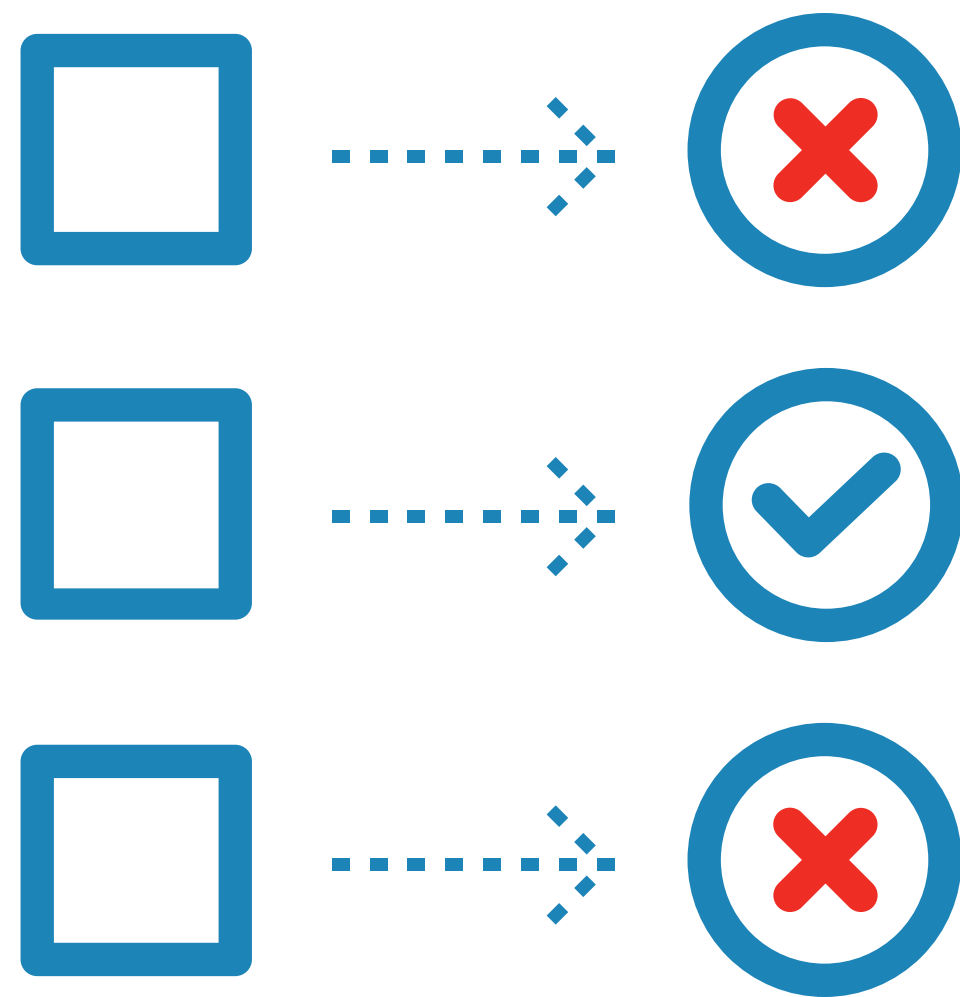
The impact of global economic collapse is horrendous for all but the finite few billionaires. Safe in their gated mansions, they offer no support to address the societal fallout.

With such a drop in the standard of living, millions in the developed world are pushed into poverty. This poverty is compounded by global food shortages, which have long been predicted but which have been ill-prepared for by governments and NGOs alike.

As unemployment escalates, newsreels are rife with stories of social degradation. The only good news stories are those pushed by lobbyists to the billionaires, who continue to position themselves as part of the solution, in a bid to maintain power and control.

It's hard to find hope on the horizon. And yet...

Bubbling away, far from the attention of the mainstream press, change is happening.

During the 2010s, a grassroots movement emerged to advocate for more humanised work.

Psychologists and philosophers wrote detailed theses about the construct of work. They argued that work was far more than an economic mechanism and that it provided so much more than a pay packet. The sense of purpose, meaning and wellbeing that come from feeling part of a connected community with shared goals and objectives is second to none.

As the mainstream financial system becomes ever more stretched and inequitable, a new social code and an alternative, regenerative economy slowly surfaced.

By the time the global economy collapsed in the early 2020s, social enterprises had emerged as organisations committed to using business to address societal and environmental issues.

> **With such a drop in the standard of living, millions in the developed world are pushed into poverty.**

The defining feature of the social enterprise is reinvestment of profit back into the local community. By providing employment and opportunity for the many, rather than the few, the wider system prospers.

With social inequality and environmental degradation at all-time highs, it doesn't take long for anyone with a sense of morality and fairness to disengage from the false promises of ultra-capitalism. The regenerative economy has an entirely different vibe and it's one of optimism.

By contrast with traditional constructs of employment, work in the regenerative economy is different.

Wellbeing and community sit at the core of work in this sector. While pay and remuneration are significantly lower than in the pre-collapse mainstream economy, people are happy.

Working hours are different too. Gone is the outdated idea of having 40-plus hours in the workweek. As sustainable living becomes culturally normalised, "enough" becomes a prevailing mantra, and *en masse*, people become acclimatised to far fewer paid hours, in order to distribute income more broadly within the community.

Job-sharing and flexitime become the new normal.

❝

Wellbeing and community sit at the core of work in this sector. While pay and remuneration are significantly lower than in the pre-collapse mainstream economy, people are happy.

❞

In this new world, community and environmental regeneration sit at the heart of organisational purpose. As climatic events become ever more extreme, it's recognised that community responsiveness is far more effective than the hyper-individualistic mindset that pervaded the culture of the late 20th and early 21st century.

The "just-in-time" approach to staffing that had enabled agile working in the pre-collapse economy now becomes coupled with a "just-enough" mindset to life and work.

"Just-enough" or minimalist living is regarded as the antidote to the exorbitant, materialistic and overtly consumptive lifestyles that led to ecological collapse. Minimalism and self-sufficiency are now seen as the fastest way to assist sustainable environmental and social recovery.

With the prioritisation of community over individualism, inclusion rapidly becomes a cornerstone of work. At the heart of all employment now lies a focus on providing opportunity for as many people as possible, regardless of gender, age, culture, religion, sexuality or disability.

Employment models are very different to those that underpinned the pre-collapse labour market.

Rigidity is replaced by fluidity, and diversity within the community ecosystem is considered essential to regeneration. No ideas or activities are unwelcome when they positively contribute to the wider collective. People fit their working hours around caring for and supporting the more vulnerable members of the community.

Thankfully, caring responsibilities have finally been reprioritised as essential for a thriving group culture.

> " No ideas or activities are unwelcome when they positively contribute to the wider collective. "

IMPACT OF REGENERATION ON ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

In many ways, organisations in the post-collapse landscape resemble community groups far more than they do the hierarchical command-and-control structures of the past.
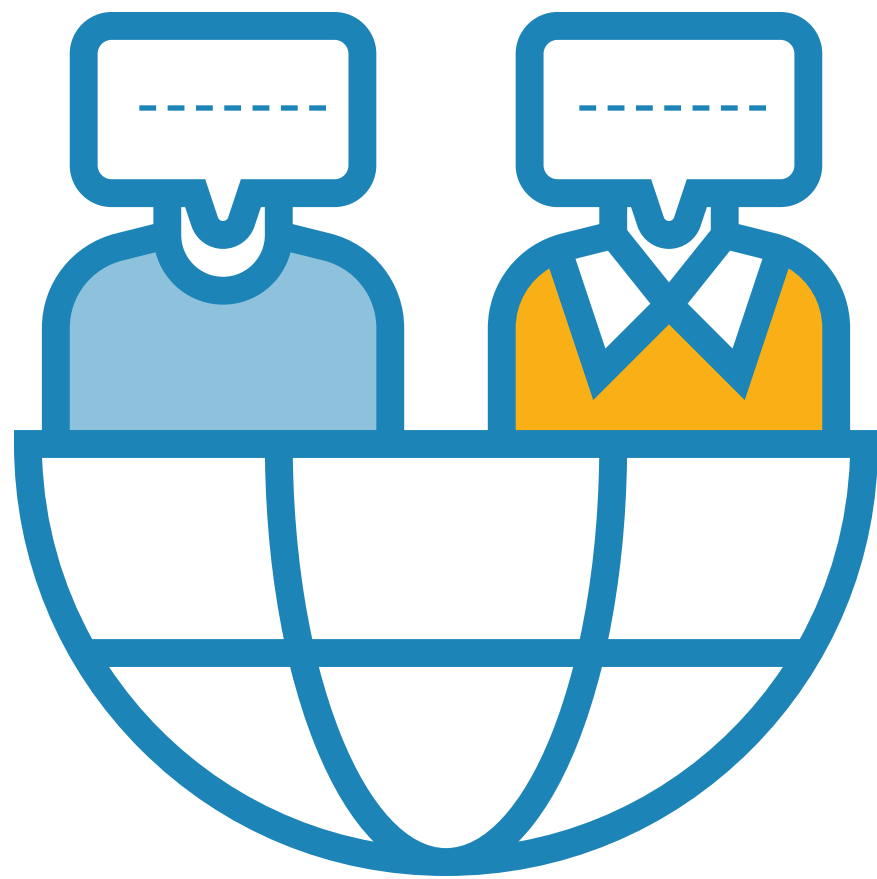
Equality, collaboration, mutuality and shared responsibility and reward sit at the heart of organising models in this new world landscape. There has been mass revival of interest in mutual and cooperative organising models and the employee ownership model has gone mainstream in business. Inclusivity is now a prevailing mantra.

In the post-collapse organisation, every member of the ecosystem is seen as integral to the vitality of the wider group. Leaders prioritise social connection and holistic wellbeing as key to successful community living. What is expected of organisational leaders shifts substantially.

The new leadership literacies include empathy, self-awareness, exceptional communication and relationship skills and humility. Next-generation leaders are accessible and transparent. They recognise their own limitations and rely on the power of the collective intelligence of the group to deliver meaningful results.

The organisations that emerge from the collapse are flatter. Leaders are world-class facilitators, encouraging discourse and dialogue both for optimal knowledge sharing and sensemaking, and also for wellbeing. Diplomacy is paramount because the plurality of perspective that comes from inclusive group cohesion is essential for community regeneration.

In the post-collapse organisation, new leadership literacies include:
1. Empathy
2. Self-awareness
3. Exceptional communication skills
4. Outstanding relationship skills
5. Humility.

Renewed focus on communication as the lifeblood of healthy sustainable organisations means that leaders invest heavily in anything that can help data, information, knowledge and insights flow effectively through human ecosystems.
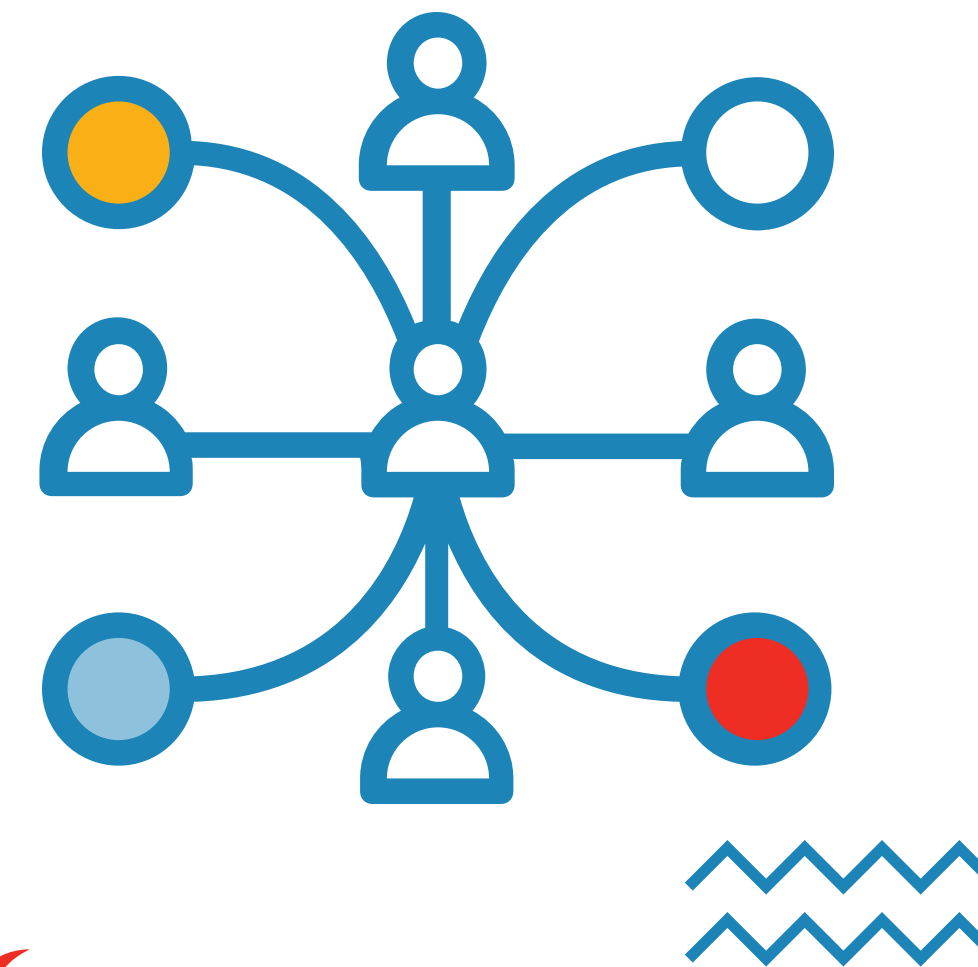
With increasingly unpredictable climatic events continuing to destabilise community living, adaptability and rapid responsiveness are key. All members of a community need to be kept informed of what's going on and when, in order that they can shift behaviour as required.

This fast becomes a survival imperative, and continuous learning is embraced as key to surviving unpredictable and volatile environments.

Rather than traditional command-and-control thinking, it's now recognised that distributed decision-making is vastly more effective. Again, however, this relies on optimal communication flow within the organisation.

Organisational structures are fluid in the regenerative economy. People contribute as they're able to and flexible working doesn't just extend to hours of work, but also to employment contracts. "Alternative" working is entirely normalised, in keeping with the new "just-enough" cultural norms.

Keeping flexible, fluid groups aligned around organisational purpose, vision, values and mission is key to ongoing success, and it's recognised that world-class communicators are pivotal to achieving results.

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#4 THE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATION

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As the economy slowly stabilises after the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, business leaders finally recognise the power and potential of people at work. They acknowledge that their organisations wouldn't have survived without huge collective effort.

Post-Covid-19, new global challenges manifest, however.

While the escalating climate emergency is unavoidable, across the working world it becomes quickly apparent that collaboration, collective intelligence and diversity of perspective are integral to complex problem solving.

Technology companies continue to wield great power but, in a bid to futureproof, their internal operating dynamics shift away from traditional hierarchical command and control. Instead, they adopt more pluralistic and holocratic styles of organising.

This new world of inclusive collectivism places pressure on digital leaders to finally use tech as a force for good.

Rather than prioritise the monetisation of behavioural data, focus shifts toward building products and solutions that decarbonise the global economy, protect communities against extreme climatic events and enhance sustainable living.

While these are all steps in the right direction, unfortunately some of the old industrial mindsets in business persist.

> **While the escalating climate emergency is unavoidable, across the working world it becomes quickly apparent that collaboration, collective intelligence and diversity of perspective are integral to complex problem solving.**

As technology innovation accelerates, various digital platforms take root that automate access to talent.

Depersonalised hiring platforms that use AI and machine learning algorithms are increasingly popular due to their purported efficiency. For all the narrative about eliminating bias, these platforms are far too narrow in their design, leaving jobseekers at a loss to understand how best to navigate them for best employment success.

Locked out of work opportunities, public resentment grows. There's an escalating perception that traditional approaches to business and employment are outdated and elitist –

serving the interests of the few, rather than society at large.

Discontentment manifests both in consumer purchasing attitudes and in worker behaviour. Social media platforms are leveraged to call out any unethical behaviour of organisations, and brands can crash overnight for any perceived wrongdoing.

Total transparency in business is now key to survival.

In parallel, adults of working age

become reluctant to work for any organisation that doesn't demonstrate an authentic commitment to making the world a better place. Greenwashing of any kind is condemned. Actions and words must align.

As sociocultural behaviours and attitudes shift and environmental issues compound, it's clear the complex social and environmental challenges of the 21st century demand an entire overhaul of the economic principles of work.

EXPLAINER

Greenwashing: unsubstantiated claims about the environmental impact of a product or operation, designed to mislead.

Capitalism as a construct is perceived to have failed. The notion of profit for personal gain in the wake of both rising poverty and climate refugeeism is regarded as crass and selfish.

Instead, focus shifts to organisations prioritising the triple bottom line[xviii], also known as 3BL.

Rather than maintain an economic paradigm where there is singular focus on financial performance, profit and growth, a new breed of organisation emerges.

In this new economic landscape, people and planet are equally prioritised. Making money is still important but only so that all profits can be ploughed straight back into initiatives that improve the local community both socially and environmentally.

From a social perspective, this brings almost immediate improvement as people benefit from both better access to work and indeed work that's holistically more rewarding.

From an environmental perspective, as organisations adapt to 3BL operating principles, there's a race to decarbonise.

In 2021, the UK Government introduced legislative changes requiring all businesses to understand the carbon emission position of others within their ecosystem.

These changes, twinned with 3BL priorities, lead to a minimalist mindset within business. Excess resource consumption is now regarded as profligacy and organisations compete against one another to win sustainable awards through the demonstration of "carbon minimalism" initiatives.

Employee-led programmes to reduce consumption and carbon emissions transform business faster towards sustainable economic models than arguably any green technology ever could.

IMPACT OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATIONS ON THE LABOUR MARKET

Social responsibility, by default, embraces low-carbon living. We can't look after our species unless we look after the planet.

As the climate heats up, swathes of the planet are rendered uninhabitable. Extreme heat forces people to leave their homes for better living conditions elsewhere. Climate refugeeism places enormous pressure on more temperate countries.

While political leaders become more inwardly focused and nationalistic in their policy making, at a grassroots level, it's recognised that localism is the antidote to the years of damage that globalism has done to both communities and the environment.

Furthermore, it's recognised that citizen action is more responsive and effective than often slow and cumbersome top-down interventions from government. Across the UK, communities embark on a quest to rapidly become sustainable and self-reliant.

It's quickly recognised that sustainable communities require both wholescale measures to decarbonise, and efforts by organisations operating within those communities to provide access to good work.

While, of course, the pandemic lockdowns created a mainstream shift in thinking about flexible and distributed working, it also became clear that forging connective bonds between colleagues was also integral to organisational outcomes. This started a fresh conversation about the definition and ingredients of good work, and the role work plays in leading a meaningful life.

While it's still possible to access certain skills from afar, it's broadly recognised that access to local skills is far more beneficial to the local system.

> "Sustainable communities require both wholescale measures to decarbonise, and efforts by organisations operating within those communities to provide access to good work."

At an individual level, building social bonds in real life underpins wellbeing. Humans are hardwired for connection, and access to good work reduces stress and anxiety within communities.
At an organisational level, trust and psychological safety are easier to nurture in person than over digital channels. Finally, at a community level, providing local employment for local people strengthens the local economy. It keeps money flowing through the system in a way that benefits the many, not just the few.

This renewed conversation about accessing good work requires a complete overhaul of conventional thinking about employment.

Several shifts occur in the labour market.

The first is a sociocultural move away from the idea of hyper-individualism, where traditionally self-reliance and personal endeavour have been prioritised. Now, collectivism and community are prioritised.
This immediately restores human connection and a sense of belonging and purpose, the absence of which fuelled the escalating mental health

> **Organisations now refocus on hiring more people to do the same amount of work.**

woes of western economies for so long.

At work, this plays out as a rejection of the long hours culture that traditionally favoured the finite few still able to access high-income roles and opportunities.

Instead, organisations now refocus on hiring more people to do the same amount of work.

Distributing opportunity more broadly and fairly alleviates unemployment and other inequalities created by dysfunctional hiring platforms.

With a transition from the 40-plus hours in the workweek and fresh focus on sustainable communities, the wider workforce benefits from improved work-life balance. Less time at work means more time to invest in volunteering

within the local communities.

Volunteering activities naturally skew towards initiatives that underpin the long-term resilience of the local area. These include caring programmes to support more vulnerable members of the community, local food production, carbon reduction programmes and other projects that underpin self-sufficiency and holistic wellbeing.

IMPACT OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATIONS ON ORGANISING STRUCTURES

As industrial-era attitudes towards work end, finally new organising models emerge and take root.
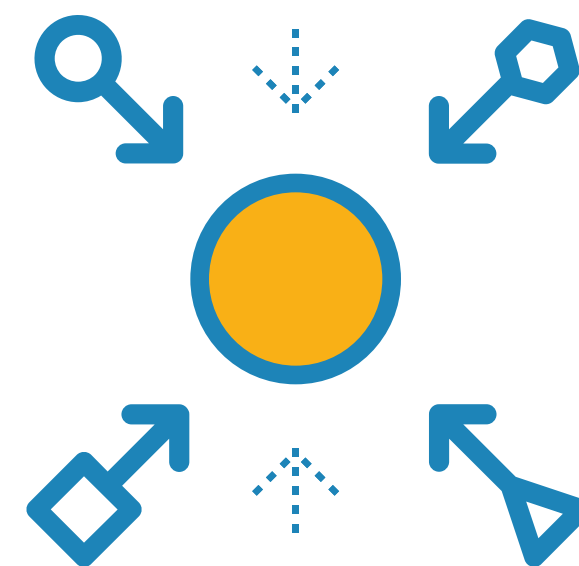
Alongside social enterprises, employee-owned organisations, mutuals and cooperatives become the norm. Wealth is fairly distributed across all contributors within an organisation. Since the onus is once more on improving the lives of the many, rather than the few, these new organisations are underpinned by the values of inclusivity, equality, diversity, respect, trust and dignity.

In these new operating landscapes, self-organising becomes a key feature.

Groups are empowered and entrusted to determine for themselves how and when to deliver their best work, in pursuit of shared goals and objectives.

Groups are continuously shapeshifting, pulling in contribution from "on-demand" team-members as and when required. This ensures maximal efficiency and minimal wastage.

In this sense, these organisations are well and truly "lean". This facilitates optimal responsiveness to volatile external environments as the climate crisis continues to pose risk to life and communities across the country.

A core tenet of successful self-organising is distributed power.

With a more egalitarian approach to decision-making, collective sense-making thrives. Rather than centralised control, shared responsibility positions power at the edge of the organisation. Information flow is omni-directional, as each contributor within a work ecosystem feels fully invested in gathering as much market intelligence as possible.

By sharing information and knowledge as it emerges, this new breed of organisation mimics the complex community systems seen in nature. A higher level of connectedness inspires constant collaboration that underpins continuous organisational evolution.

Rather than get caught in long, drawn-out democratic debate, this new era of inclusivity breeds a level of organisational agility that could only have been dreamt about previously. This allows organisations to stay market-ready and perpetually adaptive, fostering resilience and underpinning long-term sustainability.

HOW TO FUTUREPROOF YOUR ORGANISATION

There are so many external forces driving change in the way we live and work that it's a full-time job to keep track of them.

Some trends move slowly, building over time at a pace that's almost imperceptible to the human eye.

Other events happen overnight, with game-changing consequences that are hard to even imagine. A global pandemic and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine are two events that took the world by surprise.

Predicting how the future will play out is increasingly tricky. Not least when there are so many unknown unknowns.

Yet scenario planning allows us to play with possible futures and think more deeply about what might emerge. It allows us to explore how our lives might be impacted and to prepare for multiple alternative sequence of events.

As we face increasingly uncertain global economic landscapes, preparedness and mental agility are key to organisational futureproofing.

Within the field of internal communication, it's no longer enough to simply keep abreast of emergent digital communication platforms and channels. We need to better understand how interconnected forces might play out.

Attributed to multiple sources, there's wisdom in the saying, "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

But to create the future we want, we must first be aware of the convergent factors driving and accelerating the pace of change in the 2020s. Scenario planning is a first step in helping you get there.
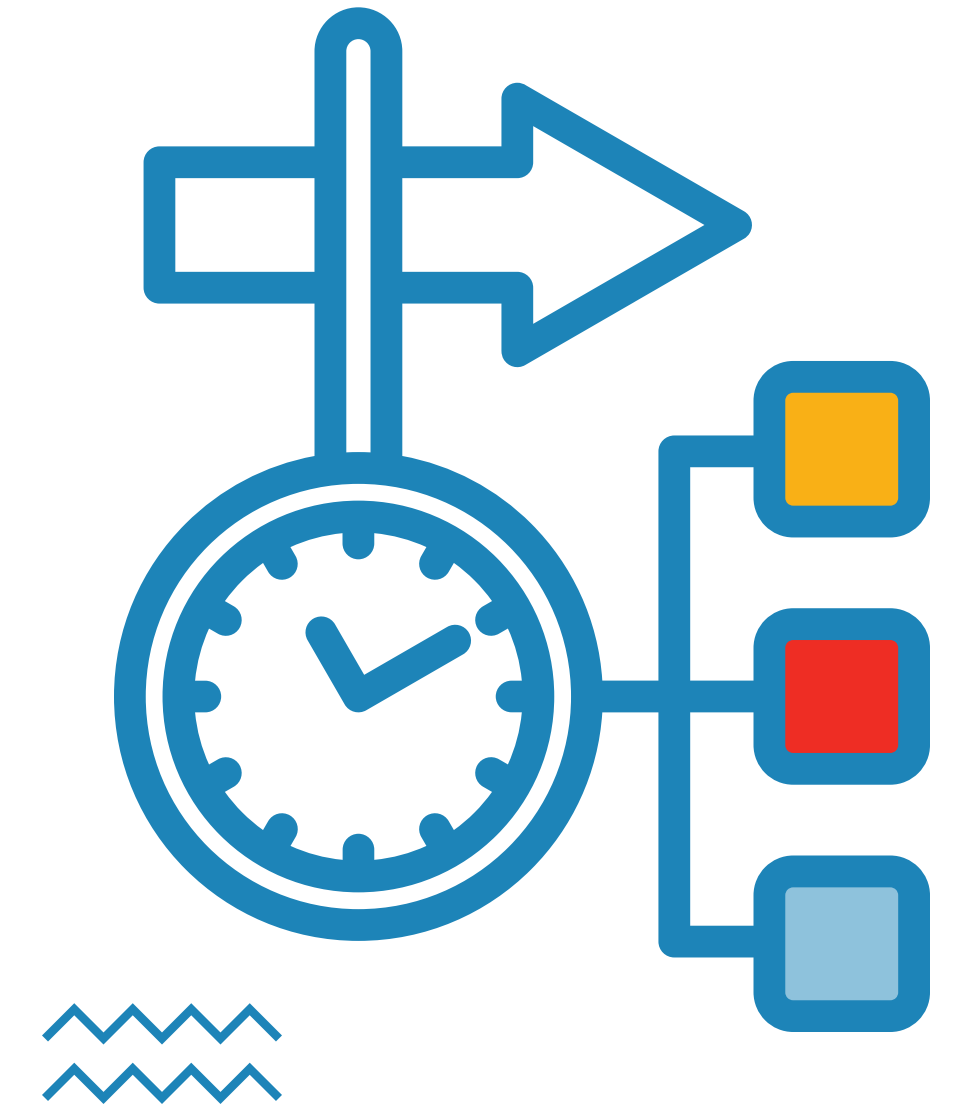
> "Within the field of internal communication, it's no longer enough to simply keep abreast of emergent digital communication platforms and channels. We need to better understand how interconnected forces might play out.

FOOTNOTES

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