

Work Futures
INITIATIVE

UNFILTERED VOICES

**A Reveal of Our Current
and Future Work Life**

**Work
Futures
INITIATIVE**

healthyworkplaces[^]
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTER

BerkeleyHaas



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UNFILTERED VOICES

A Reveal of Our Current and Future Work Life

Interdisciplinary Center for Healthy Workplaces
School of Public Health and Haas School of Business
University of California, Berkeley

PROJECT EDITORS:

Cristina G. Banks, PhD,

Cosette Gagnon, BS,

Jeff Loi, MS, MURP

COPY EDITOR: William Bellamy

DESIGN: Molly McCoy

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The Work Futures Initiative
UNFILTERED VOICES

**“PUT SIMPLY, THE REASON FOR THIS EXPLORATION OF
THE CURRENT STATE OF WORK, WORKER EXPERIENCE,
AND WORKPLACES IS TO SHAPE THE FUTURE RATHER
THAN HAVE IT SHAPE US.”**

—CRISTINA BANKS, PHD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Part 1 Sandboxes 1–9	13
Corporate Real Estate Workplace Strategists	15
Occupational Health Psychologists	33
Occupational & Environmental Health and Occupational Medicine Professionals and Ergonomists	61
Senior Human Resource Managers	77
Chief Human Resources Officers	99
Work Psychologists	119
Building Owners, Developers, and Urban Planners	147
Public Policy Professionals	177
Government Officials.	205
Part 2 Sandboxes 10–16	235
Technology Experts: Artificial Intelligence, Software	237
Technology Experts: Medical Devices and Robotics Technologists.	267
Artists, Writers, and Musicians	287
Youth Leaders	309
Union Leaders	333
Chief Executive Officers	365
Business Executives and Investors	385
CONCLUSION	401
APPENDIX	405

INTRODUCTION

What This Book Is About

You are entering into an experience that we, the Leadership Team, believe could transform how you see workers' lives in America. How? We'll explore what people across a wide range of occupations and stakeholder groups say about work, how they navigate new expectations, and how they deal with the rapidly evolving influence of new technologies.

Their voices are presented here in an unfiltered state, meaning they have not been shaped by an underlying agenda or a researcher's quest for a specific dataset. We simply listened to what came to their minds when the 163 participants talked to each other in small groups. Our goal was to avoid guiding them, whether consciously or unconsciously, to a particular point of view or predetermined conclusion. We listened and then kept what they said in as pure a state as possible, so you could hear it directly from them.

Why is this a good idea? We believe that much of what we know about worker experience and stakeholder views is too curated: questions shaped before the inquiry by researchers' beliefs about their subjects' experience. How can we ensure that the truly important questions are asked if we don't first understand what people are thinking and experiencing? This critical step is why we started here. We wanted to hear what our participants were thinking without signaling our own beliefs. We bet that we would get fresh, novel insights as a result. Our approach produced exactly what we had hoped.

We want to share these insights with you by letting you hear them first-hand, as if you were there listening with us.

The participants' voices are presented here as **quotes**, not as interpretations of their words. Their voices are captured in this book. Part 1 presents the voices gathered in 2024 prior to the presidential election, while Part 2 presents the voices gathered in 2025. Together, this book provides an intimate and often surprising view into the lived experience of people who work in a wide variety of occupations and stakeholders and who influence and shape the world of work.

Below, we describe our unique methodology for gathering these voices: the Sandboxes. **Sandboxes** comprise the first step of a three-phase project, the **Work Futures Initiative**, which ultimately aims to reimagine modern work life and create a new vision and framework for work, worker experience, and workplaces. This new vision will be generated in the second phase. The vision will be translated into actionable products in the third phase in order to jump start the transition to a new, healthier, safer, more productive work life with a higher level of well-being for all.

The primary reason for the Work Futures Initiative is to determine whether we can create a better future of work, worker experience, and workplaces by seeing and then addressing our issues and challenges in all their complexity, all their connections, and all their roots. We will see the *whole picture*, facilitated by the information we obtain from Sandbox participants' discussions and by careful and considered exploration by experts to see the patterns and forces within the whole, and determine what to fix *holistically*. Then we will create a comprehensive *Problem Statement*, exploring interactions and dependencies across elements within the world of work, revealing the interconnected system of incentives, disincentives, commonalities, and independence holding the status quo in place. We will focus on how to strengthen the elements that promote good while reducing the ones that undermine it, thus crafting

a new vision and framework for the future. The Work Futures Initiative will culminate in building the right tools, programs, and practices that translate this new vision into an integrated suite of changes forming a new, effective, holistic path forward.

Our sincere hope is that as you read these unfiltered voices you will learn about and appreciate their experiences. In doing so, you may see that *all voices contribute to our collective experience*.

Why Shape the Future?

If current challenges remain unaddressed and left as they are, the momentum underlying predictions of the future of work for workers, organizations, and society may be dire. Why not imagine a much better future and then take steps to make it a reality?

Our country needs a new vision for modern work to make room for post-pandemic realities. These include new work arrangements, changed expectations around balancing work and personal life, greater demand for autonomy in how and where work is performed, and a striving for better work experience that provides *all* workers with a healthier, safer, more productive work life, and promotes well-being. This new vision must benefit everyone: employers, workers, families, and communities.

The pandemic exposed many unresolved challenges and revealed new ones. Workers experienced these challenges in different ways. The pandemic revealed a fundamental divide: knowledge workers gained unprecedented autonomy while essential workers faced heightened vulnerability. All workers discovered that job security was more fragile than anyone imagined. While remote workers gained flexibility regarding where and when they worked, they also lost professional and personal connections that were best forged

in-person. On-site and field-based workers maintained their co-worker community but also experienced threats to their health and safety.

Managers struggled to navigate the complexities of hybrid work: managing workers' weekly schedules, accommodating workers who needed time away from work to take care of personal responsibilities (e.g., caring for children), and maintaining adequate amenities despite unpredictable on-site attendance, among others. Workers struggled with responding to in-office attendance mandates and balancing personal responsibilities established during and post-pandemic, geographic dislocations, long commutes, and constant streams of digital communications and meetings.

Jumping back into old pre-pandemic patterns has proven to be untenable for both leaders and workers, and costly for the organization in terms of lost productivity and key talent turnover. Integration of artificial intelligence and smart devices into work processes and workplaces has introduced a new dynamic with unknown benefits, consequences, and societal risks. Trust, empathy, belonging, and job security have become increasingly endangered.

In sum, we need to do more than anticipate change; we need to play a part in creating it.

The Three Phases of the Work Futures Initiative



THE SANDBOXES.

The first phase of the Initiative is collecting information about the current state of work, worker experience, and workplaces, and predictions about the future through the Sandboxes. We personally invited highly experienced professionals from specific occupations and stakeholder groups to participate in two-hour virtual discussion sessions. These sessions, lightly facilitated by a Leadership Team member, consisted of peer-to-peer discussions among people of the same occupation or stakeholder group. Sandboxes ranged from 6 to 16 participants, with a total of 16 Sandboxes conducted between March 2024 and August 2025.



Each Sandbox consisted of the same three sets of broad questions examining the current state of their occupation or stakeholder role. Participants talked to each other, not to us. Discussions lasted approximately 20 minutes each, with the first discussion including all

participants, and the following 2 discussions in groups of 3 to 5 peers in “breakouts” lasting 20 minutes each. Participants then reported their “takeaways” from the discussion sessions to end the Sandbox. After the Sandbox, participants were provided a summary of their Sandbox consisting of quotes from the discussions organized by topic. All Sandbox participants had access to all other Sandbox summaries, and they were invited to join a dedicated LinkedIn Group to share their thoughts about the Sandbox and to receive project updates.

Information collected during the Sandboxes were considered “unfiltered” because they were unshaped by predetermined views or agenda-driven questions by the research team. These unfiltered views were captured in recordings of sessions and subsequently transcribed into verbatim narratives, which were lightly edited to remove natural speech patterns, including filler words and repetition of the same points by the same person. (See Appendix for meeting agenda and question sets.)

THE MIXER.

Our next phase is to integrate these disparate views into a cohesive and multidimensional picture of the system of forces driving the current state and the potential avenues for improvement. “Knitters,” a group of experts who are comfortable thinking at a systems level and can recognize patterns and intersections across a field of information, will work collaboratively to extract common themes, synergies, opposing forces, and opportunities for mutual gain. They will knit together a new vision and formulate a framework for the future of work, work experience, and workplaces based on the unfiltered voices and information solicited from subject matter experts (SMEs) participating in the Mixer.



THE SUMMIT.

The final phase is to execute this new vision and framework in multiple tools of action to jump-start change toward this new future envisioned by the Knitters. “Producers,” who are experts skilled in translating a vision into tools for change, will create an integrated suite of change management resources such as toolkits, educational curricula, publications, presentations, training materials, and podcasts available for public distribution. Once the vision is communicated, others will be invited to continue developing resources to facilitate changes.



Organization of the Book

We organized the book into two parts: Sandboxes 1–9 conducted in 2024 (Part 1) and Sandboxes 10–16 conducted in 2025 (Part 2). Each Part is divided into chapters, each chapter capturing in quotes the perspectives and sentiments shared in Sandboxes by members of a specific occupational or stakeholder group. Sandboxes are ordered by their session date, starting with Sandbox 1 conducted on March 1, 2024, and ending with Sandbox 16 conducted on August 22, 2025.

The occupational and stakeholder group that participated in a Sandbox as well as the individual participants is listed at the beginning of each chapter. Each Sandbox chapter consists of three sections: (1) participants' quotes describing their views of the Current State of their profession or stakeholder group; (2) participants' quotes describing their predictions on the Future State of their profession; and (3) participants' takeaways expressed at the conclusion of each Sandbox (not recorded as quotes).

Themes

The information collected across the 16 Sandboxes generally fell into 4 large groupings of themes, each grouping consisting of 3 to 4 themes for a total of 12 differentiated themes. They are on the following page.

We organized quotes within a chapter by matching quote content to the best-fitting theme. By attaching a theme to a quote, Readers can cross-reference a theme across Sandboxes. To facilitate this, a unique icon (e.g., ●) symbol is placed on the edge of the page where the matching quote is located, and wherever this theme appears, the icon is noted in the margin. To find quotes that fit the same theme, the Reader can look for the theme icon in the margin across Sandboxes. This enables Readers to identify commonalities and differences among Sandbox participants by theme.

Human Dynamics



Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches

Valuing human-centered approaches to worker physical, mental, and emotional health.



Culture, Belonging & Social Connection

Fostering connection, belonging, and establishing trust through shared purpose, support through strong organizational culture.



Change, Adaptability & Agility

Anticipating change, building adaptability to respond to evolving work and workplace demands.

Skill Gaps



Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles

Responsibilities of leadership and management in guiding and caring for the workforce.



Education, Development & Training

Specialized training, education, and continuous development to match shifting roles and real-world demands.

Evolving Nature of Work



In-Person & Remote Work

Realities, constraints, challenges and impact of non-traditional work arrangements.



Collaboration & Organizational Design

Systems-thinking and systems infrastructure, breaking down silos to enable collaboration across disciplines and areas of expertise.



Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning

Intersecting factors of the physical, urban, and workplace environments.



Technology & AI

Technological advances and AI influences and their impact on work.

Global Demands



Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues

Formulating policy and regulatory structures, regulatory enforcement.



Equity & Workforce Diversity

Addressing workforce diversity, fairness, and equality within organizations.



Economic Factors

Economic drivers that shape the world of work and influence organizational decision-making.

How to Use This Book

Sandbox participants have given us a valuable gift by letting us peek into their worlds. Many of us are siloed by our training, experience, and points of view, which limits our opportunity and maybe desire to connect with those outside of our silos and comfort zones. Importantly, Sandbox chapters give us this opportunity, fortunately. This book provides “insider access” to each group’s thoughts, views, and perspectives—information we might never have the chance to know. *Moreover, all participants gave us their best thinking and insider view: a rare opportunity, and the Reader has access to all 163!*

Here are a few examples of what they told us:

- *For work psychologists, they were fearful of AI changing their work and not having a career anymore.*
- *For CHROs, their leaders asked them for information about how to bring workers back to the office and build loyalty and engagement with a hybrid workforce, but they had neither the training nor resources to do so. Their shortcomings were perceived as a direct threat to job security and future advancement.*
- *For occupational health professionals, the threat of antimicrobial resistance (the inability of medicine to combat current and future infections) will likely make the workplace one of the most dangerous places to be.*
- *For building owners, bringing workers back to the office was necessary to maintain careers in corporate real estate, because filled buildings mean revenue and happy investors.*

Readers can view Sandbox quotes as data points describing participant experience. These data points can be compared, combined, analyzed, and understood in their native form for descriptive purposes or to serve any number of purposes.

Here are a few examples:

- *Learning about people in different occupations and stakeholder groups to better understand a customer base.*
- *Discovering how people from different perspectives think similarly and differently about the same topics to address professional needs.*
- *Informing decisions on how to create products and services that more effectively serve the needs of a broader constituency.*
- *Crafting policies that better support work, worker experience, and workplaces.*
- *Expanding outreach to form partnerships across silos.*
- *Developing new leadership and management models that address business needs while supporting worker health, well-being, and performance.*
- *Developing new practices that respond effectively to the direction and pace of change and new realities of work.*
- *Guiding investment in new work practices that promotes business effectiveness and a thriving workforce.*
- *Providing guidance on business development.*
- *Helping leaders navigate the uncertainty around technological advances and AI in the workplace.*

Acknowledgments

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THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

CRISTINA BANKS, PHD

LEAD Interdisciplinary Center for Healthy Workplaces, University of California, Berkeley, and California Labor Lab, University of California, San Francisco

COSETTE GAGNON

Research Analyst, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley

JEFF LOI

Research Analyst, California Labor Lab, University of California, San Francisco

KEITH PERSKE

Workplace Strategist & Faculty, CoreNet Global

BRYAN BERTHOLD

Global Lead & Sr. Managing Director, Cushman & Wakefield

TRACY WYMER

New Boat LLC, Workplace Strategist

JEREMY MACDONALD, MBA

Head of Business Transformation, ISS World

JAN JOHNSON

Principal, Workplace Collective

MELISSA JANCOURT

Founder and Principal, WorkSIGHT LLC

EDWARD YELIN, PHD

Professor Emeritus, Medicine & Health Policy, University of California, San Francisco

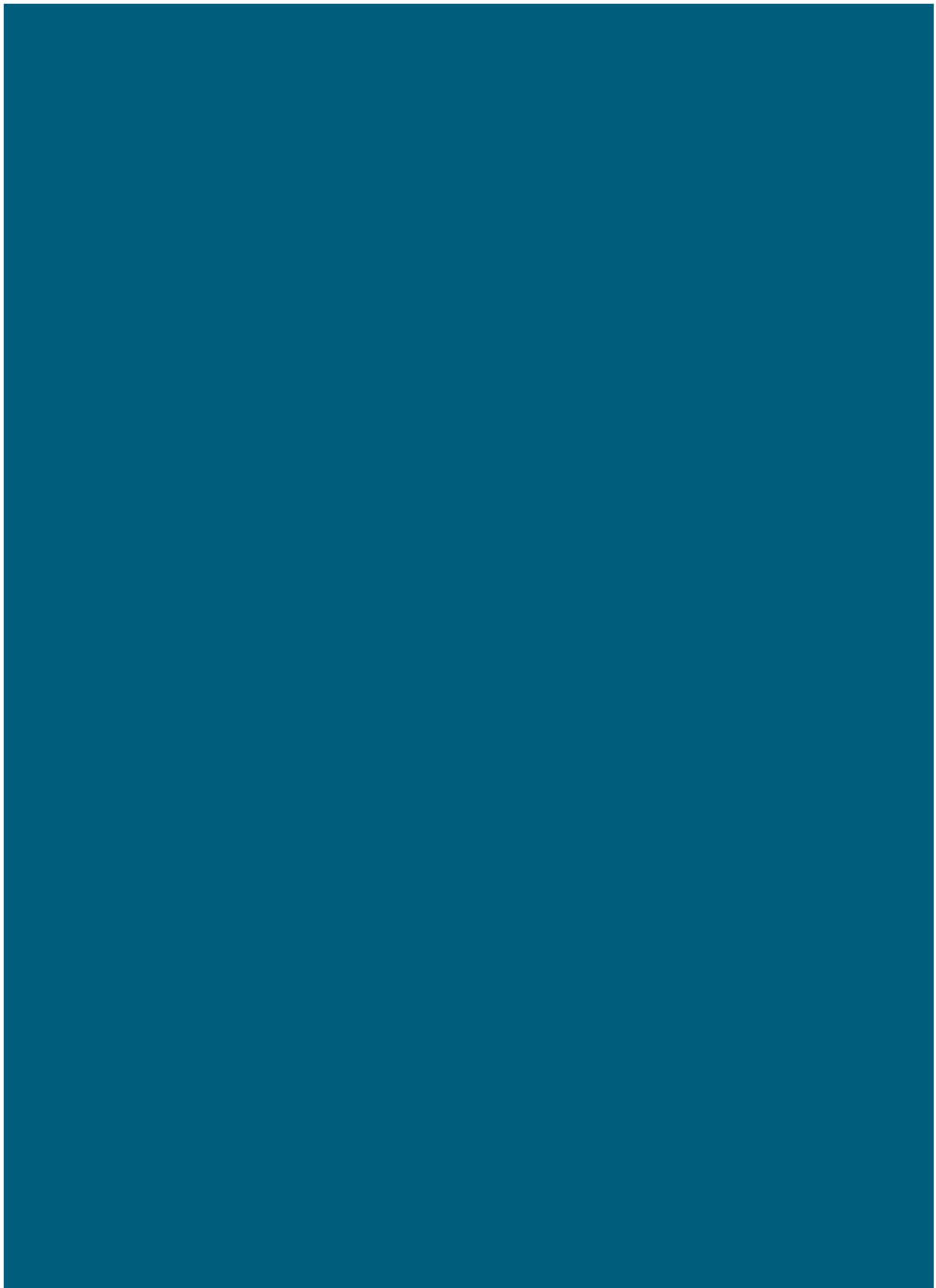
ADAM ROSS

Executive Director, Institute for Business and Social Impact, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley

Part 1 Sandboxes 1–9

MARCH–OCTOBER 2024

- SANDBOX 1. CORPORATE REAL ESTATE
WORKPLACE STRATEGISTS
- SANDBOX 2. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
PSYCHOLOGISTS
- SANDBOX 3. OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS,
OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE
PROFESSIONALS, ERGONOMISTS
- SANDBOX 4. SENIOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS
- SANDBOX 5. CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICERS
- SANDBOX 6. WORK PSYCHOLOGISTS
- SANDBOX 7. BUILDING OWNERS, DEVELOPERS,
URBAN PLANNERS
- SANDBOX 8. PUBLIC POLICY PROFESSIONALS
- SANDBOX 9. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



Corporate Real Estate Workplace Strategists

THE FIELD OF CORPORATE REAL ESTATE focuses on the management of costs for real property used by a company for its own operational purposes, and on how it can add value to the core business and contribute to the overall performance of the organization. Research and practice involve site selection, building construction, adjacencies, tenant improvements, square footage allotment, and vacancy management. Workplace strategy involves the analysis, planning, design, documentation, and management of interior construction and alteration projects aligned with building design and construction, and integrating the experiences, needs, and personalities of the users within.

SANDBOX 1 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 In-Person & Remote Work	 Collaboration & Organizational Design	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	 Technology & AI
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors	

STATEMENTS IN THIS CHAPTER are not verbatim quotes because the discussion sections were not recorded. Statements were reconstructed by examining detailed written notes, participant sticky notes on Zoom Whiteboards, and chat transcripts.

PARTICIPANTS

RYAN ANDERSON

VP of Global Research & Insights,
MillerKnoll

MICHIEL BAKKER

VP of Workplace Strategy;
Innovation and Sustainability,
Google

LESLIE BAMBURG

Senior Manager:
Hybrid Workplace Experience,
Cisco

KATIE BEATTIE

Director of Workplace Management,
Adidas

BRYAN BERTHOLD

Global Lead of Workplace Experience
and Senior Managing Director,
Cushman & Wakefield

MIRIT COHEN

Senior Manager of Global Workplace
Experience Programs, Adobe

KELLY COLÓN

Founder, Eledex Coaching
& Consulting Services

LAURA DELAFUENTE

Global Director of
Workplace Experience, HP

MARK GILBREATH

Founder/CEO, LiquidSpace

YONG IN

Creative Director &
Design Strategist,
INxD Studio

MELISSA JANCOURT

Principal & Founder,
WorkSIGHT LLC

KEVIN SAUER

CEO/Founder,
Sauer Strategy Works LLC

LEIGH STRINGER

Global Director of
Advisory Services,
Perkins&Will

GERVAIS TOMPKIN

Workplace Consulting,
Plus Gervais LLC

The Current State

SUMMARY: People are exhausted, yet are still trying to enact change at a “local” level within their own jobs. We fear the unknown consequences of new technologies such as AI. We struggle to forge social connections and create meaningful workplace culture as we return to working in the office. The role of the manager today is unclear, and most managers are not equipped for the overwhelming and often unrealistic demands that result from occupying an ill-defined role under these circumstances. Those at the top cannot get in touch with their front-line workers without utilizing middle-managers, and so their middle-managers must be trained to enact change. We can all do better, companies and individuals, by focusing on the human.

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Status of Corporate Real Estate

ENTERPRISES WANT EXTREMELY WELL-PLANNED and executed workplace programs, but don't invest to achieve occupants' needs.

A TECTONIC SHIFT IS happening, but we're only at the beginning.

IN MY PUBLIC SECTOR agency, few people come into the office (<25% occupancy), but the agency's identity is tied to the building. Organizational identity is tied to the physical environment.

THERE IS AN EMERGENT trend of more convenient work locations. During the pandemic, people moved away from work, and now workplaces are making moves to help them be in-person where they are now in order to offer flexibility and choice.



Distributed Work ●

THE CHALLENGE IN A distributed work world is to continue to connect people to corporate culture while supporting their need for choice and autonomy.

THERE IS CURRENTLY VERY little training for employees and managers to navigate and effectively operate in distributed work models.

DISTRIBUTED WORK TENDS TO stay focused on projects and needs to find ways to let people socialize, bond, coach, mentor, celebrate.

FREE AGENT EMPLOYEES COMING together to deliver a project helps remove company overhead while better aligning expertise and connection.

DISTRIBUTED LIVING MIGHT MEAN longer commutes, or will there be an office change?

82% OF A COMPANY'S teams have distributed members. There is a shortage of data and insights upon which leaders can base decisions. What do people do when given the choice?

"DISTRIBUTED WORK" IS MORE precise than "hybrid work." Precision of language is important, more specific. It is necessary when creating the future to make it more accessible and less intimidating."

WE DON'T HAVE THE budget to bring everyone together who are distributed geographically.

Privacy ●

REAL AND PERCEIVED PRIVACY concerns are stalling improvements in the workplace.

POTENTIAL FEARS AROUND AI that are more valid are privacy-related, not unemployment-related.

THERE ARE STRONG PRIVACY concerns related to how people work away from the office.

Teams and Being Together ●

VIRTUAL WORK PROVIDES NO way to connect. We need to be in-person to some degree. People say they don't know what the work culture is when work is virtual.

WHEN WE ARE VIRTUAL, we should focus only on work. Social bonding happens before and after meetings, but people are struggling to find the time to do the social bonding.

PEOPLE ARE SELFISH. WHEN given a choice to come in or stay home, they stay home.

EVERYONE IS CURIOUS ABOUT how to make employees happy to come back to the office.

Concerns About Remote Work ●

HYBRID WORK IS HERE to stay despite its shortcomings.

KNOWLEDGE WORKERS AND FRONTLINE workers are affected differently by organizational factors, but they are related and both groups depend on each other. There can be flexibility even in frontline work. I am interested in how benefits for knowledge workers can reach front line workers.

LEADERS ARE DEMANDING RTO, but not explaining the why, not explaining or even attempting to explain the value.

HOW TO MAKE THE in-office experience more enticing than home with limited opportunity to invest in the current environment.



Autonomy and Isolation ●

THERE IS A STRONG desire among employees for autonomy that leads to empowerment and job satisfaction. But autonomy can also lead to personal and organizational isolation. Isolation can lead to personal health challenges and organizational misalignment. Rise of the low-level and middle manager can address this, or can be a mode to prevent this. A full service set could be delivered at the team leader level.

WITH LITTLE-TO-NO FACE-TO-FACE TIME in the workplace, it is both hard to make connections with other people, and hard to increase the actual amount of inclusivity in the workplace.

ISOLATION IS THE RESULT of a society that doesn't have the tools to support individuals who are decentralized, but with the right tools it doesn't have to be isolating.

KEEPING TEAM MEMBERS CONNECTED socially and professionally over distance is a primary challenge.



Employees Are Exhausted ●

EMPLOYEES ARE GENERALLY EXHAUSTED. Staff cuts, remote operating models and shifting priorities have kept employees and managers focused on what is in front of them, leaving larger, more human issues, unattended.

REDESIGN PROCESSES AND R&R to allow for more work sharing and cooperation across silos.

Focus on the Human ●

HUMANS ARE SOCIAL CREATURES and that is being overlooked.

OUR CURRENT MODEL OF work structure – 9 to 5, 5 days a week, 365 days a year – is just a model. It can be made more seasonal, more natural.

PEOPLE NEED TO BE nurtured and nudged to use their choice fully.

MANY OF US WORK for global companies, and aspects of globalization such as time differences can remove separation between work and personal life. For example, early morning and late night calls.

Psychological Needs ●

THERE IS A GENERAL lack of understanding around neurodiversity.

70% OF EMPLOYEES ARE coming from complex trauma. For instance, meeting without an agenda can be very triggering for some. “Inclusion” must include behavior and policy changes to address complex trauma. Dispersal amplifies these issues.

Culture ■

CONTINUED DECLINE OF “ONE job for a lifetime” and more of a multidimensional career path.

“EVENTS” OR “SUMMITS” HELD by corporations are cross-functional: they are social events as well as professional. They build human connections, awareness of one another, and collegiality, on top of achieving the specific purpose for which the corporation hosts the event.”

PEOPLE ARE LOSING CONNECTION to culture. How to create and drive culture in a distributed world is a must.

WE’RE OPEN TO HOW much is changing. People need to still complete their work/tasks but also be happy and connected to culture.

WHAT ARE THE NEW gathering rituals?

Trust ■

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY ARE not present with a lot of new technologies because employees feel they are being tracked/monitored.

ONE AREA OF CONCERN is tension between employees and management. There is no data that backs up management concerns about return to office, etc.

The Role of the Manager ●

PEOPLE MOSTLY LEAVE JOBS because of bad leaders, not bad buildings. Talent development may be more important than the building factors or its location. Need to invest in manager training.

SOME MANAGERS ARE NOT supposed to manage/are not good at managing – they were promoted into the role but are not cut out or trained for it.

HYBRID MADE THE MANAGER'S job harder. And they failed. Managers need to manage both people and systems.

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND the skills gaps of managers. Managers are overburdened.

A MIDDLE MANAGER IS like a working mother, with so many expectations and so little control over their own circumstances and resources.

MANAGEMENT STYLES AND POLICIES are too general. We need to think about it on a team level. Teams need more from the corporation. Having purpose equals engagement. Purpose must be brought to the lowest levels in the org.

THERE IS A SURVEY created by a company that tells an individual what they are doing well and what they can change and informs their managers about what they can do to help.

Training and Educating Managers ●

WE NEED MANAGERS IN organizations to add a new skill, that of addressing isolation that comes from remote and hybrid work. That isolation is the twin of autonomy if not planned for.

THE KEY ROLE IN how future work is accomplished is the middle manager. Managers must be trained to not only keep their teams focused on meeting goals, but also on employee wellness, isolation mitigation, engagement and morale building.

MIDDLE MANAGERS ALSO NEED to be “dot-connectors.”

IT'S IMPORTANT TO LEARN from different perspectives and generations to find alignment/misalignment and their impacts.

Financial Pressures ◆

THERE ARE STILL SIGNIFICANT financial pressures to reduce spending, making investment in training, new programs, and employee wellness difficult.

FINANCIAL PRESSURE REDUCES OUR ability to make big changes quickly or even at a reasonable, necessary pace.



ROI

NEED TO MEASURE THE “depth of impact” of services and behaviors. Not just numbers. What is the ROI of a celebration? Right now, they are questioned as a cost. Do we really need that cost now?”

WHAT IS THE ROI of a set of gatherings? It’s not just a Christmas party. It’s part of a set of gatherings, rituals that are good for the organization.

Sustainability

THE INITIAL REDUCTIONS IN commuting during COVID showed a marked decrease in emissions. But a post-pandemic distributed workforce, even with limited in-office time, appears to be moving back to pre-pandemic emission levels.

LONGER COMMUTES AFTER THE pandemic could be responsible for the return to 2019 level of emissions. More convenient work locations could likely reduce commute lengths, even post-pandemic.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS impacts on human beings and our humanity are central to future preparations. Don Norman’s Humanity Center of Design is a good model for this.

The Future State

SUMMARY: The idea of a single, linear career is becoming a relic of the past. As technological change accelerates, individuals will go back to school deep into their careers in order to keep up. Gen Z is joining the workplace, and they are much more skeptical of the extant working conditions, so they may help encourage quicker changes in work culture. How can we tie our big lofty goals back to the company’s single, driving goal: ROI? We don’t expect the future to take a single, coherent form. Because specific predictions are often not correct, we will work to create flexible, sustainable systems which are compatible with a diversity of healthy, strong futures.

Uncertainty About the Future ●

IT'S KIND OF AN unrealistic goal to develop a strong, singular vision for the future. We should instead strive to enable the best possible outcome for the future because we've been wrong about the specifics so many times before.

WE CAN'T PREDICT THE future, instead we need to be dynamic and adaptable and create dynamic, adaptable systems.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT we don't know, so we should focus our energies on designing for resilience and human needs.

Experimentation ●

WE NEED TO IMPLEMENT small-scale, risky moves, and enable resilience.

TOO MUCH HYPE ABOUT new stuff. Most things we're experiencing today are not actually new, and we should begin problem-solving by using proven solutions and avoid novelty bias.

WE HAVE A "QUICKY Resilient" lab where we try new things regarding the physical, technical ways and methods, community and well-being. It's an experimentation engine.

MAYBE WE CAN THINK of productivity as a byproduct of other things rather than THE thing. For example, a client's method of making change was cost reduction, which in turn resulted in reduced carbon emissions. This change created new alternatives which might positively affect performance.

I'M LIVING IN THE moment and spending time with people internal and external to my industry/company. I get inspired by people in adjacent industries.

Work Arrangements ●

PEOPLE DON'T DO THE same work remotely as they do in the office. The office will be more about coming together versus staying home for heads-down work.

DO WE OPTIMIZE FOR people who are in person or people who are on the screen? Hybrid is problematic for this and many other reasons.

THE ABILITY TO DELIVER an entire workplace experience (e.g., snacks, meeting space, HR, materials) to individuals who are not in the workplace will be a primary challenge.

MEASUREMENT IS HARDER WHEN employees are more distributed, and when organizations are so large (>50 teams in one organization).



Evolution of Work ●

THERE ARE ASPECTS OF which we are now currently unaware that will have great impacts on how work is accomplished in the future.

THE NEW "HEROES" OF the workplace may be the team-level facilities person and the building-level occupancy planner. What could be the virtual versions of these roles?

TEAM-LEVEL FACILITIES AND OCCUPANCY people exist now but will be more central in the future.

WE SHOULD THINK LIKE generalists, systems designers, rather than specialists.

Calling for Help ●

A **"CALL FOR HELP"** button is used in the manufacturing industry on the assembly line which is installed to prevent injuries and harm. You would never get in trouble for pressing the button, you would only get in trouble if you didn't press the button when you needed help. Is this something we can have in other workplaces? How can we make it easier for people to ask for/rely on workplace support?

IN THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY there's a way of asking for help: "I'm in the weeds." It takes guts to say it. When someone says it, people jump in to help no matter what. We need the corporate version of this.

Data on Employee Experience ●

CORPORATIONS NEED TO START leveraging data and insight to figure out what drives employee experience. There's too much subjectivity and focus on attendance.

I AM FOCUSED ON capturing global employee sentiment data and what is driving experience.

MORE DATA WILL BE available to underwrite decisions about work and workplace in the future.

WHEN WE DO GROUP work, we change the way we recognize success, changing the mindset for individuals.

HOW DO WE INTEGRATE traditionally siloed services? And, how do we have measures to back it up and drive improvement?

WE ATTEMPT TO PROVE the new value of the workplace to C-level teams through traditional KPIs (ROI). This has to happen.

WE NEED TO DO post-occupancy evaluations for every single change we make. We need an industry-wide benchmark.

DATA-DRIVEN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN performance is rapidly improving.

LESS TIME SPENT FIGURING out utilization and where/what people are doing...
More time measuring the employee experience and uncovering the drivers.

HOW DO WE BRING ROI and quantitative data to the argument?

WE NEED A HUMAN well-being index.

HOW DO WE MEASURE joy?

Metrics ●

NEW METRICS WILL BE required to measure more human-focused aspects of work. Return on investment (ROI) will still be critical but new metrics will assess employee wellness, engagement, loyalty, contribution, personal development and growth. An industry-wide set of metrics could be established to enable comparison of organizations against each other.

IMPLEMENTATION IS A PROBLEM for any plan or solution or future vision, especially when thinking about "human" aspects.

WE NEED TO ARTICULATE the value of coming into an office.

WE SHOULD TAKE ACTION on positives (joy, new relationships, etc.) as we already do a lot of taking action on negatives (what people and processes are doing wrong).

WE ARE TRYING TO add data intelligence capabilities to many roles.

THERE IS A HYBRID dividend and a people dividend. We need to appreciate and measure both.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS impacts on human beings must be central to any definition of how work will be performed in the future.

Focus on Humans ●

THE FUTURE WILL BE human.

FOCUS ON HUMANITY IS a fresh way of looking at things.

WHAT IS HUMAN? WE should prioritize human things.

THE FUTURE OF WORK is human but it is not obvious how it fits in the capitalistic framework.



Empowering Employees ●

EMPLOYEES WILL BE NURTURED and trained to use their new autonomy for the organization and for their own well-being.

PEOPLE NEED TO BE nurtured and nudged to use the power of their choice fully.

HOW DO WE TEACH the employee/individual to have a language or approach to seeking what they want? How do we open this dialogue when we may not speak the same language right now?

FUTURE EXPECTATION: EMPLOYEES WILL be more empowered and capable of driving the experience (e.g., more "bottom up" than currently).

Natural Cycles ●

ARE WE OVERLOOKING HUMAN factors, such as seasonality, or pain, or mood, as we move to the future? We should remain in touch with the traditional experiences of humanity and what that means even as we move into the future.

THE HUMAN WILL BE at the center of how work is organized and accomplished. The natural cycle of seasons will help organizations focus their efforts. These natural rhythms will help establish meeting rituals for the organization and teams within it. Human well-being will be integrated into all decisions and not considered a nice-to-have or leftover.

PEOPLE BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY AT different times of year, there is a rhythm to life.

RHYTHM IS A BIOLOGICAL metric of measuring most things, it's a great way to think of measuring humanity.

THERE ARE ALSO RHYTHMS and rituals of work at organizational, team, and individual levels.

Worker Experience ●

EMPLOYEES WILL BE NURTURED and trained to use their new autonomy for the organization and for their own well-being.

MAYBE THINKING OF EMPLOYEES similarly to customers, at least as a thought experiment or in some facets, could help to "pull forward" employee experience.

THE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE IS steadily declining. Shifting the focus to improve the experience will drive a lot of the answers to design, technology, and policy decisions.

CAN WE THINK ABOUT the employee experience beyond the workplace? Especially in the context of return to office mandates?

FOCUS AND METRICS WILL be expanded to include creating strong employee experiences that drive successful team and business outcomes.



Wellness

WE NEED TO PAY attention to brain health.

THERE IS MARKET CONFUSION around the term, human wellbeing. We should work on defining terms more clearly.

WELL-BEING STRATEGIES SHOULD NOT be a matter of “check the box.” Rather it should be integrated into the project, event, etc., as any other aspect of a given project is.

WELL-BEING IS AT AN all-time low. What in the workplace improves well-being? Leaders, real estate, and tech need to make well-being a priority.



Sustainability

HOW CAN WE CREATE a low-carbon work future?

THE CARBON IMPACTS OF video calls are only now being understood.

Personal and Professional Development

WE NEED TO LET go of the traditional career path. Just-in-time learning and formal and informal lifelong learning will be critical.

FOR INCREASED FLEXIBILITY, AND because technology is changing so much, it would be normal for many people to go back to university multiple times throughout their career.

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL is also a way of saying that we may not have the right skills, data, or processes to remedy all of the problems set before us.

WE NEED TO INVEST in management and training, with less focus on formal education.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER advancement should be built into jobs so employees do not need to leave organizations for their professional growth.

UNIVERSITIES AND LEARNING STYLES are changing significantly as a result of new technologies used by the younger generation.

ADULT VIRTUAL LEARNING IS in its infancy. More research needs to be done, more effective programs and processes are needed.

HOW DO WE TRAIN future leaders in the face of decentralization and remote work? How can we adapt educational frameworks for modernity?



Workplace Culture ■

HIGHLIGHT THE POSITIVES OF being together, and highlight the activities that foster a sense of belonging.

HOW TO SHIFT FROM workplace impacting people to people impacting workplace?

WE NEED DYNAMIC, ADAPTABLE systems.

WE NEED AN ORGANIZATIONAL Development person who is responsible for the health of a team.

THERE IS IMPORTANCE IN the fact that we are social creatures who need to be together.

Multigenerational Workforce ■

THE WORKPLACE WILL BE populated by various generations. Training will happen in both directions as more seasoned employees help younger ones, and younger ones help established employees navigate new technologies and methodologies.

THE YOUNGEST GENERATION SEES things differently, and older people should involve themselves in how younger people see things. It's more important to them to be in the office, they want mentorship in-person.

GEN Z'S ARE MORE interested in changing jobs every 2–3 years. They say it's in order to have a wider variety of experiences. Can we design jobs with that desire in mind?

THE NEW GENERATION OF workers want more variety and access to more experiences and skill development. This should be built into the company so that they don't just leave.

IF YOU HAVE TO claw people back into the office, start with the younger people who want to come in more than older people. Tailor the return to the needs of different generations.

NEED TO STRENGTHEN BELONGING and inclusion so employees have guidance and support for building their support systems. There's a new office in Atlanta where the company focuses on supporting the development of early career hires.

Team-Based Work

TEAM-BASED DISTRIBUTED WORK TENDS to focus on projects but will need to be expanded to include socializing, bonding, coaching, mentoring and celebration.

THE KEY UNIT IN the future of work will be the team. The team will be where team norms will be established, agreements on time together will be made and how team members will support each other both personally and professionally.

WHEN HR DOESN'T TAKE into consideration location strategies in its policies, it is difficult to have a consistent team strategy and build team culture when people are in different locations. It might be better to hire someone local rather than someone far away.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS ARE IMPORTANT, and we have to start thinking jointly in order to make cross-functional teams actually functional.

HOW DO WE TIE hiring strategies to team strategies and the feasibility of building a strong team through the distance?

Organizational Leaders

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL leaders will evolve and may possibly be split to focus on operations, strategy, and inspiration. The role of middle managers will become even more critical as they work to translate leadership goals and initiatives into their teams' day-to-day actions.

THERE IS A NEED to rewrite job descriptions, skills, values, and beliefs for management and leadership.

WORK PROCESSES CANNOT BE changed easily at an enterprise nor individual level. Teams are key, and managers often are not sufficiently trained to handle or direct big change.

WE SHOULD TEACH MANAGERS how to create purpose. Currently, team-level agreements are not aligned with leadership, thus you can't really drive engagement from the top.

WE CAN'T DRIVE ENGAGEMENT from the top without engaging managers in actions that bridge the gap between top level and the frontline.

ONE SIZE DOES NOT fit all, so how do we all work together? How do you herd the cats required to make change management work? Leaders are just as broken as the rest of us.

CAN WE CHOOSE BETTER leaders and then equip them to manage complexity at the team level?

IMPLEMENT POLICIES THAT SUPPORT choice rather than mandate.



ROI

TODAY'S WAY OF WORKING, we created it, we can create a new one. But getting people to adopt it, tying the new way to an ROI, is essential to making the change.

WE NEED A BETTER way to provide organizations with a model to quantify ROI on human needs.

Technology

ENABLING AND SHARING TECHNOLOGY will be critical. AI is pervasive but probably won't impact jobs as much as people fear.

CONTINUING TO LEARN IS crucial. AI computing power is doubling every 3 months, how can you possibly envision 1, 3, 5 years out?

AI CAN BE USEFUL in a work environment when users or those affected by the AI's work have the power to shape the "new solution."

TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIES SHOULD BE part of the project execution strategy.

AI WILL BE A good thing for addressing the talent shortage and to take care of repetitive tasks. We must invest in management training.

CHATGPT WILL BECOME EMPLOYEES' personal assistants.

Participants' Takeaways

UNFILTERED
1

WELLNESS

- We collectively need more clarity about well-being strategies (versus "check-the-box" programs that are proven to be ineffective), and then need to integrate them and technology into a given project.

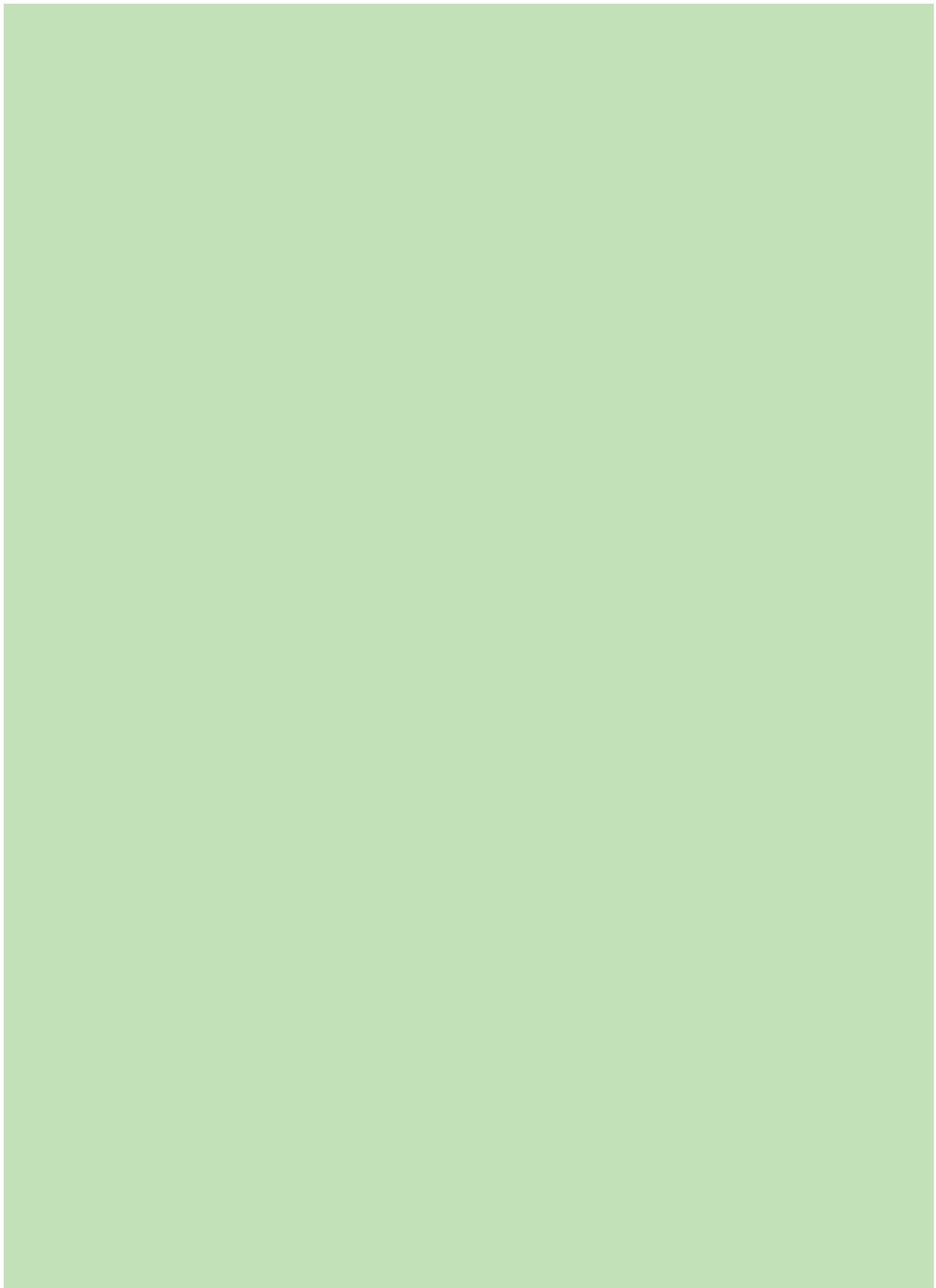
ROI

- Using our current framework, we need to be able to measure and demonstrate the ROI of efforts in order to make the changes happen.
- How do I measure the ROI of an annual gathering celebration?

NEEDED CHANGES

- We need dynamic systems.
- We need an open feedback loop between us and workplace users, and they need to be empowered to make changes, to be able to recreate the workplace to support dynamic and emerging needs. Is there a new role (our design person) that empowers this? Can a union help with this?
- I need the "help light" that only manufacturing seems to have, where people get in trouble for not tapping it. Why doesn't this happen in the office?





Occupational Health Psychologists

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY (OHP) is an interdisciplinary subfield of psychology that examines the impact of psychosocial working conditions on the health and well-being of workers. OHP applies behavioral and social science theories, principles, and evidence to understand sources of psychosocial issues and to protect, promote, and generally improve worker health, safety, and well-being. Research and practice includes models characterizing the balance of work demands and controls over demand or resources to meet demands, work-life fit, job stress and job strain, effort-reward match, job crafting, reward/recognition programs, and leadership style.

SANDBOX 2 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 Education, Development & Training	 In-Person & Remote Work	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	 Technology & AI
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors	

PARTICIPANTS

SADIE COSTELLO

Associate Professor,
Environmental Health Science,
School of Public Health,
and Associate Director,
Northern California Center
for Occupational and
Environmental Health,
University of California, Berkeley

CHRISTOPHER CUNNINGHAM

Guerry Professor and UC Foundation
Professor of Psychology and
Graduate Program Director,
University of Tennessee
at Chattanooga

THOMAS CUNNINGHAM

Senior Behavioral Scientist,
Division of Science Integration,
CDC/NIOSH

KEATON FLETCHER

Assistant Professor and
Assistant Director of the MAP-ERC
Occupational Health Psychology
Training Program,
Colorado State University

ERIN KELLY

Professor, MIT

AUTUMN KRAUSS

Chief Scientist, SAP SuccessFactors

CHRISTINA MASLACH

Professor Emerita of the
Graduate School,
University of California, Berkeley

NATALIE SCHWATKA

Assistant Professor,
Center for Health, Work &
Environment, Colorado
School of Public Health,
University of Colorado
Anschutz Medical Campus

ROBERT SINCLAIR

Professor of Psychology,
Clemson University

LILI TENNEY

Director of Outreach and Programs,
Center for Health, Work & Environment

The Current State

SUMMARY: Many were surprised that the discussion consistently centered around big social topics: climate change, structural inequality, and public policy. Work is seen as a place where beneficial change can be made, to improve job conditions, worker rights, and pay, and therefore improve health and economic outcomes for disempowered people. Work is, simultaneously, seen as a paradigm too narrow and limited to affect actual change, given the scale of the social topics addressed. Systems thinking and interdisciplinary work seem very important in light of such a complicated perspective on work today.

CHAPTER
2



Status of Occupational Health as a Field ●

“OUR FIELD IS ALWAYS running behind and trying to play catch up. We jump on the bandwagon once it’s already passed or as it’s passing, even though we have a hundred years of research that could speak to these trends because largely, they’re not that different from the same principles that we know will apply. We don’t speak to them and we let other people who probably have less expertise than we do drive the conversation and then we’re playing catch up.”

“WE’RE REALLY SERVICING THREE different stakeholders. One, we’re servicing organizations. So many people in our field work in business schools, and at the end of the day, their thought is like, ‘How can we help companies make more money?’ Even if it’s through improving employee well-being, you have to make a case with healthier employees, you can get more out of them. And then there’s a different camp of people who are really servicing the worker and the working experience, which is great. And then you have the camp that’s knowledge for knowledge’s sake, who need to understand what the experience of work is. I think that’s probably the smallest camp. These three different stakeholders often come into conflict. Trying to create a coherent agenda, particularly one that addresses these grand challenges, I think it just doesn’t happen.”

"WE ARE PSYCHOLOGISTS LOOKING at the human experience. Inherently, when you do that, you end up with person-level interventions. So many of these issues are not at the person level, the outcomes are. But the causes where we can step in and intervene are outside of that person level, and we just don't speak to that."

"IT'S ALWAYS BEEN SOMETHING about our field that everybody has their own scattered agendas. So maybe that's the issue, that we lack an agenda of the most important problems that we collectively as scientists can solve."

"I'VE THOUGHT THIS FOR a long time, but I really see it now as an editor: scientific knowledge does not accumulate in our field. It's a bunch of people doing piecemeal stuff that doesn't build on each other. If you have this relationship XY and somebody proposes a moderator, somebody else comes along and proposes a different moderator."

"I THINK THAT THE knowledge for knowledge's sake group is the biggest group. It's a really typical phase right now, in a way that they care about well-being, but in reality, it's caring about getting published or maybe about generating grant revenue."

"THERE'S A MISMATCH BETWEEN what students learn to do when they're being trained and what they're going to be doing. In public health, they like the content, they want the MPH, but they need something that's applied and marketable so that they can get jobs and they can hit the ground running. That is a trend that I'm thinking about as an educator. What are my courses going to look like in the future to capture their intention to be relevant, while also in a way that's authentic to the tradition of academia?"

"I DON'T EVEN KNOW how to study this, but I'm very curious about entrepreneurs. From the start of a business's inception, how can we as a discipline study them and learn how emphasis on workforce health evolves over time and at different points in the development of the business plan – gathering money, startup, et cetera? When can we inject these core principles that follow the business? That's a big thing I've been thinking of, especially for small businesses. My husband's a small business owner and it's very stressful. You gotta focus on the money and it's very much at the expense of the entrepreneur's mental and physical health sometimes. So how can you help them from the outside? Because I feel if they can see how it can work for themselves, then it's easier for them to think about how to design healthy work for the rest of their team."

"WE'RE FORGETTING THE PEOPLE managers, the leaders who a lot of us are blaming for creating a poor work environment, but we aren't attempting to help them be healthy themselves. If they can't be healthy, they can't create spaces and programs for their employees to be healthy. So I've been thinking about our challenge, 'How do you tap into them? How do you get their interest? How do you get them to put dollars and resources towards creating healthy work?' I don't know. I just think the future is to support them, to recognize their perspective and the challenges that they face too, which sometimes I feel is controversial, especially if you're talking to people who are focused on the workers. But there's a lot of good leaders and managers out there who want to do the right thing, but they don't have the time, they don't have the space, they don't know how to do it reasonably."



Work as a Social Determinant of Health ●

"HOW IMPORTANT IS WORK as a gateway to so many good things? The CDC has now recognized work as a social determinant of health. It's important to view it through that lens when it comes to how we're trying to solve the big problems of society."

"THE MEMBERS OF THIS group in particular, we tend to highlight all the ways that work will kill us and be bad for us. But we have to be honest that work is a gateway to really critical psychological, social, and material resources that we can't get any other way. Some of this perspective is coming out of work that I do with the manufacturing industry, which is suffering right now with a major branding and image problem. They can't get people to do the jobs because people think they're still dirty and gross, but they're not. They're super high-tech and advanced and they pay really well. They're stable. We have a problem with work in general, people don't appreciate the value that work can create. Part of that is because we spent a lot of time telling people what to do and not explaining how or why. So there needs to be a return to motivational theory and the critical role that that plays and how we position tasks and manage people to tasks."

Mental Health Concerns ●

"WHAT HAVE WE BEEN doing that's not really working anymore? It's this idea of throwing resources at individual employees and saying, 'Here, go fix yourselves. Here are all the tools.'"



"WE'VE BEEN TALKING WITH a very large healthcare system that is going back to this concept of individually-focused mental fitness promotion among employees. 'You need to do these exercises to keep yourself sharp so that you're mentally healthy at work and you can withstand all these stressors in the workplace.' To me, that really sounds like resilience training in different clothing. It's unfortunate to see that, but I think it's also a result of saying, 'Okay we tried that new thing back in 2022 when it was really clear after going through the pandemic for a couple of years that organizations are grinding people up, what else do we have in our tool bag? 'Cause it doesn't seem like we solved the problem. Oh, okay. Let's go do this other thing. This seems cool.' All the folks dreaming it up are super healthy, paid people who go to Zumba classes."

"IF WE CAN IMPROVE just one thing to make workplaces safer and healthier and affect employee well-being, it would be to ensure that all employees have ready access to healthy social support networks because we know, without question, that when we have someone we can turn to, whether it be a co-worker or a boss or some other peer, then we will be able to get someone's support when we need it. We don't always need support every minute of every day, but at some point over the course of our employment, we're going to need help. Not everybody has that or feels like they have that."

"WE'VE ACTUALLY KNOWN SINCE the mid-1980s that even non-clinically trained people can be taught enough about mental health to be aware of what their co-workers are struggling with. We've known for many decades how to intervene. If somebody is really seriously at the suicidal stage, you want to know how to intervene. You don't have to be able to fix their problems, but you can be there to listen and have a huge positive impact at that time."

"I'VE BEEN STUDYING STRESS for the past 20-plus years. I think too many people study stress, nothing new or good is coming out of that research. We're just recycling the same old stuff. We have very specific occupational health, safety, and well-being issues that aren't getting enough attention. This field is too fixated on these really abstract things that can't be translated into actionable guidance. Seriously, we're at the point where you can't talk about stress management anymore with a straight face. Stress manages us, we don't manage it. So instead we need to be focusing on the other ways that our health and safety is impacted."

Blue Collar Jobs and Mental Health ●

"I'VE BEEN DEALING WITH workplace mental health in the past couple of years. Blue collar industries are considering, 'How do we address mental health?' Specifically, I'm thinking of mining and construction. We've been getting requests more and more often. 'Can you come and present at a very basic level, just to raise awareness?' Within those industries, they're asking for very specific issues related to mental health around substance-use disorder and suicide prevention."

Burnout ●

“WHAT I KEEP SEEING is, no matter who is saying it, even an authority like the World Health Organization, people keep thinking and operating on the assumption that burnout is something else. You have to deal with it in a very different way. So there’s an army of burnout coaches now who are going in to work individually often with people at the top rather than at the bottom, still medicalizing it as a mental illness.”

Workplace Violence and Harassment ●

“THERE ARE INCREASES IN violence or harassment in the workplace and counterproductive behavior in general. I know from the work that I’ve been doing over the past couple years specifically in healthcare, we’ve seen, and we’ve heard, media reports about significant increases in exposure to violent patients and just general harassment. Some of it being pandemic-related, but there are also just poor social interactions all across the board.”



Loneliness and Isolation ●

“ARE YOU GUYS FAMILIAR with Robert Putnam’s book *Bowling Alone*? They’ve been writing about this stuff for a long time and I think a lot of it’s coming to fruition. If I look out my window, how many neighbors do I know by first name?”

“I WAS IN CHICAGO for a conference about 2 weeks ago. You look out on the street and everybody’s walking around looking at their phone.”

Belonging, Connectivity, and Inclusivity ●

“I HEARD SOMETHING REALLY refreshing on a webinar this week, which was this acknowledgment in response to the Surgeon General’s report on isolation and loneliness and the focus of being able to create belonging and connection within the workplace. One of the speakers acknowledged that’s important. While that’s important, we also need to respect the different needs for belonging and connection outside of work. And so I feel like the emphasis and a lot of the interventions we have are workplace-focused, work-related, and now need to pull back and think more about that community-based, health behavior-based models of what people are experiencing outside of work.”

“CHANGING THE CONDITIONS OF work is a key NIOSH perspective. It’s hard to think about, ‘What are the implications for the people who are not employees, but are workers, all of the subcontracted and contingent workers and other people like that.’ I just did a big review on the implications of these things for economic security and mobility, trying to connect the health and health disparities question to economic security and economic mobility. It’s something that we haven’t figured out how to do in a smart way. In my view, it’s partly because when you think about work redesign or organizational interventions, you’re following the people who are there for a short period of time. You don’t see who left, and what happened to them.”

Translation ●

“IT’S A TRANSLATION ISSUE. How do we translate? How does anybody translate? There’s a ton of stuff that’s out there on how to deal with burnout as an illness, even though the World Health Organization and everybody else says it’s not an illness, it’s a response to stressors. That’s a normal thing. But recovery is the problem.”

Hiring Young Workers ●

“ONE OF THE INDUSTRIES that’s really interested in having mentally healthier workplaces are law firms. They’re having a really hard time hiring new young lawyers because they know those jobs grind them up and there’s not enough money they can pay them to do a really crappy job. We’re looking at these high-wage, white-collar jobs and worrying about filling them as a first concern.”

Diminished View of CDC ●

“ONE OF THE CHALLENGES is that the CDC hasn’t really looked that good in the past four years when it comes to telling people what they ought to be doing to take care of themselves and their workers. That has definitely hurt [them]. I don’t think [they] have a good sense of just how much that has hurt [them] at the occupational safety and health level.”

Industrial Organizational (I/O) Programs ▲

“A LOT OF I/O programs, broadly, are losing faculty or shutting down. The pool of graduate applicants, I think, is shrinking and the quality of applicants has gone down across institutions. I’ve changed institutions. I’ve talked to peers at other institutions in the last three or four years. I don’t know if that’s true of all graduate programs. Maybe economics is seeing the same thing. I have to think that it’s a reflection of our field just not providing the answers that we should be. And other fields are stepping in and doing it without having that person-centered focus that we have that can be a strength, but we aren’t using it like a strength.”

Conferences

"I **JUST GOT BACK** from a few conferences and I didn't learn anything at all from any of the sessions. I met a lot of great people. I'm glad I went, but it's been years since I've been to a conference and actually learned something new. And I'm not that smart, so there's got to be something out there that we're not doing."

CHAPTER
2

Unclear Direction

"**SO IT WAS FUNNY** to me the last couple of years coming off of COVID, all the sessions by consulting organizations were like, 'Look, we discovered worker well-being, this innovative new thing.' There was a couple of years with people talking very much like this is this wonderful new concept that we've just now discovered. I was amused by that, but then people's attention immediately shifted to artificial intelligence this year. It's the number one thing that's on everybody's mind. I don't think we have a really good handle on everything that's happening in that domain in relation to worker health and well-being, layoffs, new skill requirements, and different forms of stress."



"**EVERYBODY'S GRABBING FOR ANYTHING** they can find to throw at the problem, they don't know exactly who to listen to. They might listen to just about anybody, and they'll do anything if somebody tells them it might work."

Prepared for the Pandemic?

"**I THINK SOME OF** us thought we were prepared for a pandemic, and we weren't paying attention. When I was in epidemiology grad school, it was like, 'If these three things happen at the same time, we're really screwed, but don't worry, the CDC is on it.' That's what I was taught within five years before the pandemic. Those three things happened. I was like, 'Oh, that's super bad, but the CDC is on it.'"



Employee Preparedness

"**EMPLOYERS AREN'T PREPARED TO** deal with emergency situations, whether that's violence or harassment issues, guns, climate-related things, tornadoes or hurricanes or other sorts of natural disasters."

Employee and Organizations Expectations

"OUR FOCUS IS THE employees' expectations and how the labor market has a role to play in that. But also on the back of the pandemic, they felt like they could get more and they wanted to hang on to that. I do think that we're backsliding on some of those things now. It seems like the pendulum swinging back a little where the organization is like, 'Oh no, we're back in charge again. Here are our expectations.'"

Bifurcated Workforce

"WORK FROM HOME AND choosing to move for lifestyle reasons is only available to some people, but scheduling instability and unpredictability is a concern for many frontline workers."

"THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO completely lack the knowledge of the economy and they're stuck in their towns. So the workforce is bifurcated and we don't really talk about that because a lot of our research focuses on professionals. It seems like it's two completely different worlds. My research is in economic stress. Our studies always show that it's the number one stressor for people and that doesn't get talked about enough."

Work Flexibility

"THERE WERE MULTIPLE REFERENCES to women choosing flexibility and flexibility being key for working mothers. I think that the evidence suggests flexibility and having more control over when, where, and how you do your work is valued by everyone. It's incredibly important to older workers. It's something that is important to everyone doing caregiving. Obviously, the ties to gender inequality are real and acknowledging them as important, but continuing to frame it as a working mothers issue reinforces that flexibility stigma in my view."

Power Differential

"ONE THING WE DON'T talk about enough in I/O psychology is the power differential between employers and employees. We have the assumption that power will sort itself out in the market. We don't have to consider this as economists have, but we see record gains and low levels of income distribution. There isn't a lot of discussion in our field about power and maybe more recognition of labor's power. We are seeing increased interest, at least in unionization, towards a shift towards giving labor more power. If that continues, that would result in maybe a different trajectory than we've had in the last 50 years."

Unionization

"I'VE WORKED WITH SOME positions who are now starting to talk about unionization. It's so taboo for that group of workers to talk about it, more so for nurses and others. It's bad if physicians are starting to talk about unionization,"

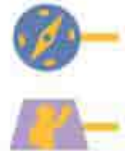
CHAPTER
2

Disconnect Between Workers and Managers

"THERE'S THIS DISCONNECT BETWEEN workers and their managers. A lot of the things about, 'You must come back into the office, you need to show up so many times a week' is managed by presence. 'If you're here, you're working,' rather than focusing on productivity. 'Are you doing it on time?' For me, one of the biggest challenges is that we still have a model that is very much focused on the individual. Managers are doing annual performance reviews. It's all framed in what do you do about the person and so forth. A lot of what we know about this is it has to do with the larger systems of work. If we don't shift into a 'we' as well as a 'me' focus, I think we're going to miss a lot of what could be happening."

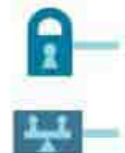
"I'LL MENTION THE LACK of leadership trust. We've been studying this a lot at the executive board level and understanding their senior executive leadership, but also that dyadic relationship with people managers. I think that we spent a ton of time with corporate Chief Human Resources Officers (CHROs). It just feels like the employees' desires, preferences, and expectations of work and their work experience are moving in one direction. There's pullback from the executive leadership, including the CHROs and HR teams that are going back to some traditional practices. Hybrid and the old performance management are some great examples. They've gotten stuck in different trajectories, and it's causing a lot of distrust. I think it's probably always been there, but it's getting worse."

"I WOULD RAISE THE role of people managers and how they're comped and what their expectations are. There's burnout in that role, specifically trying to deal with layoffs. You have the job of your individual contributors and you're the people manager. What that role entails and how it's being supported by the business is unsustainable at this point. Nobody wants to be a people manager. Why would I sign up for that? The incremental pay is little and the stress is big, so I think that's going to have a tipping point."



Surveillance and Productivity Tracking

"SURVEILLANCE AND INDIVIDUAL PRODUCTIVITY tracking is a source of pressure that has not been acknowledged."



Some People Cannot Work Remotely ●

"A LOT OF THE people who I study are going through burnout issues and are not able to work remotely. You have to go to the hospital and work with patients. You have to be in the restaurants. You have to be in construction out on the streets and so forth. And the kinds of issues that are coming up I think are different for them."

Life Stages ●

"RELATED TO LIFE STAGES, those are shifting and we're doing work to really understand what people are experiencing related to work and their needs. We're changing those life stages drastically. That's related to how we want to work, what our expectations are."

"THERE'S THE LOSS OF perspective on life and inherently on death. We have a lot of people right now who are making huge decisions that affect them, their families, their communities, society, the world, without understanding and even thinking about, 'Why would I do this, or why wouldn't I do this?' or 'How is this going to create ripple effects for the here, now, and after?' Some of this is tied to generalized trends in people's loss of faith and spirituality and religion. Some of it's due to changes in educational patterns. Some of it's due to the loss of stabilizing forces that affect our communities and our society. One of the greatest potential stabilizing forces is long-term employment. As those relationships that we have with organizations change, we also are eroding some of the forces that have held entire communities together for previous generations. We just don't have that anymore."

Adapting to Change ●

"WORK IS CHANGING SO rapidly on a day-to-day, month-to-month basis. How can we be thinking about how we can develop predictive models or thinking about how to break down the silos that still exist while we're still very much an exposure-based science and discipline? The work that I do is mostly around employer engagement. We're able to start looking at different dimensions of it, but it's not quite there yet because I think that we're still in the model of assessing, designing, implementing, evaluating, and that's happening on a daily basis in most organizations. So how can we start to be able to look at the ways in which we work, being able to be more ahead and more predictive of those changes in economies and in climate and in communities and at the societal level so that we're able to be more adaptive and less responsive to a lot of what's happening?"

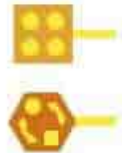
"HOW PEOPLE ARE WORKING is changing. The nature of work is changing, but folks aren't getting trained for it. Teachers having to teach remotely during the pandemic and having no clue how to make that transition quickly, or physicians are now providing hospital care in homes, and they're trying to figure out how to do that."

CHAPTER

2

Purpose at Work ■

"I DO WONDER ABOUT the extent to which employees are making decisions based on purpose or if they want to work for companies that have pro-social or Corporate Social Responsibility programs around climate. So it ties to a lot of those things. We always say, 'Oh no, that's why they want to go work for companies.' If you have that luxury, if you can make choices, if you have options, you can say, 'No, I really want to be aligned with their purpose. I see that they're trying to impact the world in a positive way.' Versus there are plenty of workers who are like, 'Yeah, that'd be nice to have, I have these other 20 things that I have before I worry what their values are.' So that becomes a have-and-have-not dichotomy."



The Future State

SUMMARY: Connection and community was a very common theme throughout the discussion. The pandemic caused fracturing, and we are continuing to drift away from one another rather than reconnecting. Much uncertainty about the future was expressed, especially regarding the state of major institutions like businesses, universities, and governments.



Future of Occupational Health Psychologists ●

“WE DIDN’T REALLY TALK a lot about what we expect to happen in the future. One thing is I expect this question to keep being asked. And that’s fine. I think it’s a great question. My concern is that it distracts people from focusing on what needs to happen right now. The majority of people are almost 100% focused on just getting through today. And so we can’t be surprised when it’s hard for them to latch on to a new initiative or buy into this grand vision for the future.”

Training for the Future ■

“HOW ARE WE GOING to train people to think critically? Training people to care and have empathy and see? The big picture dealing with mental health? The mental health crisis is bizarre and intense. I’m not a psychologist but I see it in my kids, I see it in the grad students, I see it in my coworkers, like there has been a shift and it’s real. It’s having very real implications. I’m not an expert to know what to do about it. If we have everyone walking into a job and quiet quitting on day one, that’s not gonna be a very positive future.”

“WHEN I GET TO a point where I need to retire, I need somebody else who’s going to be willing to work hard to keep things in place. One of the challenges with the health, safety, and well-being stuff is if you don’t have a champion who’s willing to go the distance day in and day out, these types of programs and campaigns tend to fall into the background because they only surface as a priority when something bad happens. And so one thing for the future is making sure we’ve got a critical mass of people who are seeing these issues and wanting to respond to those issues.”

Education and the Future ■

“THERE’S A BIFURCATED THING. I’m at a science and technology university now and I think it is going to try to update technologically, but continue to be an in-person, full-time experience. We’re going to have radically different experiences of higher education going forward.”

“IT’S HARD TO SEE education as really valuable when the labor market’s weak and you need to have that leg up. We’ve been getting hammered hard and people are not interested in higher ed at the moment. The enrollment cliff is basically here. If there’s an economic downturn and the labor market gets a little bit tighter, I think, maybe that’ll sort itself out.”

“I TRY TO TRAIN as many students as I can to look at the world with a more complete view and to understand and appreciate the importance of worker health, safety, well-being. The honest truth is there’s nothing I’m going to do that’s going to build the future into a totally better place if there’s no one there who can sustain it.”

"I TEACH AN OCC health organizational health seminar every year. When I start every semester, I tell the students, 'You're in this class because you think you like this topic, but I'm going to warn you right now that when this class is over, you're never going to interact with the world in the same way, because from now on, you're going to see around you all kinds of examples of things that aren't going well, and you're going to know what you can do to make it better. So if you're excited about that, let's do it. But if not, you really don't want to come back to the next class.' And sure enough, at the end of every semester, I have at least half the students say to me, 'I went out to dinner last night and I really wanted to enjoy it but I could not because I was just watching all this stuff go off.' I'm like, 'My goal wasn't to make you miserable. Do you understand what you need to do?' They're like, 'Yeah we had ideas.' I'm like, 'Okay, so focus on the empathy, focus on the reality that you did know how to make it better.' It's that awareness thing. It's also about maintaining optimism."

"WE'RE PUTTING IN OUR new education research center right now. A lot of these questions are like, 'What are you doing that's innovative?' And I'm like, 'Innovate it.' I can't get why they're asking that. All grants ask that and it's fine. But at some level I want to be like, 'Actually, I'm not changing anything. I have a really good class going. I am going to continue to teach critical thinking. I am going to do this. I'm going to do that. Some things change a little bit.' Yes, you can't have the exact same program. It's got to alter over time. But there's something about this constant push to grow. It's a little bit like a company has to make money, so we have to change something because we have to make more money."



Translation

"I THINK WE NEED to move from that grant research, clinical research model to a more translational, implementation model of what you do in real-time. Research-to-practice and practice-to-research is being led by industry. At the end of the day, we're in a lot of places, we're just moving too slow, and we need to be able to tap into what industry is leading on the research front because there's so much there."

"FROM A MANAGEMENT STANDPOINT, we've seen so much change. There wasn't a Chief People Officer five years ago, 10 years ago. The center point for responsibility is changing so fast. I think that's a real opportunity and also a threat. We've talked about Total Worker Health. How do we stay relevant if there are people in organizations that are doing this? But do they have the right skills? And so it's always that balance of figuring out who should be implementing it best in a sustainable way and how can you contribute best to that."

"I'M AN EPIDEMIOLOGIST, NOT an organizational psychologist. My training is a little different, but I think one thing is that we know a lot, but the research we have generated and the knowledge we have is not being implemented. It's not being implemented in policy or in workplaces. Some of it feels like, 'How do I ask the same question in a slightly different way so that it can stay current in the literature?'"

"AFTER SPENDING A TON of time with HR executives recently, there's more use of behavioral science than when I started as a consultant. Then, I was the only show in town. They were like, 'Psychology. Wow.' I was just in New York City. There are entire programs in behavioral science. They're not the researchers, but they were presenting good-quality academic research. There's a difference between sitting in academic sessions and getting a consultant to come in and give you the knowledge, the applications. There are always gaps between the academic work and the practice. But I see that there's another gap between practice understanding, which I think has increased, and practice execution. So we're missing that next layer. I think a lot of VPs and CHROs could tell you a lot about our science and our understanding, they just can't figure out how to make it happen in their businesses."

Implementing Solutions

"I'LL PUT IN A plug for Dissemination and Implementation Science. No limit to the amount of work and the value that could come from doing a better job of figuring out how to implement solutions that we know work. How do we increase uptake? How do we get people to try new things? That's a behavioral challenge that has gone back for a millennium, but it's still right in front of us."

Multidisciplinary Approach

"IT JUST COMPLETELY VALIDATES the need for a multidisciplinary approach to sorting this out. Our group, we can carve out our space, but if we're working with these broader political-social context and regulations, you feel like you're moving dead furniture on the Titanic. Everyone's focused on skills, transformations, reskilling, upscaling for the future of work. But individual companies are not getting it done. That requires a workforce strategy at our government level to facilitate some of that, incentivize some of that, provide that. And until that happens, the skilling that we all said we needed 10 years ago is just not going to manifest."

"I WANT TO GET better at intersectional analysis and go from theorizing the intersection of race, gender identities in particular, but also age and life course, to actually figuring out how we do that in our quantitative analysis. I think that is also a part of just recognizing the variety of needs and experiences and not defaulting to average treatment effects or descriptions of larger populations, but doing more targeted things."

Continuous Learning

"I HAD VERY NARROW training in I/O psychology and it was really good training, I just feel like our field is really too myopic to address some of these grand challenges. So I'm doing my best to expand my knowledge base into economics and public policy and things that I never really was taught about and trying to learn the basics of how those work and letting it reshape and reorient how I think about research and also life."

"I DEFINITELY HAVE ALWAYS adopted a continuous learning mindset. Always learning new things formally and informally, and I've started over the past couple years to start to think about who I want to team up with who isn't in my area of expertise. So I've been purposely trying to build teams of people locally and nationally who can collaborate with me and add value to the topic that we're trying to tackle, recognizing that I can't do it alone."

"I WAS REFLECTING ON my path 20 years out of PhD. There is some anxiety about remaining current. What is our role when we're not in the data? Do the skills that we have today still have applicability? As much as when we had totally different tools from what my team is using today? So I can still be smart and ask smart critical questions of them but I'm not reviewing their code."

"I'VE BEEN TAKING A lot of executive education classes, like business acumen, innovation strategy, competencies that as I/O psychologists, we have the depth, but when you get to a certain level inside corporate America, you don't have the breath to be successful in some of these strategy-steering roles that I now serve in."

Aging Workforce

"ONE OF THE THINGS that I don't think we're really addressing is the combination of the aging workforce and people not having retirement savings and those people not having the skills and talent for the kinds of jobs that are out there. It just seems like there's a tsunami of older people coming who lack money to live, but also lack the skills to get the kinds of jobs that are going to be there."

CHAPTER

2



Economic and Policy Trends ◆

"I'M FOCUSED ON THE individual level. One thing that we don't do really well is incorporating the economic trends and economic patterns into our research. It really does impact the individual experience of work. Deregulation and consolidation within local areas as well as within occupations. So you have what ends up being monopsonies, people don't actually have the opportunity to choose from a range of employers. You're stuck with the limited benefits and opportunities you have, and that really reduces your experience. The flexibility that people want over their work you can't get because there's one employer in your town or two employers in your field."

Tight Labor Market ◆

"WE'VE HAD THE LONGEST period of low unemployment in 35 years. So the tight labor market, plus the pandemic didn't even get us paid family leave, paid sick leave nationally. But it did get a bunch of new conversations started and some improvement in wages and other things, but what's going to happen in the future?"

Universal Basic Income ◆

"THERE'S A REALLY COOL paper by the IOP on universal basic income (UBI). What would that do to the human experience of work, basically? There's a bunch of responses that I thought were really interesting. I think it dovetails really nicely with AI. The threat of, 'We can replace your jobs' isn't as threatening if you have UBI. Or entrepreneurs starting a small business isn't as scary if you know you have that UBI to fall back on, but it's not something that we'll have if we're trying to create this bifurcated system."

Moving Out of the Country ◆

"I THINK YOU'RE GOING to get some movement from people who are starting to have more and more concerns about where this is heading from an economic and a stability perspective inside the US. The level of conflict, the level of stagnation. Whatever side you're on, it's just feeling like it's at an impasse. Some people don't have geographic mobility."

Climate Change

"I THINK CLIMATE CHANGE is going to be a huge driver for just about everything. Think about people who are moving to Arizona and working remotely, to the people who are growing our food, just everywhere."

"CLIMATE IS A KEY issue. From NIOSH's perspective, it is right next to mental health as front and center issues for the workforce. For current issues and emerging issues, going forward there's a very large effort underway to get some guidance out on exposure to wildfire smoke for all outdoor workers. I also think about the climate issue, similar to the pandemic, as this watershed moment, shifting how people think about work, but maybe more so specifically for all the outdoor workers."

"WE HAVEN'T TALKED ABOUT climate migration, and migration because of wars. People are moving from the Global South to the Global North, largely without any sort of protections. They're put in precarious employment positions because oftentimes this migration is maybe legally dubious or they're in hostile environments. So you have these low-wage workers who are not only in precarious employment positions, and inherently, because it's low-wage, these jobs are a dime a dozen, but they're also in a position where they can't complain about rights violations, or they're subject to particularly dangerous working conditions because of their precarious status. I think that's a trend that we're gonna keep seeing increase with climate migration and the associated violence that we see with increased climate disasters and lack of resources."

Integration

"IN THE LAST SIX months, I decided I need to ask bigger questions and they need to be about climate and economic integration and climate and social integration. I am trying to find time among all of my different current responsibilities and roles to read on that. I'm trying to understand if it's possible in the US to support people's contributions to community and caregiving and paid work. What are we going to do if there are people who are not finding work that affirms their identity and affirms their dignity as well?"

Societal Fragmentation

"I FEEL LIKE THERE'S this underlying 'society is coming apart at the seams' kind of thing that has all sorts of different dimensions to it. I'm not sure how to prepare for it or what can be done about it with the confluence of our old relationships no longer being there. And people not knowing what's real anymore, with facts not seeming to matter in a way that they used to. I have a lot of concerns about societal fragmentation."



Labor Shortage

"IMMEDIATELY POST-PANDEMIC, I SAW teachers leaving in droves and going and signing up for other jobs where they could use their skills. And I was thinking, they got thrown into the deep end of the pool during the pandemic. 'Okay, go teach, make sure it's good.' But they were teaching remotely and the kids weren't there. Are there certain places like nursing or other areas of healthcare where we're seeing worse shortages? Who's going to be the teachers of tomorrow?"

"ONE SHORTAGE I KNOW related to nursing is long-term care employment. They're projecting significant shortages. Legislation just passed requiring minimum staffing ratios in long-term care facilities, which I was really heartened to see. Might they do something similar for other healthcare facilities at some point?"

Government Employees

"I'M A GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE, so my reality can shift very rapidly every four years. How do you prepare for that? One is to just be ready to be looking for a job. That's a very stark reality. The other is to try to insulate yourself from external forces that are going to potentially have a significant impact on you. So, in a very practical sense of running projects, trying to get your project wrapped up within a fiscal year so that you're not beholden to whatever government shutdown or policy shift could completely derail a body of work that you've had going for 10 years."

Future of Work

"WHEN WE START TALKING about what's gonna happen in the future, what does the future require? We're bound to come up with something new and exciting and fresh. I'm 100% confident that part of the reason people are so excited about AI is because it's tech, but I really couldn't care less. I know it's here. I know it's an issue. I know it's a part of our reality, but the fundamental things are there. There's this cyclicity of what we study and need to respond to more than anything."

"I LIKE THE IDEA of being able to hone in on the most important questions related to the future of work. For what? And why? What are the questions we really need to be asking related to the future? And are we talking about 10 years from now, 20 years from now? How does that benefit? What's the most realistic and feasible way to ask those questions while acknowledging the reality of the future?"

"I WAS HOPING ACTUALLY that a silver lining of the pandemic would be that it would open the door to rethinking how work can be done of all different kinds. The idea that the job is what it is, and you just have to take care of yourself. No, a job can be different. How could it be different in better ways?"

"FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, companies are paralyzed a bit. Like you do this survey now that has 50,000 variables in it and afterwards try to unpack where you should focus. You can't even decipher where the priorities are to drive a positive employee experience. So we're thinking maybe we just need to go back to the basics. Say stuff we already know, stop making new things. Can we just go back to what we understood were good job characteristics?"



Communicating Uncertainty ●

"WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S coming, right? We didn't know the pandemic was going to come. There are all sorts of things that we didn't know were going to come. One thing that I think went south obviously with the pandemic was, 'How do you communicate uncertainty and how do you ensure trust?'"

"COMMUNICATING UNCERTAINTY IS HARD. We've eroded trust for some really good reasons and some not really great reasons. We're going to have more crises obviously in the future. We've got climate change in there. It's going to cause a crisis. Lots of things are changing. We've got shifting demographics. So there's going to be crises. How do you build trust? How do you create plans that are appropriate for lots of different things?"



"HELP AND MAKE SURE that the people who are doing this work are getting some training in how change evolves and how to manage change. Part of that is communication. But part of it is also appreciating that change is a process and appreciating that it's really dangerous to stack too many changes on top of each other. It's a lot better when you can make it a little more sequential so that you can see if you're having any impact. Some really fundamental stuff that is covered in some programs of study but completely absent in others. That's part of the issue that we're dealing with. We didn't know that this pandemic was gonna happen. That's true. But if you talk to the experts that have been studying pandemics and viruses, they knew it was gonna happen at some point. It was not a mystery. It was just a mystery of when. If we knew it was gonna happen, then how come we weren't busy helping people get ready to manage these types of sudden revolutionary changes that we knew were gonna happen eventually?"

"I FEEL LIKE BOTH personally and professionally, it's a little bit of trying to maintain every day. If I don't drop a major ball, it's been a great day. I don't have a crystal ball. I don't know if it's just my time in life or the chaos, but trying to figure out where it's going to be in the future. 'Where is a guy going to go?' I don't know. I'm not a very paranoid person, so I think it's probably going to be just more practical."



Life Stages ●

"HOW DO WORKERS CARE for both children and parents or other family members while also maintaining a full time job and access to benefits to do so?"

"I'M A PARENT OF teenagers. I think expecting them to follow in our footsteps and buy into the world that we have created for them is not flying, it's not gonna work. They are not buying it. My kids think they can just scroll Instagram all day. They're not buying this, find the thing you're passionate about and go to school forever and then work really hard and then be all pissed off at the end of the day."

"THE YOUNG FOLKS ARE looking at a pretty different world than the world that we grew up in. I think there's going to be a range of optimism in them, too. But they want it to be better, though. They do. There is that renaissance. They've seen us mess up enough to want to not do the same thing."

"I'VE GOT A STUDENT doing a master's thesis looking at this issue of seeking help for stress-related problems and factors that influence that. New college graduates are just now entering the workforce often-times with a lot of debt and maybe limited prospects in certain occupations. How does it affect things like decisions to get married, people living at home longer, holding off on having children? We don't really have a good handle on how that's going to affect things, in the long run."

Change ●

"I THINK IN A historical context, we're going to continue to see similar challenges that are cyclical in nature."

"I THINK ABOUT ADAPTATION models where we can start to be thinking about, 'Okay when these changes happen, what are the different factors of work? How are exposures going to change? How are health and safety outcomes going to change? How can we be thinking about that in a cyclical way?' Versus here are going to be the issues in the future that we should be focused on."

Filling Open Positions ●

"IF YOU TALK TO employers and hear how difficult it is to fill open positions, I can't think of an industry where they're saying, 'We have way too many applicants and we don't know what to do.'"

Tailor Work to Individuals ●

"I'D LOVE TO SEE some more attention spent on work design, how we design the job for real people. Once we hire people, what are we doing post-hire to actually tailor that work so it fits the individuals we bring on? One of the things that's always fascinated me is we can't hire somebody who fits a job 100%. So we might hire somebody who's like an 80 or 90% fit, but then we'll act as if, 'Okay you're good.' We all know if we buy clothing off the rack, it's never going to look that great on us unless it's been tailored, but we hang these jobs on people and then we wonder why the fit is not good. What kinds of effects does that have on you over the course of your career?"

Psychosocial Hazards ●

"WITHIN THE WALLS OF our organization, there's pretty significant pressure to work with other behavioral scientists within our organization. We're a small but mighty group. We are being asked to look at psychosocial hazards as we do physical hazards and be able to provide guidance in the same way that we do for dealing with physical hazards, which is a major challenge. These are not another set of apples or oranges. They're not even a fruit. It's a completely different thing that we're trying to force through the same framework or paradigm for how we control those hazards. How do you control psychosocial hazards?"

CHAPTER

2



Employers and Workers ●

"I CAN'T TELL YOU how many people I've talked to who say with the best of intentions, 'I want to do something for my people, for the workers in this organization,' but almost never talk to them, never get feedback before implementing something. And then people are saying, 'What the hell was that? He spent all the money, and it's not fixing a problem.' There's not a lot of good communication that really focuses on an issue and then says, 'How could we do this a little bit better around here?'"

"I'VE BEEN TASKED WITH basically building a culture where we watch out for each other's health at my current institution. It's just by starting to pay attention to what were the health and safety and well-being challenges that I'm experiencing right now at this moment in time today. What did I do today that helped impact or hurt somebody else within my work? It's starting with awareness, right? And trying to break it down into step-by-step bite-sized chunks. Over time, what's happened is it starts to become ingrained in people's minds. The terminology we would use in an org development or change space is they own the problem and they own the solution. They own the change process themselves, which is how you accelerate a change. You can't have a large-scale change just emanating from one facilitator. That just doesn't work. But we don't do a great job of explaining that process to the folks that are out there building interventions."

Employers as Problem Solvers ●

“A LOT OF OCCUPATIONAL health work assumes that the locus of the solution is some kind of organizational training versus changes in social policy. It seems to me a lot of the problems that we’re talking about are not going to be solved by hoping that individual organizations do something about them.”

“PEOPLE DO GENERALLY WANT to protect workers. Almost all of us have to work. When I’ve done some projects where I have interviewed CEOs, I’m like, ‘What stops you from making health and safety decisions?’ Usually, they say, ‘We know it’s important, but we also have to make money.’ That sucks. But at least you know it’s important, you’ve got to keep on working and keep on working. Maybe the direction going forward in occ health is just to try to embed more of us in more places.”

Bifurcation of the Population ■

“I THINK YOU’LL END up where we were a hundred years ago with an upper class that has mobility, that has security, that can move to places where they have rights and economic mobility. And then you have a perpetual underclass that cannot break out of basically chronic employment and chronic poverty, at least with the trajectory of our current policies. Combining that with migration, with policies that reduce your ability to family plan so that increases your financial insecurity, with perpetual underpayment of jobs and not keeping up with productivity. I think you are just going to see this bifurcation of the population into the haves, who have that flexibility, I think we all are lucky enough to probably be in that group, and the have-nots, which is going to be the majority of folks.”

Priorities ●

“WHAT WE’RE FINDING IS it’s the pebbles in your shoe. It’s the chronic everyday stressors that make a big difference for people’s basic quality of work life. How do we get people to focus on what we can do there in a pragmatic way? Let’s make it a little better around here, let’s keep adjusting, we have to.”

“WILL OUR ROLE AS occupational safety and health professionals change? That’s asked a lot, especially with different business practices. Being able to tap into the industry-led research and have that be something that’s more fluid and informative of what we do. I think also acknowledging the savviness of what business executives are being trained to do now, or at least considering this being part of the conversation that it wasn’t 20, 40 years ago. I don’t think it’s a threat. I think it’s an opportunity. How do you communicate uncertainty like the big question with the pandemic?”

"ONE OF THE WAYS I try to prepare for the future is I try to get right with God, I try to get right with what is important to me, whatever I may value, and I try to help the people that I care about do likewise."



Purpose at Work ■

"IT'S INTERESTING TO THINK about people finding purpose and meaning in their work and in their employer and will they then do the work to invest in helping change where they're working?"

"THERE'S A NOTION IN education about psychic pain. We're fulfilling your meaning, we're fulfilling your call and your purpose so we can pay you less, right? And we see that across a wide variety of sectors and I think we're seeing that even within organizations where jobs that are more fulfilling might be paying less because you get the psychic pay or we're asking you to do extra labor because it's fulfilling, it's meaningful, and there's a gendered component inherently to it. A lot of these pro-social jobs that we're underpaying tend to be filled by women."



"NATE WILMERS HAD A great recent paper on pro-social jobs and the college wage premium. The punchline is, 'Pro-social jobs pay less, but that actually reduces college and non-college inequality because some of the college folks are able to take the pro-social jobs, which narrows it a little bit.'"



AI ■

"I'M QUESTIONING THE AI narrative. The agenda of every CHRO meeting, not just the ones we're hosting, it's AI all day. I don't want to overplay the tech. Maybe we pull back, because tech is not going to solve everything. Tech is not the only solution. But the conversations happening in the people space inside companies right now is 93% AI."

"IT'S THE SCARY, CREEPY, job-insecurity aspect of it. Who's going to lose their jobs and the stress around that? It's the expectation of companies that you should be using it. 'We're not going to tell you how, but figure it out, use it to make yourself more efficient.' And then these are the thorny, picky things that my team of organizational psychologists is really trying to dig into. Employees don't want to tell their employer they're using it, because if they do, does that mean that you're basically telling them that you can be automated? Or if you use it, and that saves you 20% time, and so now you have a little bit more bandwidth, do you want to go say that you have extra time on your hands at a time when they're already stressed? These are the psychological aspects that are not being solved."



In-Office Work ●

“ONE OF THE ISSUES for some workers is having to go back to the office more days than they want to and the commute issues and stuff. But at the same time, there are others who are saying, ‘It’s gotten really lonely when I come to work. Where are other people and when can you get together?’ The solution that keeps coming is everybody kind of chooses which day they show up. It’s an individual solution that is not thinking of the larger whole. ‘When do we all need to be there, for what kind of task? Can we all focus? We’re all there on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. What we’re gonna be doing is strategic planning. We’re going to be doing orientations. We’re going to be doing things that really require a lot of us to be together, whatever the work happens to be, rather than whenever you feel like it.’”

Participants' Takeaways

THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

CHAPTER
2

- The discussion about the future forces me to think about the fundamentals and how we use them for worker safety and health. It forces us to focus on today because it shapes the future.
- The importance of needing to ask more of oneself, getting outside our comfort zones and start thinking about some of these bigger questions in the research. Part of this is just accepting that I'm going to be a lifelong learner.
- As an educator, what can I do to have a positive impact on the future? There are a lot of other people worrying about these things so it's a matter of building a critical mass.
- We're focused on the employee. We're focused on organizational dynamics. We're trying to solve for the employee experience and culture at work and these broader macro issues. Tech is just one tiny piece of the puzzle.
- Mental health concerns are getting attention and that's appropriate, but we need to try to be discerning about how they're discussed and what advice is given and promoted to employers.
- We've got the future of work as a concept, but I think ultimately humans haven't changed a ton. So even though the world around us has evolved, foundational psychological needs and motives are still at play.



SYSTEMS THINKING

- The future requires the socio-ecological model, a very fundamental public health model, for considering what we should be addressing, assessing, acknowledging, studying, and implementing.
- It feels overwhelming when you start to get to the systemic aspects of some of these entrenched issues and how we could potentially solve them. It really will take a village of multidisciplinary folks and experts all joining forces to make that happen.

APPROACHES

- What we're asking employers to do is so complex. How about educating employers and workers on some simple principles and strategies and letting them run with them?
- Our entire paradigm is to ask employers, 'Hey, go solve this big society problem, but do it at your workplace for your workforce.' I feel like we're expecting a bit more than we should from most employers to be able to solve these problems.
- The challenge for us is to walk the walk. How do you provide a framework that will fit within different work environments that people can then use? What's a helpful way to keep adjusting and making things a little bit better?
- We need to keep investing in whatever we can to bring stability to our society. I think building healthy, resilient organizations is one of the most critical forces we have.

Occupational & Environmental Health and Occupational Medicine Professionals and Ergonomists

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH addresses all aspects of health, safety, and well-being in a variety of occupational settings, including the workplace. The field has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards. Workplace hazards present risks to the health and safety of people at work, which include physical factors, adverse ergonomic conditions, chemicals, biological agents, allergens, and a complex network of safety risks. The profession's aim is to provide America's workforce with a safe and healthy workplace, free from hazards. This discipline is supported legally through the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1980 and OSHA regulations are enforced by a governmental body at the state and federal levels.

SANDBOX 3 THEMES

 <p>Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches</p>	 <p>Change, Adaptability & Agility</p>	 <p>Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles</p>
 <p>In-Person & Remote Work</p>	 <p>Collaboration & Organizational Design</p>	 <p>Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning</p>
 <p>Technology & AI</p>	 <p>Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues</p>	 <p>Equity & Workforce Diversity</p>

PARTICIPANTS

JOEL BENNETT

CEO, Organizational Wellness
& Learning Systems

JENNIFER CAVALLARI

Associate Professor and
Director of Faculty Development,
Department of Public Health Sciences,
University of Connecticut
School of Medicine

KRISTIN CUMMINGS

Occupational Health Branch Chief,
California Department of Public Health

MICHELLE ROBERTSON

Executive Director, Office Ergonomics
Research Committee,
Lecturer, Northeastern;
Lecturer, Center for Occupational
and Environmental Health,
University of California, Berkeley;
Research Faculty,
Psychological Sciences,
University of Connecticut

ROBERT HARRISON

Clinical Professor of Medicine,
University of California, San Francisco

SOO-JEONG LEE

Associate Professor,
University of California, San Francisco

LAURA LINNAN

Senior Associate Dean, Academic
and Student Affairs, Professor,
Health Behavior and Director,
Carolina Center for Healthy Work
Design & Worker Well-Being,
UNC Gillings School of
Global Public Health

KATHLEEN MOSIER

Founder & Principal Scientist,
TeamScape LLC

ELIZABETH NOTH

Associate Researcher &
Director of the Industrial Hygiene
Graduate Training Program,
Environmental Sciences Division,
School of Public Health,
University of California, Berkeley

PAUL SPECTOR

Distinguished Professor,
Muma College of Business,
University of South Florida;
Organizational Behavior Science
Contractor, Tampa General Hospital

JOHN SWARTZBERG

Professor Emeritus,
School of Public Health,
University of California, Berkeley

The Current State

SUMMARY: The conversation around occupational health kept returning to systems thinking, worker voice, and the limits of piecemeal fixes. Safety, mental health, remote work, and training are still treated as separate issues, creating unintended consequences and leaving an aging, diverse workforce without coherent protection. Interdisciplinary training and regulation are weakening just as risks grow more complex, from isolation and poor ventilation to psychological strain and uneven job security. AI offers potential to reduce physical hazards but raises concerns about surveillance and displacement, while managers struggle to support hybrid teams and build real psychological safety. The future of occupational health depends on rebuilding coordinated systems, elevating worker input, and designing work environments that protect people rather than shift burdens onto them.

CHAPTER
3

State of Occupational Health ◆

"THE HUMAN FACTORS AND ergonomics area brings a systems approach to integrating the technology with a personal kind of subsystem, which is the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the workers themselves. A systems approach integrates technology, training, the built environment, and the organizational structure."

Work Systems ◆

"THE PIECEMEAL APPROACH IS just not going to work. You are going to end up with unintended consequences for changes that you make to fix one thing."

"TAKE INCREASING SAFETY CLIMATE. They say, 'Well if you increase safety, what are all the unintended consequences? Because there are always unintended consequences so you have to look much more broadly,'"

"SYSTEMS THINKING AND A participatory approach are needed to be there and I don't see it happening."

Interdisciplinary Work

"I DON'T THINK WE have convinced the legislature and employers about the importance of interdisciplinary work. Unless we find partners who really get it and are willing to advocate for it with funding the work we do, I think we are at a crossroads right now."

"IT REALLY WORRIES ME when the funding limits the work that we do. If it's not us training in the interdisciplinary approach, then who's going to be doing it?"

"WE DON'T WANT TO work in silos."

"THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IS very disappointing to me – how many programs and curriculums have been reduced to one or two courses? Are we integrating engineering, the sciences, and technology? I am not seeing a broad curriculum-based training occurring."

Federal Regulation

"SO MUCH OF THE way in which people are impacted is top-down from the national level. If there isn't a regulation to protect them, then it doesn't matter at a local level."

Workplace Safety

"YOU'RE GOING TO AN office environment, you have the physical ergonomics, the workspace design, you have the corporate ergonomist that can be a resource. Then you shift to remote work. So the occupational safety and health kind of protective bubble has to really change."

"MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WERE so profound amongst people who had to go back [during the pandemic] and work with the public."

"HOW WOULD PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY look in a factory? Lack of things like bullying or harassment. Or, working on a line, not feeling that your supervisor is over you. Are you comfortable there? Are you constantly under stress? Is it a toxic environment where you're worried about your boss coming in and jumping on you or whatever? These things are more ethereal than musculoskeletal disorders and physical things, but there are things you can track."

"HEALTH HAZARDS IN BOTH situations – remote and onsite/with the public."

"UNIONS GENERATED THE BIGGEST opposition to public health and vaccination during the pandemic."

Industrial Hygiene and Human Safety ●

"IN PLACES WHERE IT has been more successful in protecting workers and valuing workers is where there is psychological safety – workers feel like they have a voice and there is communication. 'We hear you' – and creating a culture to support well-being. This is hard to do when you're being driven by profit."

"THE PROBLEM IS NOT that people making decisions are so disconnected from the people being affected. People don't adopt the changes because they don't want to be disrupted."

"DESPERATE TIMES – THAT was the motivator for them to make changes. And the resistance that they encountered was by the workers."

Mental Health ●

"ON THE MENTAL HEALTH side, how do companies identify struggling employees and how best to support them?"

"A CHALLENGE AND THING that is not working is when we think about mental health. In the mental health of workers so often we address this with individual behavior change, more yoga, more meditation, and not changing the actual work. As professionals in this area, learning, growing, and in teaching people and figuring out how to untangle this wicked problem."

"PEOPLE WHO ARE NEURODIVERSE and who have disabilities are part of the workforce now and companies are starting to think about ways of accommodating them. Training is helpful, redesigning work so the work can be done by someone who may have particular skill deficits or particular disabilities."

"A PRESIDENT OF A construction company started a national movement to destigmatize mental health issues – the suicide rate within construction is 5 times the national average. He's given talks all over the country and the world, a TED talk, and written a book. He gets people calling from companies all over the world asking for advice. Physical issues are much more easily recognized in fields like construction and factories and more easily regulated because adverse outcomes are identifiable."

"AS LONG AS MENTAL issues don't impact work...as long as you can keep building whatever, it's not a salient thing for your employer to worry about. It's sort of an invisible problem because management may think there's nothing wrong because everybody seems to be working but efficiency is degraded."



Managers ●

“EVERYTHING IS STILL DICTATED from the top and from circumstances, and people who are doing the work aren't involved in how it's designed and how the whole system is designed. We want workplaces and workers to stay healthy and productive, and we are not asking workers to help us figure this out.”

“THERE WAS A TIME when the worker on the shop floor could make their way up to management.”

“THE MANAGERIAL ROLE HAS really shifted. A lot of managers are struggling to figure out how they handle career progression, mentoring, training for those who are doing remote work and those who are in the office. In trying to reduce the social isolation, how does the manager pull those teams together? We're starting to see this even at the international level, some countries are coming up with a minimum of three days in the office.”

“IT SEEMS THAT WHAT is happening is these changes occur, but we are addressing them piecemeal. So you say, people are working at home. So how do we deal with people working at home, or things that have changed? But we are not looking at the whole work system that has changed. Even when you isolate that if people don't go to work, they don't have the chance for a promotion – this statement still assumes the same work system that we had before when everybody worked on-site. But that part of the work system has changed, so how do you change the whole system so it's not a problem?”

“FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL cohesion, team engagement, what kind of training do we provide for both employees as well as the managers to make it a positive interaction?”

Getting the Attention of Senior Managers ●

“I HEAR WE ALWAYS spend the time on planning and organizing and talking and then we have this deep void of implementation. Everyone sits around the boardroom and goes, 'Okay, great idea!' But then walk out and just go back to their normal work day. What are the motivators for those key decision makers to implement?”

“THIS PROMPTS ME TO reflect on my experience consulting for three really large international corporations during COVID. Interestingly, they were incredibly receptive because they needed to keep their plants open. So that was the motivator to them. And the resistance came from their workers.”

“WE'RE TRYING TO GET things legislated to have a larger impact, and working with international communities, agencies, governments, and unions.”

Lessons From COVID-19 ●

"ONE THING WE'VE LEARNED during the pandemic is indoor air quality in buildings, but we haven't applied what we learned to ensure good quality air. We could be talking about inanimate objects as well. But despite pressure by the administration to create a safer indoor environment, no changes have been made because there is no funding for that."

"FROM THE INFECTIOUS DISEASE standpoint, we talked about what kinds of air quality fixes could happen for viruses such as MRSA, and fortunately it has become less of a problem in the last 15 years. All those changes we talked about doing aren't being applied. The reason I mention that is because of a slow-moving catastrophe for the world – antimicrobial resistance."

"IT'S GOING TO BECOME enormous if you go to a workplace where you're going to either get wounded by the kind of work you're doing and get an infection that can't be treated, or you're going to be inhaling organisms that can't be treated. It's going to make workplaces incredibly dangerous."

"BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, REMOTE workers worked their jobs from home and it wasn't expected that you would be overseeing and taking care of your children at that time. A lot of companies actually required the worker to say that they were taking their children to daycare or that they had someone come in because they didn't want this conflict occurring."

"WORKPLACES ARE ALWAYS THE canary in the coal mine."

COVID Testing and Vaccines ●

"BECAUSE WE HAVE ALL these essential workers, mostly immigrants and undocumented, on ranches, and we want them to be at work and we're demanding they are at work, they are kind of cloistered away. There is a backlash by the ranchers who are in very conservative states, so it's a real interesting dance between the workers and the employers and public health."

"CDC SAYS THERE'S A good candidate vaccine, but I don't hear a lot about actually producing that and getting it out to the workers."

"A LOT OF THE workers don't want to be tested on a regular basis because they are afraid if they get sick, they'll lose their ability to work, and these are not people who have a lot of skills, and they don't have a lot of job security in any case. Many of them may not be documented. So there's many obstacles to applying what we know."

"THE SAN QUENTIN COVID outbreak had horrible ventilation and COVID spread like wildfire. Incarcerated people didn't want to wear PPE, didn't report they were sick, they didn't want to get moved."

RANDY
3



Unifying Regulations ●

“AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL integration is when the EPA Air Quality Index was adopted by Cal/OSHA, replacing their own standards, to unify regulations on both indoor and outdoor air quality standards, resulting in a standard that was more protective of workers.”

Shifts in Power 🔒

“THERE’S A NICE TREND in terms of worker voices, I do think we are seeing a small movement even in the Southern states that have the right to work.”

“MOVEMENT TOWARD UNIONIZATION
I think is a tiny trend. Don’t know if it’ll last, but we’re seeing some emergence of that, which I personally find is heartening and may give voice where voice has not been given in a long time.”

“WORKER POWER. WORKERS DON’T have voices and they can’t organize and make changes in their working conditions. So everything we do really has to be laser-focused on that.”

Changing Demographics ■

“THERE’S A LOT OF politics that are going to enter into how things change or the ways in which they change, coming up in this next cycle. One thing that is true is that the workforce is aging, and I don’t think we’re quite prepared for the implications of that in a lot of workplaces in terms of workplace safety and health.”

“CLEARLY ONE OF THE trends is the diversity of the workforce. Politics will influence a lot such as who’s going to be allowed to work and who is not, whether unions are supported or not.”

“WE’RE GOING TO HAVE a set of workers that have to work for all of their lives because there’s no infrastructure for their retirement unless they do it for themselves but many of them don’t have the wherewithal. That’s why they’re doing gig work.”

“IT’S A BARE MINIMUM to enable mobility in our environments for people injured or aging. We have lots more and different types of limitations on what people can do. We are just scratching the surface of that right now.”

“THERE’S A SEVERE SHORTAGE in the skilled trades and yet, for the most part, parents and schools are pushing students to not go into the trades, go to college. And many of them come out of college and struggle to find jobs because the supply of jobs and the supply of labor isn’t completely matched. You are seeing some pushback – more encouragement of people to go into the skilled trades, and this trend will continue.”

"THERE'S A LACK OF national support and state-level support for child care. It has implications on the workforce, particularly for women. Not being able to have affordable child care means they can't get into the workforce because it doesn't make sense for them financially to try."

Remote Work ●

"SOME COMPANIES ARE DOING that, requiring people to come back at least part-time. But I would think that's a trend that will increase. What will happen over time is that employees themselves will realize that it's awfully isolating to be just working at home, unless for some reason you have to. There's research that you're less likely to be promoted. There are benefits of being in the office. You're not developing close relationships with your co-workers."

"IF YOU DON'T GIVE people power and yet you shift all this responsibility toward them...that's a bad situation."

"CORPORATE REAL ESTATE AND facilities managers, they're all excited that they can reduce the number of office space that they have, but they're again shifting the burden to the employees."

"THE 70% OF WORKERS who don't have the option to work remotely are in high-risk situations, but most of the research is going into the 30%. I would really love for us to really have the 70% be the focus."

"A NEW YORK TIMES editorial pointed out how it's completely unrealistic for a lot of essential workers to even think about having a remote option, and yet people are talking about the changing nature of work with all this opportunity for remote work."

AI ■

"AI IS HUGE – trying to figure out how best to use the tools, where they should and shouldn't be used, what the advantages are, how it impacts outcomes."

"AI IS REALLY, NOT always being designed as a tool for people. It's being designed as a people emulator. The good news when you think of things like robotics, and things on the floor, is that they can reduce a lot of the risk factors for injuries – like pulling things, dealing with heavy things, moving things around... it can be a positive thing."

"AI IS LEARNING ALL the time – that's the scary part. Supposedly, but who knows? Is it going to get 5% better, 10% better? Is it going to get to the point where it can basically replace a person?"



The Future State

SUMMARY: The future of occupational health depends on shifting from reactive safety measures to systemic, human-centered design. Despite its proven value, human factors remain underrecognized and are often left out of workplace planning. Safety needs to be redefined to include aging workers, emerging technologies, and psychological well-being, not just infectious disease. Collaboration across disciplines and communities, especially at the local level, offers a clearer path forward. Success will depend on simplicity, inclusion, and a shared commitment to workplace fairness. Moving ahead will require participatory design, systems thinking, and leadership that treats health and safety as central to business success, not as a regulatory afterthought.

Future of Occupational Health ●

“OUR GROUP IS TRYING to make sure that human factors is recognized as an essential element of the future of work by developing a standard that would prescribe human factors considerations for its members to be aware of and to implement – but that’s always been kind of a struggle. People and organizations don’t recognize the need for it and how it can change and guide the design of work systems.”

Changing Demographics 🗝

“AGING MAY CONTRIBUTE TO labor shortages due to retirements and the following generations not being as large. No one’s really thought about how to deal with older workers, and can you still get some meaningful contribution out of them?”

“PHASED RETIREMENTS? HOW TO maximize the strengths of people as they age out of the workforce because the health and safety implications of that are real, and it could be beneficial to do it for the rest of the workers that remain.”

Workplace Safety

“WE NEED TO EXPAND our workforce by any means necessary so we can continue the work that we are doing and address these hazards.”

“AS WE ENVISION OUR new workplace, we need to consider workplace safety and not just infectious diseases.”

CHAPTER
3

Industrial Hygiene and Human Safety

“I WISH THAT WE could demonstrate that change would be good and create some success stories that show that if you embrace this at the top and include a participatory approach with the workers and they felt like they were working together and were being heard and seeing those implementations, we could create a feedback loop or continuous learning that would show to the organization that this works.”

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

“MAKING COLLABORATIONS, NOT JUST an environmental health exposure scientist and an industrial hygiene exposure scientist, but a true, broad collaboration that includes a lot of people and gives them a bigger voice.”

“I’VE RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE of simplicity by communicating in simple ways and trying to be clear in order to appeal to and be understood by broad audiences.”

“I ENCOURAGE US TO think more locally. My experience working with nonprofits around the country and with different multi-stakeholder groups show that once they start doing service work in local areas, the future looks a lot brighter.”

“TO COUNTER THE THOUGHT that polarization will continue to make it hard for us to do our job, I suggest rolling up our sleeves at the local level. Forget about the world and focus on those people who are doing good things and aligning with them and collaborating with them.”

“WE HAVE TO CREATE something that is almost workplace agnostic, whatever workplace you’re in, you’re entitled to certain things that are fair – it’s like a bill of rights for the workplace.”

Work Systems

“HUMAN FACTORS HAVE THE experience and expertise in integrating different disciplines to look at the whole system. They can be the integrator, the linchpin person that’s going to help to get areas of the company to work together.”

Getting the Attention of Senior Managers ●

"HOW DO WE BRING in a positive organizational culture that is going to embrace these types of workplace interventions?"

AI ■

"TECH NEEDS TO BE thought out well at the systems level – how the whole system is working."

"WHY ARE YOU APPLYING new tech? Are you creating another risk consideration or benefit? We want to control it, manage expectations of the worker with exoskeletons – workers might be expected to push themselves a little bit more with this tech."

Participants' Takeaways

WORKER SAFETY

- The pandemic helped us learn how to be safe, but then we unlearned it. It's important to move toward safety, but workers want to work so they don't follow what we've learned. Worker engagement might be able to change that, but can't have work consequences like losing a job because of accommodations.
- The growing disparities in work exposure and work experience make everything pretty fragile and pretty easy to bring down and very hard to improve. How do we go forward with a better societal structure that is stronger and maybe comes from the bottom up with worker organization and local intervention, etc.?

OTHER CHALLENGES

- Job vs. health – not either/or. This conflict must be resolved.
- Employers don't take the time to solve the problem, they don't know the options to keep people working with accommodations, people lose jobs, and are not covered by compensation because the injury isn't permanent.
- Slow-moving catastrophe with antimicrobial resistance has a huge effect on the safety of the workplace.
- We look at future work, but we still haven't fixed the present.

RANDY
3



CHANGE STRATEGIES

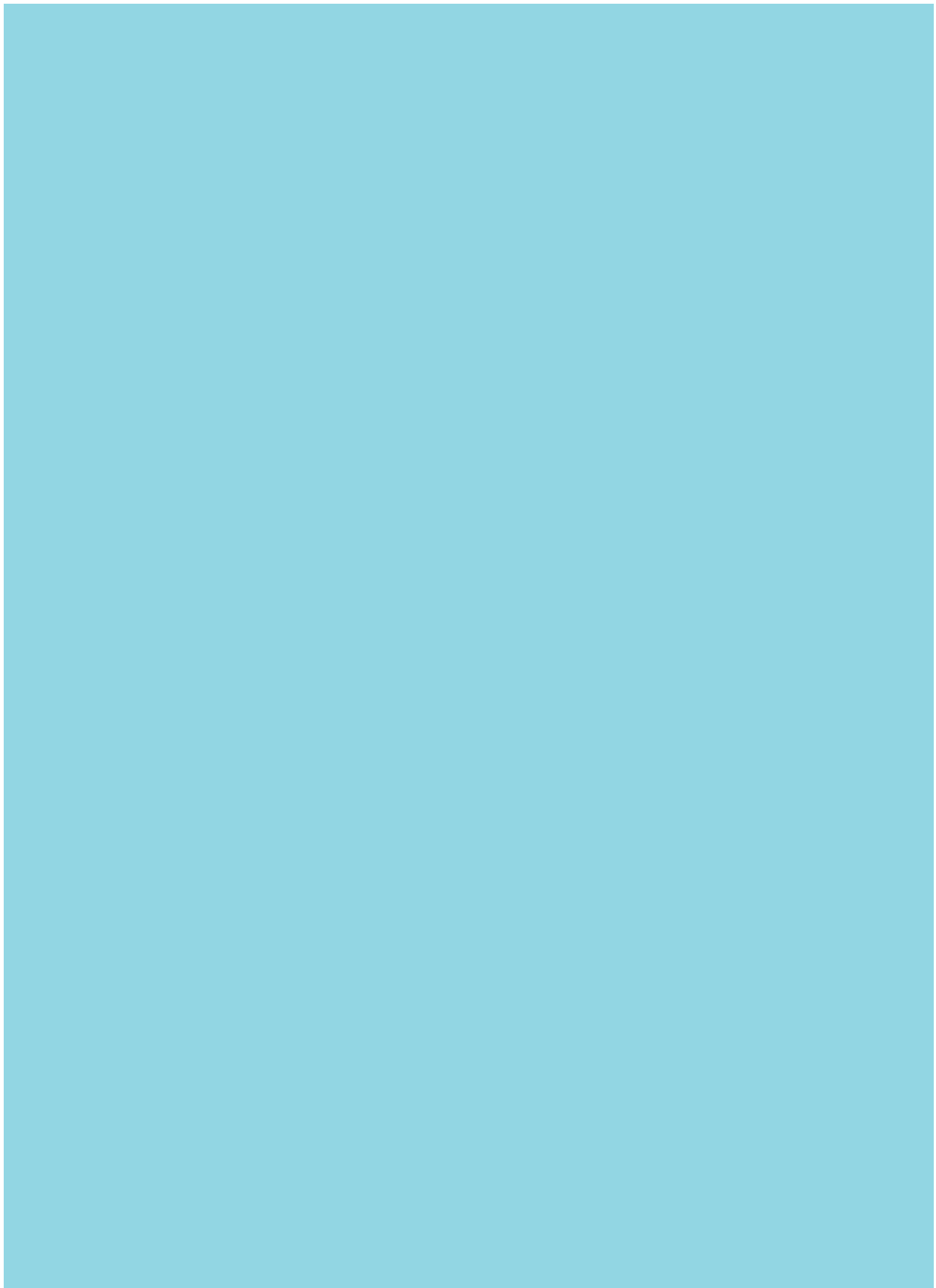
- We have a lot of knowledge and wisdom, but how do we work with other people who are “in power” and “have influence”?
- We have to bring in key stakeholders to understand whether motivators are encouraging employees to become involved and participate in building success.
- Worker empowerment is foundational: better societal structure that is stronger can come bottom-up through worker organizations and local intervention.
- What successful model can demonstrate that when we bring our fields together, it can make a significant impact on the business needs as well as the worker’s needs. What are those motivators and how can we show integration across the work systems?
- It’s really important to find a societal structure where we have trusted institutions in public health, institutions that represent workers, and institutions that represent management. We need to find a way to create synergies between those three as opposed to pitting one against the other.

COLLABORATION ACROSS FIELDS

- The key is collaboration across fields, but our training doesn't include how to become good collaborators.
- Bring fields together to build toward business success.
- Social sciences are needed to contribute to managing AI.

SYSTEMS THINKING

- We need to look at problems through a systems lens.
- We need to consider the whole range of work systems from agriculture to manufacturing, to office work, to computer work. We need top-down support, engage stakeholders at high levels, using a human-centered systems approach.



Senior Human Resource Managers

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (HRM) is the design and development of formal policies, practices, programs, and systems in an organization and other structures to help manage the organization's workforce and to support desired employee behavior, attitudes, and performance. HRM provides the guidance, tools, training, and management support to assist organizational leadership in managing its human talent in accomplishing organizational goals. Its aim is to create a strategic and coherent approach to the effective and efficient management of people in an organization and help the organization to gain a competitive advantage over their peers. HRM also works to support the organization's compliance with all relevant labor and employment laws.

SANDBOX 4 THEMES



PARTICIPANTS

PAULA ALLEN

SVP Human Resources,
FirstService Residential

ADRIENNE BIGLEY FRETZ

Founder, TENDhr,
Managing Partner, Anso Partners

AIMEE EINSTEIN

Vice President of People & Culture,
SI-BONE

NATASHA GIBBONS

Talent Leader, Americas,
Cushman & Wakefield

SHANNON LEVY

Head of Professional Development
and Director of People, BridgeBio

OLGA MARTENS-STUURMAN

Director Future Ready
Work Experience, HP

SUSAN SUTTON

People and Operational Lead,
Chief of Staff, Open Core Ventures

EUGENE WHITLOCK

Chief People & Culture Officer/
Associate Vice Chancellor-
Human Resources,
University of California, Berkeley

SONYA ZILKA

Chief People Officer,
Chan Zuckerberg Biohub

The Current State

SUMMARY: HR leaders are caught between escalating expectations and shrinking resources, tasked with everything from rethinking employment structures to navigating economic pressures that push teams to their limits. Employee engagement is at an all-time low, with workers prioritizing personal growth over company loyalty, while leadership struggles to balance cost-cutting with sustainable performance. Organizations cycle through reactive decisions, defaulting to outdated management styles rather than addressing structural issues like trust, career development, and mental well-being. AI offers efficiency, but raises new questions about workforce planning, while remote and hybrid work remains contentious, often dismissed rather than optimized. The future of HR demands a shift from short-term fixes to intentional, adaptive leadership.

CASEBOOK
4



Current State of Human Resource Management

"WHEN I'M ASKED WHAT an HR person can do in the organization I am working with, I think the expectations are really off the charts, and we're trying everything. We have talked about ownership in companies – do we tie people to the company more? Or do we tie them to the company less? Are we going fully fractional and gig, or are we giving ownership and equity deeper inside organizations?"

"I HAD A LEADER that I listened to the other day, and he said what he would promise his team was, 'If I can't get you where you want to go in two years, then I'm going to do everything I can to help you find what that opportunity is externally.' The loyalty and the drive that he garnered for people and the degree of trust, he followed through with that. It was a contract between two people, not just he and not just the employee in the organization, and we still see that, right? People join companies and leave managers. Do we have leaders or managers?"

Leadership and Management Perspectives ●

“WE’RE ALL JUST LIMPING along right now. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work and lets down both the business and the teams. Leader by leader, having human conversations, taking human-centric approaches, and building trust with your team members so that they feel like they can be transparent with you about what they need as far as work, flexibility, resources, mental health, and well-being, all of that. It’s a package deal, right?”

“EXECUTIVES AND PROFESSIONALS WHO are organizing their teams, organizing work, really are at a loss for what to do. I think they would welcome some guidance. I also think there’s some resistance and fear on their part. Even if we made a plan on how to make hybrid even more effective, there wouldn’t be any fear of a loss of control, loss of productivity, all of those things. I did have believers in my organization that are on board. Look at what people in different roles do and figure out how best to do that.”

“THERE IS TENSION UNDERLYING the need to be lean, be profitable, and shareholder return versus the well-being of your employees. If you could show leadership the long-term impact and what it really means when we have turnover and absences that they hear about, I would love to see it. We continue to go round and round on this, and there’s still a default to a real short-term mindset.”

“WE HAD A FUTURE of Work team that was working on redesigning our whole space and I told them the way we work, the way our physical space is arranged is very much for a five-days-a-week in the office situation. That’s not where this is going. Let’s think about better technology to have hybrid meetings. Let’s make it more collaborative and fluid for having some people remote, some people come on-site, and so on. Let’s figure out our schedules. Let’s figure out what we need to come together for and what we don’t need to come together for, and just rethink everything.”

“WE HAVE LANDED ON hybrid, three days of the week, but the executives, who I’d say are all Boomer generation, are like, ‘Everybody needs you back in the office five days a week,’ and I’m like, ‘Why?’ What are we missing? What’s the gap? We’re feeling that tension for sure, but I think we’ve settled into a norm.”

Executive Mindset ●

“WHAT WE ARE SEEING in the marketplace is CEOs and executives that don’t know what to do with where we are and where we’re going and so they’re just going to old scripts and their old ways of doing things and demanding people come back in the office and tracking badges, which is so offensive, and treating your employees psychologically and telling them, ‘Work is prison.’”

Workforce Management ●

"IN MY ORGANIZATION, OUR approach has been managing hybrid team by team, role by role – not putting out any edicts. And if certain roles can be fully remote, that's fine. If they can be hybrid, fine. But if we have people in the labs, they obviously have to be on-site. Look at what they do and figure out how best to do that. Let's figure out what we need to come together for and what we don't need to come together for and just rethink everything."

"IN OUR ORGANIZATION, WE are having conversations leader by leader, taking a human-centric approach and getting to know and building trust with your team members so that they feel like they can be transparent with you about what they need as far as work, flexibility, resources, mental and well-being, etc. Making it team by team."

"WE AS HUMANS LIKE being around other people and it is part of our needs biologically and psychologically. Some level of connection with other people, having a connection to the purpose of your organization and to other people who are working there is absolutely necessary."

"TREAT PEOPLE LIKE ADULTS. You'll know if they're not delivering the results. Then manage their performance. And if they aren't performing, then fire them."

"ALMOST KIND OF THAT gig economy mindset. If you have a consultant and they're not delivering their outcomes, then you're not going to use that consultant again. Same thing. If you have an FTE and they're not performing then you're going to address that, right? You don't need to be the police state and Big Brother and completely erode the trust, make them feel like you have no trust or faith in them, because then they're not going to give you their best."

"WE SET UP 'REGION headquarters' that were support centers. We got pushback initially on hybrid and committing to this, but the flexibility of hybrid is energizing the teams that want to be there when they are scheduled, and they don't have to drive or come to the office all the time."

"OUR COMPANY WAS REMOTE first before the pandemic, so it just naturally became a distributed, remote-first company. We were flying people out to convene in various cities around the US – very cost-intensive, but the CEO's justification was that we were not paying for rent. It produced human connection – it would fill the well, and people said that it was so productive – 'We got so much done.' In the end, it was ultimately very inefficient."

"I GET REPORTS OF screen fatigue, and I get that more from my women in the workforce. They are trying to balance coming into the office to connect as opposed to doing everything via screen. That's the pain point that's popping."

SAATCHI

4



Leadership and Management Training ●

“HR PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING

and trying to get the right to lead in this era. HR is asked to help create some answers with the CEO and the C-Suite, but they haven't valued HR. They probably didn't hire well enough in HR, but now all these big issues are coming and maybe now they need really smart people in this seat.”

“WE CONTINUALLY NEED TO

do more and equip managers on how to have conversations, how to build trust and psychological safety, how to build connection and teams across a distributed workforce. It takes more work than just getting everybody in a conference room, sitting next to each other, and all of that. You need to be intentional about these things.”

“THE TRAINING CAN ENABLE managers to be more productive and establish very strong bonds. My team finds ways to connect through Slack, Zoom, and all these different technologies and ways to connect. But not every leader or manager knows how to do that.”

“REGARDING TRAINING LEADERS AND managers, we know management skills are always a challenge in every organization I've ever worked in. I've never met a single organization that didn't say, 'We need better management skills.' Managers now have to manage in a different way. We continually need to do more and equip managers how to have these conversations – how to build trust and psychological safety, how to build connections, and team across a distributed workforce.”

“HOW TO TRAIN MANAGERS on ways to connect through different technologies and how to lead and manage distributed teams, working in different ways – some remote, some hybrid, and some on-site and still being able to build both that teamwork, connectivity, and engagement, but also the productivity and work product.”

“WE DON'T FEEL THAT we have the capacity or sometimes the knowledge and skills to address these big questions. So there is a lot of churn. Because there is so much ambiguity, and people come into the workplace already with very little capacity to take on all the challenges that are inside the workplace with everything that's happening in the world and in their homes. By the time they get to work, there's little left. To then say, 'Can I just come and do my work?' Not true anymore. There's a sense that the company wants so much from folks.”

Building Back Trust ●

"WE FOUND THAT WE'RE able to measure trust within the different divisions in our organization. Where trust is low, complaints are high and turnover is high. That doesn't surprise anyone in HR, but for those business unit leaders, they're not thinking about it. The data are there, but there's something you can do to change the relationship. When a person files a complaint, they don't trust the leadership to do something about it. It's a cry for help. We're focusing on how you show up as a leader and how you develop trust and communicate."

SANDBOX

4

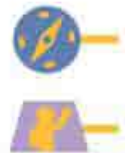
Paradigm Shift ▲

"IN MANY OF THE organizations I am working with, there's so much basic work in growing the company that there is 'block and tackle' work that is happening, and unfortunately, I don't know that they're investing right in these questions. They're so reactive and so singularly focused on growth and on the financial outcome that there's no active discussion on people, to the detriment of the business. It perpetuates the short term versus sitting back and being more intentional with it."

"WE ARE IN THIS universal experiment right now to say what works and maybe there's not one thing, but a lot of it is right. We want to be both mature and innovative and young and wide-eyed."

"WE WANT ALL THE things right. We want to be really hard-charging, and we want to be careful and take care of people. So, there's a tension there, right? I don't know that we have frameworks for that, we don't have the language. My sense is that it just feels like we're doing it wrong because we haven't given it some parameters and said to people, 'This is okay, this is right.'"

"I AM THINKING ABOUT the tension between the state of work: how work is done, upskilling leaders to be good leaders in a hybrid, remote, or in office environment, making sure that they're bringing the team together for moments that matter, that they are actually building relationships and building trust in their team so that they can get discretionary effort out of their teams, and making sure that their team members are being thought of as holistic people – taking care of their mental health, well-being. Then this is shifting from taking care of investors to taking care of your team."



Career Development ▲

"OUR EMPLOYEES WANT TO be treated better. I don't know how to spread that sentiment, but there is definitely a growing belief that, 'Hey, you, employer, need to take care of me, help me grow my career, help me get to that next thing.' So, I see a future of people saying, 'You're not taking care of me, I'm moving.' Movement will be much more fluid."

"DO WE AS ORGANIZATIONS see ourselves as doing something for greater citizenship or humanity? Because there is a sense of 'I'm developing you right now, but if you walk out the door, I just wasted my money.' We don't have this sense of broader connectivity to the greater good. I guess that's hard when we're each in our own economic entity and you are a net exporter of talent, which is lovely, but how does that serve you?"

"CAN WE ALL WIN?"

"I THINK WE CAN take turns winning. I think if you do it right and develop people, they will not think that the grass is greener on the other side, so they'll be more likely to stick around. I also think that if you are developing people, there's some people who are going to take those skills somewhere else because growth opportunities are better outside of your organization. But then, your organization will also have a reputation of being a wonderful place to come and be developed and supported."

"BECAUSE THERE IS MORE flexibility, more remote opportunities, more hybrid work, people don't feel as committed or tied to a company. What we're doing to try to prepare for, or prevent from happening on too large a scale, is to train our managers on how to really lead their teams and support their people looking at performance management. It's not just giving somebody feedback once a year and giving them a score, it's having a conversation multiple times a year: 'Where is your career going? How is your manager?' It has really changed that dynamic."

Workplace Culture ■

"IT IS A MINDSET shift that I think that we have to keep hammering on. We'll give you the skills, the hard skills, the soft skills, but the platinum rule, 'treat others the way they want to be treated,' means the onus is on you to know them, to get to know how they want to be treated."

"BUILD THAT SPACE AND openness with your employees. I remember the first time I talked to an employee about situational leadership. I was like 'You don't have to have magical things in your head and just know how people like to be managed, you ask them, and get out the little situational leadership. 'Do you want more direction, or do you want less direction? Do you want more coaching or more whatever?'"

"YOU GET WHAT YOU give. If you give the bare minimum, they will say, 'If you're going to treat me like that, then I'm going to give you the minimum.'"

"HOW SHOULD WE BE measuring productivity? Are people being productive?"

Employee Engagement ■

"THERE'S A LOT OF data out there that employee engagement across the board is in the toilet. People are not committed to their organization. There is not a commitment or loyalty to brand, company, any of that. Frankly, industry fed that by not being loyal to them. That's a business risk if people are not engaged, they will be picked off. Your top talent can be picked off at any time very easily."

"I'M THINKING ABOUT OFFERINGS that we can do to get people the human connection that's really useful to individuals without actually making them come in every day."

"LIFE IS TOO SHORT and work is too short. We want to make sure that we do something that really matters. I see that in the workforce, the meaning of work but also connection at work is really important. The more technology we throw in, the more remote opportunities, the more people long for human connection. So that meaning of work and human connection is what I'm missing from you. I think people are fed up with emails, PowerPoints, and other virtual social media."

"I THINK PEOPLE VIEW that if we're properly resourced, then maybe we're being fiscally irresponsible – I see it the other way. To be truly fiscally responsible and to get the best work out of people, you need to be properly resourced."

"YOU NEED TO GIVE people that downtime and rest to reach peak performance. There's a mindset shift that needs to happen. There's a conversation between people that have pressure from investors and being able to push back with some science and data and say, 'No, actually you're thinking about this wrong.'"

AI ■

"THERE'S A NEED FOR training and investment to get people up to speed and using the technology in the appropriate way. And I do think that's where we're going to be eventually. AI is going to be helping us, but we're going to have to train people first on how to use it efficiently so that it is a value-add to the bottom line."

"I THINK THERE'S ENORMOUS interest in AI, but there's a lot of emphasis on the technology part of it, on the ethics, and on productivity, but there's a lot more elements to an AI-augmented workforce that we need to look at, such as, how does it impact the need for health? How do you manage a team of bots and people? How do you fire a bot versus delegate to a human being? How do you pay for certain performance if one's work can be augmented by AI – do I pay you because you have digital skills or because you have human skills?"

SANFORD

4



"THERE WAS A LOT of fear about technology, but I think we need to continue to celebrate what technology can do in helping us to be more human. We aren't robots."

AI and the Workplace ■

"AT MY ORGANIZATION, WE are using AI to help us to move a number of things forward. As a heavy people-related business, very transactional [sales], there are safer uses for us to use AI internally, creating some really good production. We're needing to teach people about how to interact with AI, especially for people who are very relationship-focused."

"TO THE EXTENT, WE can deploy AI to remove some of these mundane tasks that people have to do, they can focus on the higher value parts of their work, the more interesting parts of their job – hopefully more engaged, more productive, and more likely to stay."

"WE ALSO WANT TO deploy AI that helps to create a marketplace at work, that will automate the creation of career plans and paths for people, and help them automatically figure out what path to take to get a certain job in five years. What jobs are in between? What training to take? All of it using AI to support this idea of, 'We're investing in a new employee to help them be the greatest version of themselves while they're working for us.' But really, we are trying to get the most out of them without it seeming that it's just purely transactional."

"YOU MIGHT USE AI to help you develop people and to get rid of tasks that they may not want to do so that they can move toward a greater good. But that only works if the purpose of that is the development of people, not necessarily to create a cost offset."

"I HOPE AI CAN enable not only productivity but also better quality work, and a better work experience for the people who are doing the work."

Remote Work Lessons ●

"I THINK WE ARE going to continue to see the pushback to the office. For some industries, it may not be something that's required. There are other parts of my company where workers need to be physically together, like prototyping, and they can't do it with a set of remote workers."

"WHEN LEADERS RAISE THE five-day-a-week thing again, they think they are going to have the buzz we had before the pandemic. Let me tell you, there was no buzz before the pandemic. I don't know what reality you are working in, but people were in the lab then and half the time you don't see people outside of it. They have some romanticized version of what it was like."

"WE WERE A REMOTE-WORK-FIRST company. There was a lot of discussion about whether or not a remote environment was actually contributing to our success, or later, failure. We were sort of locked into that model, and it posed a lot of interesting questions like, 'How do you set up a remote-first company in such a way that it succeeds?' But recently it closed down. Another company I am talking to is a remote-first company and it is actually very successful. They very strongly and passionately believe in remote-first, but they're also a software development company by trade. It makes me think a lot about whether it's industry-specific where it can work successfully."

"WE ARE LOOKING AT industry practices in our specific industry – we don't want to be the bleeding edge. We want to be aware of talent practices, the data has been helpful. We also want to hear from our employees directly – it's really helpful for leaders. It seems very basic, but they are in their own echo chamber."

"WHEN REMOTE WORK DOESN'T work, we say it's the idea that doesn't work. But there are other considerations. We're so quick to just say, 'Oh, remote doesn't work, hybrid doesn't work,' but maybe it's not that it doesn't work, it's that you didn't do it in the right way. Do we throw up our hands and give up so easily and go back to the old ways? You experiment."

"PEOPLE ARE SELECTING OUT or into the environments that work best for them. And increasingly, we are seeing people finding the right matches."

"I HEARD A GREAT phrase: 'executive nostalgia.'"

Lean Teams

"IT IS A BUSINESS risk when you're too lean and then when somebody burns out – God forbid – something happens to them, or they go to another organization. Our organization used to be too lean, and we had a situation where there was only one person doing the job. When that person left and a couple of people on that team left, everything fell apart."

"WITH COVID, THE ECONOMY, and the volatility of our industry and biotech, there have been so many peaks and valleys that we have been really focusing on having lean teams. We run lean, and that's great. And we prided ourselves. But we question whether that is sustainable. We've been burning the candle at both ends for most of our employees, most of our teams, and they don't have the ability to step back and look at their professional development, be creative, be innovative because they're really in a fight or flight mode."

"EVERY COMPANY IS TRYING to get leaner. And so many things are falling by the wayside. It's productivity. There's not a lot of time for development. There's not even a lot of time for management. I think the macroeconomic pressures are really having a substantial impact, especially for those companies that have a little less."



Economic Pressures

"YOU SEE THE GOOGLES, you see the Intuits, you see these large companies shedding lots of jobs and seeming to have similar sort of approaches to performance and staffing that you're used to seeing in these smaller companies that aren't profitable."

"I JUST GOT MARRIED, I don't think employees can start a family while working here. New team members who just started in the last six months, I don't know if they feel like they had a chance to onboard because they were just thrown straight into the deep end."

"MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING and wellness have been kind of pushed to the side and we need to refocus on that."

Focusing on the Short Term

"A LOT OF ORGANIZATIONS are going too fast to even get leaders to think about bench strength or org structure design. 'I don't have time to have a 2-3-hour meeting to think about that.' So our response is reactive, just-in-time human resources. When there is a critical departure, the company is actually paying for the lack of bench strength for critical roles, whether they see it on the spreadsheet or not, it is a real cost. I think it's our job as human resources professionals to highlight these unseen costs along the way – turnover, absenteeism, disengagement, mental health and ill-being costs."

Facilities

"WHEN I COME INTO the office and there are only 20 people and it's a floor for 100, it looks like you're not using your resources in a fiscally responsible way. But then, when you have a town hall or all-hands meeting, you have to rent another floor for the day because there are no meeting rooms."

"PART OF THE PROBLEM is that the CEO or COO fears they are going to be judged for the way they are using the facilities or our resources, and it's not necessarily what's best for the business."

The Future State

SUMMARY: The conversation around HR's future kept returning to themes of uncertainty, adaptability, and shifting power dynamics between employers and employees. Work is no longer a place of assumed stability because career paths are fluid, skill demands are accelerating, and loyalty is transactional. AI, hybrid work, and changing workforce expectations are forcing organizations to rethink not just policies but fundamental structures of employment. At the same time, there is a growing emphasis on community, purpose, and reimagining how people find meaning in their work. HR is caught between efficiency and engagement, tradition and transformation, as it navigates an era where neither jobs nor organizations remain static.

CASEBOOK
4



Preparing for the Future ●

"FOR HR PROFESSIONALS, HOW many more skills are we going to need to acquire, and how escalated is that sense of urgency? It'll be so many more skills per year than before. I think we have to consider ourselves all entrepreneurs going from project to project, company to company. You can't just float along anymore. You always have to be very strategic about what you are gaining from your work. What are you bringing to the table? There needs to be a symbiotic relationship between you and your employment these days."



"THE REALITY IS, THERE are no certainties, and organizations are no longer that loyal to their employees. It is really about being loyal to the investors and the bottom line. We've learned this the hard way over the last 10-20 years, but it's definitely proved to be the case."

"CREATING THAT SENSE OF community within organizations is going to continue to be very important. I know some of the focus has gone off of all things DEI but I think a lot of organizations are saying, 'Okay, we're not taking our foot off the sense of community and belonging piece.' And we can't, we have to reimagine what that looks like so that it works for everybody."



"I THINK NOT ONLY jobs will change, but also how work is organized. I think we probably will have flatter organizations, but we can also personalize at scale with AI with personalized training. Personal preferences can really help shape the type of activities you do and those in the organization because some people really love being together face-to-face, having a team, while others want to be let loose in the world."

"SOMETIMES I NEED TO go a bit slower than I would like to go in my organization. I think skills will be very important. I try to get people a broad portfolio of learning so they can be relevant in different scenarios in different futures. With generative AI, it will be interesting to see what the skills are that will really complement AI in the best way, so you can have the best portfolio. Are certain skills going to be obsolete?"

"I AM PREPARING FOR the future by reading as much research data as I can get my hands on. I am trying to learn as much as I can to figure out how to best navigate this and get things where I want them to go. I have a very strong bias to make this work and make hybrid a permanent thing. What do we need to do? I think hybrid first or remote first can work, but you can't just do it without forethought – it has to be very, very intentional, such as equipping leaders and managers with the skills to do it and a lot of things to support it. It would be really nice if we could come up with a playbook where folks could get tips."

Executive Mindset ●

"WE, AND OTHERS, NEED to figure out a game plan for executives that they can use because they don't have the tools. They don't have a road map. So they are just flailing and doing things that don't make sense."

Leadership and Management Perspectives ●

"WE NEED TO STAY open to change as business needs change...what works now may not work in 6 months for everybody the same way."

Leader and Management Training ●

"AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF this skill building and training for the future is how to lead and manage distributed teams that are working in different ways: some remote, some hybrid, some on-site, and still being able to build both teamwork, connectivity, and engagement, and also productivity."

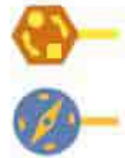
"COMING FROM A LEARNING and development background and executive coaching, I find that I am always trying to play catch up on the new model or new way of thinking about leadership. It is just not sustainable. I could never get ahead of the curve, so I have kind of gone back to this – just be a human, be a good human. It's a paradigm shift for leaders where you know how to treat other people, or you wouldn't have gotten this far in life. Your job as a leader is not to continue doing the work or delegating some of the work – it is 60–70 percent take care of your humans, 30 percent make sure your humans are getting the job done."

"WE'VE BEEN IN THIS kind of old-school mentality about how to lead and manage. That's been so rigid and so investor-focused for so long that I think we're going to have to break past that to get to the next chapter."

Building Back Trust ●

"THERE'S A CONCEPT OF democratization of leadership development. The idea that leadership is still a pretty elite concept where leadership development is for those who go to top schools or big companies that can invest in it. There's so many other aspects of leadership development deeper into organizations. We could all benefit from that – an investment worth making."

"INVESTING IN LEADERSHIP IS key, and we start doing it when you're a manager, 'now you're a leader, we're supporting you with coaching and all of these different things to start developing that mindset.' We also tell individual contributors, 'You have an opportunity to lead as well, and here's what you can do to do that.'"



Future Focus ●

"THERE IS INDEED SOME fear or loss of energy dealing with life in general. But I also feel that in some organizations it's very siloed. Looking more external, there are leaders who are challenging people to help shape the future. If you have that kind of leadership or attitude, and people are pretty interested and have capacity, they can get a positive view like 'My opinion matters, and I can make a difference.'"

"OF COURSE, PEOPLE GET nervous because they feel a lot will be changing, but they don't know if they have a say in it or if they can influence it. So I think stepping out of the silo, especially in HR, and partnering with different functional areas, giving a positive outlook on the future, I think will stimulate people and get them energized and engaged."



"I AM REALLY LOOKING forward to turnover in leadership, generational turnover, when we get people who are more well-versed in understanding people. You shouldn't just be happy that you have a job. Yes, you should be happy to some extent, but I should also be happy that I have you working for me, and I need to understand how to motivate you. That relationship is becoming two-way, and certainly, as we look at people who are graduating from college now and entering the workforce, they might expect it to be

"I'M OPTIMISTIC. THERE ARE a lot of people really leaning into some alternative conversations and saying what we're doing doesn't seem to be helping everybody to thrive. The fact that we are even holding these kinds of conversations brings a lot of hope about us being able to collectively figure something out."

Paradigm Shift

"THE IDEA THAT UNIONIZATION in the US is low and there is a tension with talent now – who wins? The talent wants something that companies don't want to give them right now. I think the impact of the financial market winning is going to be that people bargain together in a different way, whether that's unionizing or simply opting out or opting into different spaces – that will happen."

"DEVELOPING PEOPLE COULD BE tied to the greater good of humanity and society. When you are talking to individual employees, 'I want you to be great here, but if your greatness needs you to go somewhere else, I'm going to support you in doing that, too. I will be the first person to give you a reference that resonates with people.' From the research I've seen, when people hear stuff like this, they change, they stay."

Workplace Culture

"ONE THING I AM trying to do with our teams is shifting that sense of responsibility from just the investors in the bottom line to how we do right by each other so that we enable better performance."

"I WOULD BE MORE likely to go into the office if there was childcare close to on-site. I would be more likely to do things that are convenient to my life if I am working from home. If I'm in the office, particularly in a metro area, it becomes quite hard to go from place to place."

Employee Engagement ■

“**THE NEW GENERATIONS OF** workers want more out of their jobs and career and organizations, and also connection at work. The more technology we throw in, the more remote opportunities, the more people long for human connection.”

Organizational Change ◆

“**AT A MINIMUM, WE** need to be thinking about different types of employment structures, at least in the US. We don't use 'gig' and there are real barriers to that.”

“**CHANGE IS BECOMING QUICKER** and quicker. So, you need to be very agile as an organization to respond to socioeconomic pressures. You need to build in that change ability in your organization as well and move away from fixed jobs and have much more work flowing to certain people, but it requires a different mindset.”

“**BUT IT COULD ALSO** be that you're taking out things that are really interesting for people and that feel like, 'Hey, the identity of my role is really gone. Do I still like what I am left with?'”

“**WE HAVE TO BE** thinking about different constructs as we're thinking about the workplace going forward. How we incent people to be full-time employees is probably going to change—no longer just the bonus or you get this regular salary, etc. There are probably other benefits, mental health, childcare on-site, other things we're going to need to bring to the table.”

“**WE ALL PROBABLY NEED** to work until we're 70 – we need to think differently about how we manage our energy and how we keep that sustainable performance over a longer time.”

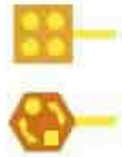
“**I THINK EMPLOYEES SEE** value in being recognized for their 'skill toolbox' and evaluate whether the organization is going to help me add value to my resume, to my portfolio, to my toolbox, or not. That is the real differentiating factor – that's an organization's real competitive advantage – which companies are helping people build their brand and build their career?”

Remote Work Lessons ●

“**I EXPECT THAT WE** are going to keep struggling through this for the next 2–3 years, maybe until we start to find our groove and do all the things we talked about: more training, more data to back up different ways of working, some kind of roadmap, more stable things that leaders and managers can rely on.”

CAREER

4



Performance and Productivity ●

"THERE'S MUCH TO LEARN from high-level athletes and a bit about nature. Rest is really important. To sustain performance, we somehow, along the way, decided that to get more performance and productivity you just push harder."

AI and the Workplace ■

"I THINK THAT THERE'S a real opportunity for us to unlock capabilities from an AI perspective and to be able to utilize that in the workforce. In my opinion, that will only lend itself to having more flexible workforces, like we are kind of battling today."

"I THINK THE ENVIRONMENTAL, social, and legal constructs are all making how we go forward in the world from a working standpoint very interesting. We have an opportunity to take many different roads, and I think all of those will help shape it. But I actually think it's unfortunate there's so many of them because it will mean one has to overtake the others in order for us to have a real theory about where we are going to go."

"I DON'T THINK WE know a lot about how AI will impact work. We have a lot of assumptions, but we miss opportunities because AI is primarily focused on productivity. For example:

- Can I reduce errors?
- Can I increase the wellness of people?
- Can I go to a 4-day work week because I can afford it with some of the productivity gains from AI?
- What are we going to do with the capacity? Fill gaps? Make life more interesting? Make work more interesting?
- Is there a different way of evaluating and sizing certain tasks, etc., with AI so that you really have opportunities to take out certain tasks and divide them much more equally and meaningfully?
- Could you be taking out things that are really interesting for people?
- How much time and investment do we need to train people to work with AI, especially if it is going to be irrelevant in two years?"

Participants' Takeaways

FIGURING THINGS OUT

- There is no grand plan or silver bullet to deal with the current situations we face. We are all struggling with the same issues regardless of geography or industry. Everybody seems to be trying to figure this out.
- AI is going to be part of our future, but it's a journey we're still trying to figure out and what we can learn from each other.
- Things will start settling out where certain industry-specific models make sense. Given that, people will start to find their sort of right tribe or whatever form of work works best for them.
- There's so much we already know, but somehow, we're not applying it. This leadership development concept keeps coming back to what we know about how to run good companies and how to be good leaders. We can get back to some really good fundamentals. Will those guide us through? It feels like we are running around reactively. Should we take back the reins a bit and say, 'Let's just slow down a minute, breathe, and we can figure our way through this through some really good thinking and sense-making?'

CHAPTER
4



PERSONALIZATION

- Overall, we need to personalize and tailor. No silver bullet is one size fits all. We are going to need to be rethinking and looking ahead.
- Use AI to personalize at scale: AI is a benefit to offer personalized benefits, personalized training, personalized care, and personalized work structures.

NEW EMPLOYEE MINDSET

- There is a decrease in loyalty to employees. What I'm seeing is an increase in employees demanding that the company be responsible for their development. They are connected.
- Employers no longer hold employees captive as an audience. Employees are managing their brands and careers. How do we make that our differentiating factor?

STRATEGIES

- Maybe we should hold our ground for a little bit longer before making changes – find out what it is, how to fix issues, and have a bit more accountability around it before changing things.
- We need to find some best practices, but not be rigid in our approach, whether it's facilities or new tools and resources or organizational structure.

- We need to treat people like adults – not children.
- Look at work from an athlete's perspective – you have peak moments, but then you need to take your rest. We need to get better at building this in versus being busy as a badge of honor and keep going all the time.

DEMOCRATIZING LEADERSHIP

- Democratizing leadership is key: equipping managers to manage through a lot of change, but this part isn't settled.
- How do we get CEOs and CFOs of the world to also understand these challenges and then work together to address them? It all seems apparent what we need to be doing, but at least for some of my peers, the CEO doesn't get it, or the CFO doesn't get it, and we don't know how to get through to them.
- We've taken away the onus from our top leaders and spread it amongst different roles and levels across the organization. So, democratizing it, spreading that a little bit, bringing in different viewpoints and lenses on it, and then feeding it back up to the leadership is more useful for us to get their attention with those data points.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- There is a tension between short-term and long-term approaches (e.g., shareholder vs. employee). It feels more acute than it was a couple of years ago.
- There seems to be a lack of intentionality around the future of work and remote vs. hybrid, resulting in almost a knee-jerk return to old habits and biases, and not a willingness to continue to experiment and move us forward to a different future.
- How can we fire a bot?

Chief Human Resources Officers

CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CHRM) is the strategic leadership and oversight of an organization’s human capital strategy, policies, and practices at the highest level. CHRMs involve shaping and aligning the overall vision for workforce management with the organization’s mission, culture, and long-term goals. It focuses on driving organizational success through effective talent acquisition, development, engagement, and retention while fostering a positive and inclusive workplace culture. The role of CHRMs is to provide executive-level guidance, frameworks, and policies that enable leadership teams to optimize employee performance, strengthen organizational resilience, and enhance competitive advantage. It ensures that all HR initiatives are integrated with business strategies. Additionally, CHRMs are responsible for ensuring organizational compliance with labor laws, advancing diversity and inclusion, and anticipating future workforce trends to support sustainable growth.

SANDBOX 5 THEMES

 <p>Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches</p>	 <p>Culture, Belonging & Social Connection</p>	 <p>Change, Adaptability & Agility</p>
 <p>Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles</p>	 <p>Education, Development & Training</p>	 <p>In-Person & Remote Work</p>
 <p>Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning</p>	 <p>Technology & AI</p>	 <p>Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues</p>

PARTICIPANTS

PETER ALLEN

Managing Director,
Allen Strategies LLC

NAVEEN BHATEJA

Executive Vice President,
Executive Advisor,
Medidata Solutions

TARVEEN FORRESTER

Vice President of People,
Kickstarter

RASHMI GUPTA

Chief Human Resources Officer,
Magnit Global

NORMA C. HANLEY

Head of Human Resources,
Hartz Mountain Corporation

SAMANTHA HOWLAND

Chief People Officer,
Gannett Media Inc.

GINGER KING

Chief Human Resource Officer,
Kohler

KAREN KOCHER

Global General Manager
Future of Work,
Workforce of the Future, and
Talent & Learning Experiences,
Microsoft

MONICA POOL KNOX

Founder and Managing Partner,
LegacySeven

JAIME NIELSEN

Chief People Office, Trimble

HEATHER RICKARD

Senior Vice President,
Global Head of Talent,
Cushman & Wakefield

MOE WILKERSON

Vice President, Trimble,
People Experience

NICOLE ZIMMERMAN

Head of Human Resources
and Facilities, GMO, LLC

The Current State

SUMMARY: The discussion focused on how HR is shifting from incremental adjustments to a fundamental rethinking of work. Leaders are navigating hybrid models, AI integration, and shifting workforce expectations while balancing productivity, culture, and activism. Remote work exposes generational divides, and executives struggle to align mandates with reality. As workplaces fragment, HR must rebuild community, redefine leadership, and adapt to constant uncertainty with a more human-centric, agile approach.

KAMARAJ
5



Current State of Human Resources Officers

"A CLASSIC PROBLEM IN HR for a very long time is that we tend to be very incremental, very iterative, and largely, the corporation or organization, has been the same for 50 years or more. And we never really talk about or do anything materially different, or very rarely."

"WE'RE STILL TRYING TO do episodic change because that's what we've always done. And we're trying to do it a little differently, but we're not trying to do it radically different. And yet we're faced with these changes that are so monumental. And so I do think that's something we've got to figure out how to do better in HR, hold ourselves accountable."



Community

"WE'VE LOST COMMUNITY AND what that is in our citizenship in the US, in our town, and our clubs. What community is, it's a gap. We have to establish it. People look to their employers more and more for that glue and their well-being. It's something they can count on even if they're disappointed."

Communication and Connection ■

"I THINK THAT INCREASINGLY remote work is probably not helping because when you're on video, you don't have the benefit of seeing nonverbals. And so, some things can be misunderstood. And so having really strong skills around how to communicate without that complete nonverbal so as not to create more conflict, I think is important."

"REMOTE WORKERS ARE FEELING that it's harder to be connected or people are just choosing happiness over work."

Climate, Culture, and Inclusion ■

"A LOT OF UNDERREPRESENTED employees have this sense of relief from being able to work from home. Women, underrepresented employees, have reported fewer microaggressions and they are having better mental health because of that. And so, this adage that everybody just needs to be in the workplace, ignores the cultural work that needs to be done to ensure that when people do show up in the workplace, they are having psychologically safe interactions with their colleagues. I don't think employers are paying enough attention to that as they put demands on workers to physically be present."

"THE POPULATION IS MADE up of 50 percent introverts, 50 percent extroverts, but yet the work environment is still really designed for extroverts. Introverts, while not underrepresented, found a voice during COVID being virtual, and getting them back to the workplace is creating a challenge."

Civility ■

"A BIG TREND THAT we're seeing is this whole lack of civility."

HR Questions ■

"HOW DO YOU MAKE sure new employees feel connected to the culture and other employees?"

"YOU'RE REVAMPING AND OVERHAULING your entire workforce. Do you revamp your operating model? Do you revamp your employee experience? Do you revamp your HR processes?"

Changing Roles of HR ●

“OUR ROLES ARE CHANGING as HR leaders. We are being pulled into discussions when our leaders don't know what to do, so they're pulling us into discussions of topics we have never traditionally had to really be a part of. And so, it's challenging us to develop a new set of skills. And at the same time, there is very strategic HR work to do. Is there a different role: the psychologist and counselor and all these things that businesses need?”

“WE'VE ALWAYS, IN HR, been preparing for changes. It's part of our DNA. It's part of who we are. It's part of what we signed up for, but everything is just moving under our feet very quickly.”

“WE'VE BROUGHT WORKPLACE AND people together under my leadership, intentionally knowing that more than ever, the workplace and how we can work have to be more tightly linked.”

“ONE OF THE THINGS that I have taken under HR in the last year is actually tracking operational metrics, tracking productivity metrics, and moving them more in the direction of what's meaningful versus 'I need to be in front of the camera,' 'I need to work 8 to 5.' What is the outcome? And moving that conversation to the outcome and is it relevant in a remote working environment?”

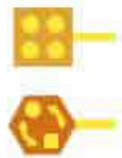
Change ●

“WORK FOR A LONG time was the thing that is most important in people's lives, and that has drastically changed. When I think about work, I think about it as an experience for people. And I think that is also what the social world has done. Everything has become an experience. I also try to lead through the lens of what experience we provide for people.”

“I AM ONE OF those leaders who will probably be leaving the workforce in five years. And it's not uncommon for my company, which is a small company, all of the senior leaders are around the same age. So, in five years, my company's leadership would look completely different. And that is a good thing, but potentially can have some drawbacks. A lot of knowledge is going to be transferred out the door because I happen to work for a company with employees that are there 15–20 years, so a lot of knowledge exits out the door.”

“CAPABILITY TO MANAGE IN such uncertain times. There's uncertainty in the political scene. There's uncertainty in the economic scene and social uncertainty, technology. And so how do we build the capability to manage? Because I don't think that's going away. I don't think there's a solution, an easy button we press and then it's the new normal. And as beings, human creatures, we do need some stability. We do like certainty and that's just not the environment we're in. And so how do we, as leaders, develop the capability to manage in those environments, and then teach that to those who are coming up, who are just starting out their career, help them help themselves so they're not calling us with every drop of the shoe.”

KANDRIX
5



Adaptability ●

"I'M LOOKING AT UNLEARNING a lot of the things that I've learned over the past three decades of being in HR. You've got to be in the office from X time to this time, or this is how the policies look like. So, I'm doing a lot of unlearning myself. And then at the same time, I'm trying to learn to stay plugged in and being adaptable."

"I THINK THAT THE challenge we're running into is that we have all these other reinforcing activities that are happening outside of the workplace that are not naturally developing the skill sets that we're talking about. Problem-solving, learning agility, adaptability, that's going to be absolutely required. And so we really need to lean into that."

"WE'RE FOCUSED RIGHT NOW on building cognitive skills, more specifically creative skills and problem solving."

Technology ■

"AS HR PRACTITIONERS, I really believe we need to get much more comfortable with data. We need to get much more comfortable with the technology and being able to draw insights out of all the data elements that feed into AI, a Gen AI model, or a large language model. Traditionally, HR folks have not been comfortable with data and not been comfortable with drawing insights. But in my opinion, this technology has such implications that we should be leading the conversation and our businesses, everything from, 'What's our right business model?' To, 'How does this technology change the business model?' And then, 'How does it have an implication to the org structure and then our jobs?'"

"I REMEMBER TALKING WITH one of my CEOs and I was asking him, 'What percentage of problems in the business do you think are people problems?' And he was like, '100%.' I thought he was going to say 30%. I was like, 'What about the technology?' 'That's a people problem. You get the right people, you're not going to have a technology problem.'"

"WE'RE ALL OF COURSE focused on learning as fast as we can and experimenting and considering the AI world. And I think equally important is, we're in the people business. How do we continue reinforcing that it's necessary for people to know each other, learn together, do things together, the importance of going back to the basics of how people interact and how you build a relationship, and how you read emotions and how you're situationally showing up with different types and styles and moments and putting that in the mix? We all have touted that AI will not replace that. There will be human interaction where appropriate."

"RATHER THAN SAYING, 'OH, we are implementing AI technology,' I was brainstorming with my team and we thought, 'How about introducing AI as a coworker?' You just bring another coworker to work. How about shifting the mindset and saying, 'Hey, here is another coworker to assist you or to help you, or it's not just to displace or take your job?'"

AI Utilization

"HOW CAN COMPANIES AND employers focus on ethical AI and reducing the biases in the system, because trust is going to be broken if that's not fixed."

Political Environment

"THE CEO AND I and a few other people created an affirmation statement that speaks to different types of social geopolitical topics. One example that I'll share is our focus is affordable, equitable health care for all employees. So, when Roe v. Wade happened, we were able to lean into what we said about equitable, affordable, and give a general statement not about the Roe v. Wade decision, but about what it means for our employees. We go to the grounding of our affirmation statement and then use that to determine to what level we communicate. And at the core we say, if it impacts our employees, we at least need an internal comment. If it's directly impacting our employees, impacting our customer base, then we look more externally. If it doesn't impact our employees or our customers, we're staying silent on it."

Activism

"THERE'S A LOT OF side-talking about issues. This has been cited as one of the biggest challenges that CEOs are having because they can't bring teams together and just work on things when people are having points of view about other global issues. And it's not just necessarily in the US. I think there's some battling happening in other regions around the world, and it's a huge concern. This lack of civility, lack of constructive dialogue, being able to disagree when you have very different points of view on charged issues. We used to be able to do that in the workplace, but it's becoming increasingly more challenging as people identify folks either on the left or the right or in between or whatever the case might be."

"EMPLOYEE ACTIVISM. WHETHER IT'S the government policies or election or race or climate, if you look at the workforce composition over the years, it is tending to be younger. Whether it's the Gen Zs or the Alphas or the Millennials, it matters a great deal to them that you as an organization take a stand. And this is becoming more and more complex. In fact, I think in just the past five years, the most amount of time I would say we've spent as an executive team is not really on getting people back to work, but more specifically on these societal issues and where do we stand. Are we going to take a stand or not even take a stand? And what does that mean for us?"



Managers ●

“MANAGERS ARE NEEDING TO develop a new set of skills to manage this new, at-home, in-office, and hybrid environment, and I don't think we're there yet. I think we've got a lot of work to do to ensure managers are developing the skills that are required in this new workforce.”

“MANAGER EFFECTIVENESS AND THE accountability and the responsibility that we put on managers have become important. But also, what are we doing to up-level and upskill managers? That led me to the thought around remote work does require so much more intention, and it's probably more time-consuming for managers.”

“HOW DO WE GET to a world where an individual can be far more autonomous and a team can be far more dynamic, which means that there's far less, more classical management and leadership?”

“WE DISCONTINUED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 10 years or so ago, and we didn't bring back ratings. What is interesting, we still haven't moved towards any team-based anything. And we know we need to. We moved to a world where you get evaluated on your impact and your contribution for three things:

1. Being successful with your own priorities
2. Helping others, the work you've done in support of others
3. The work you've done that others have been able to leverage to the success of something bigger than yourself or team activities that you're part of

So, we have these three circles and you're accountable when you talk to your manager about what you've done and what you're going to do going forward. And to have equal contribution and impact in each of those, which tends to move people towards caring about and thinking about things other than themselves. So, it gets to teams, but it is definitely not team-based. And I wish we could figure out a way to make it more team-based and we just haven't.”

“FOR ANY OF US who have been in HR for a long time managing during uncertainty, that's nothing new. I think what's new here is really the political climate. There's all these things that are really affecting personal things, that are really affecting the workplace, the whole remote individuals, they don't just bring to work their skills, but whatever is happening at home. So again, an employee may be working remote, happy to work remote, but a manager has difficulty because they're trying to reach them and maybe at that moment, they're not by their computer. They can't get a hold of them. It starts building this distrust.”

Executives ●

"I CAN'T TELL YOU the number of executives who would say to me, 'I'm not sure if my people are working.' And these are senior executives, tons of experience because that's how they grew up in the eighties or nineties. You had to be in the office, you had to do nine to six or nine to five or whatever. And now they can't see their teams. They can't high-five each other. So, is the work being done? Not done? That's the anxiety they were dealing with."

"I THINK THERE'S A little bit of hypocrisy in the system. I sit with the executive team and then they would say, Oh, I want everybody back in the office. And then you ask them, 'Where are your kids?' They're like, 'They're working from home.' Your kids are working from home clearly, but you don't want your employees working from home. So, there's that hypocrisy as well."

Schedule ●

"THE BIGGEST LESSON WE'VE learned, we've been doing this now for two years in our new space, is freedom of choice in schedule."

Remote Work ●

"THE REALITY IS REMOTE work isn't new. Remote work has existed for a long time and there is a lot of literature and surveys and studies and white papers that exist about the best way to approach remote work."

"THE WORLD HAS BEEN evolving and everyone is trying to find a balance and we've been observing some of the bigger companies first going fully remote, Google and then Amazon, and then trying to bring everyone back to the office, and that didn't go very well. And we've been doing our own experimentation, but I don't know that anyone's hit the success formula with that. And one of the things that we have continually considered is, 'What is the right middle ground with that?'"

"WE DON'T HAVE THE option of doing hybrid everywhere because we also took advantage of the market and hired in many different locations. So, not every place has that mass of people to bring them in. And so, we've been trying to do key events, key planning meetings, opportunities to bring people together during some of the key points in their career, like hiring, year-end meetings, et cetera, et cetera, to give them the opportunity to form those relationships that can then be the foundation of a more effective remote work."



"WE HAVE NOT MANDATED [a return to the office]... a lot of companies have, and our CEO jokes at times about, 'Maybe it's just time we mandate.' And I joke back, 'Then you're going to need a new Chief People Officer because I'm not wanting to live in an environment where my team is managing badge swipes. I'm not going to have the infrastructure for it.' We don't have the right systems anyway. So, it would be a nightmare, but getting the leaders to focus on not the butts in chairs equals productivity, but really those measures of success, the measures of productivity, the outcomes-based leadership."

"WE HAD A HUGE DEI focus in 2020 and 2021. And in order to get diverse talent, we hired people that live far away from the office. So now you're telling a bunch of people they have to get back to the office when probably a good 30–40% of our population actually isn't close enough to an office to get into one."

"WE'RE STILL STRUGGLING WITH finding the balance between remote work and making that productive."

Burnout ●

"BUILDING IN SOME INFRASTRUCTURE for people and also educating them about why it's important to stay away from burnout and obviously that's for the benefit of the organization. Burnout is a clinical term and it's important that managers and people understand what burnout does to you. And I think as leaders, we need to be particularly attentive to how that's affecting our people in the workforce."

Workplace and Work Environment ●

"WE'VE HAD TO THINK much more intentionally about new hire onboarding. So, we've created cohorts of people that come together over the course of a quarter that get hired and they stay together for a 12-month period now. And so it's a combination of doing things together, live or hybrid or just virtual so that they experience it in all different ways. But they also have people, because it's anyone who's hired in that quarter that are in all different locations, and it really starts to create a cohort where they can share about their experiences, trying to do that in a hybrid environment."

"IT BECAME HARDER THE longer we were in a remote work environment because there was an influx of new employees coming in who had not met and had not seen what the company looked like pre-COVID. Now we're preparing a different style of onboarding and setting up a different remote workplace expectation regarding employee experience, now involving a dedicated culture experience group that thinks about internal communication, connectivity and community events, and DEI and ESG commitments and doing that all in a space where this is our new environment versus the brick and the mortar environment that we used to be in."

"COMPANIES TYPICALLY DON'T HAVE a problem returning people back to the office if the location is convenient. If enough people are in the office, and if the office has the right amenities, people will go back without a mandate. Whereas in other situations, they have to be mandated and then there is the whole nightmare of, 'I told you to be here on Tuesday, where were you?' which I think is inherently disengaging."

"WHO'S THE TEAM? WHAT'S our purpose? It's that macro, and then micro, how do you work across? These aren't new issues, but there's less anchor of place."

"WE'VE FOUND CLIENT LOCATIONS [for our people to work]. One of our innovative solutions is that we have a lot of people who work directly with the clients. And so we've had people going to client locations and shifting our business model slightly to be able to provide them a place for belonging. To be able to go in once a week, twice a week. So that's one of the ideas that helped us provide a more in-person 'home' to many of our employees."

"DURING COVID, IT WAS extremely intense for everyone, and because you had your kids at home if you had kids or you were trying to take care of parents who couldn't leave their houses and all kinds of other crazy things."

KAMRUKA
5



The Future State

SUMMARY: The conversation around the future of work keeps circling back to the speed and scale of change. Traditional career paths are fading, replaced by a constant need for adaptability, yet most organizations remain structured for stability. HR is caught between competing forces because companies prioritize efficiency and employees seek purpose, development, and security in an uncertain landscape. Hybrid work, AI integration, and generational shifts are accelerating transformation, but many institutions still rely on outdated leadership models. The challenge is not just responding to change but shaping it, reimagining how work is structured, how people are supported, and how organizations remain resilient in a world where uncertainty is the norm.



Preparing for the Future ●

“HOW DO WE HELP instill in workers the opportunity and the responsibility of contributing to something together? It’s never going to end. It’s only accelerating and accelerating. So how do you use adaptive skills to maximize for yourself and contribute the best you can wherever you are when you’re there? That’s a massive issue, but adaptive leadership, adaptive working is the reality. I think so many people don’t recognize it. And of course, the HR and leadership functions and talent functions aren’t necessarily equipped to instill that.”

“I HAVE THIS PERSONAL mission to help this new generation understand how to leverage the HR function, how to think about things in a different way, how to develop themselves so that HR can be the best leaders they can be in this new environment.”

Future Expectations ●

“I THINK ONE THING COVID has taught us is to be agile, to be prepared to meet where the future is at. People, work, workplace, all three are changing at the same time. And I think the only thing we know about the future is that’s going to continue to happen. So my focus, at least, has been on that. As we design our workplace for the future, I think about policies, think about areas of focus. It’s with the mindset of being agile and what might shift and the workforce that’s coming in as well. There’s a lot of generational change that’s happening along with sort of the physical workplace change. So we’re designing our programs with agility, open mindset, and resilience in mind.”

“I DON’T THINK WE’RE ever going back. I think it’s what’s next. I think we’re at the very beginning.”

Change ●

“EVERYBODY’S FOCUSED ON SKILLING or skills, but yet we don’t seem to be talking a lot about skill change velocity. How do we get individuals or organizations to change at the speed that they need to?”

“HOW DO WE HOLD ourselves accountable for some of that radical change that likely needs to happen if our organizations are going to be able to be the high performers and the differentiated ones of the future?”

“ONE OF THE RED threads for me is just helping people and leaders, in particular, and this is more and more a need. Just be adaptive. What is work? What is the purpose of work? What is the process of work? How do I own my own evolution and interaction and reputation and network and navigate never-ending change – that’s opportunity versus something someone did to me or didn’t offer me? So victim versus owner.”

"IT'S THE VELOCITY, AND it's also the magnitude. They're not small things. They're massively big things."

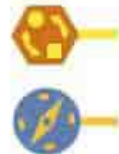
"I DON'T FEEL LIKE leaders are as quickly understanding how impactful and how much of a change that's going to be for the workforce and for leaders and how we lead."

"IN MY MANY YEARS in leading people, I've never focused as much as I am now on a future of work strategy because the technology evolved at a slower pace 20 years ago. At the pace technology is evolving, skills are evolving, and how people at work are evolving, it's so fast that you can't keep up. You can't plan for what's going to be the skills in three years like you used to. You could just see it and predict it. Agility is a perfect way to describe it, this is a large focus and we're being really intentional about it. I think we have to be because we're just gonna otherwise end up falling behind and missing the boat on a lot of things."



Adaptability

"HOW CAN I HELP not only the leadership I have today, but the future leaders of tomorrow in our organization – to really find the skill set that they need in order to manage a hybrid workforce, manage different individuals, different ideas, interactions with individuals, be hands-off, but yet be hands-on? What are the skills? And how do we tap into that so we can invest in those programs and those learning programs that we need in order to do that more and more?"



Managers

"HOW DO WE AS leaders develop the capability to manage in those environments and then teach that to those who are coming up who are just starting out their career, help them, help themselves?"

"SHIFT A GOOD AMOUNT of our training on coaching, which is always part of management training. But I think understanding that managers are coaches and in this environment, connecting with your employees is important."

"HOW DO LEADERS LEAD in this space? How are our strategies changing or evolving, and how are we ensuring that our managers have the skill set and tools to manage a really complex environment? When you look at all of these social issues, you don't just deal with one of them, it is the intersectionality of many of them with a very global diverse population and getting your leaders to work through that complexity is a different way of leading than how they led, even pre-pandemic."

Executives ●

"HOW DO YOU LEAD in a hybrid world you don't expect and should not expect your employee to be using the mouse on their screen, not showing inactive 24/7? It's a different mindset and that's something which we have been training and having discussions with the managers."

Technology ■

"THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT AI is going to be infiltrating or integrating into almost everything we do. And the question is how, right? How do we adapt to it? How do we get comfortable with technology? How do we make it secure?"

"IF I JUST TALK about AI and the skills transformation, so not only are you helping employees get upskilled, but you're also allaying their fears if they're getting redeployed somewhere else because they might be displaced, right? So how do you keep the anxieties calm for people and their jets remain cool, over a period of time that they're not freaking out about this entire thing."

"RELIANCE ON SYSTEMS AND technology to support your ability to be agile felt more optional at the time, and now it feels like you really need to be able to have technology integrated into your process."

AI Utilization ■

"THERE'S POTENTIAL FOR AI to take on a significant amount of work that we no longer have to have in the system. That is a barrier to changing as rapidly as we could and as readily as we could."

"ONCE WE IMPLEMENT THE AI solution that we are implementing, are we retraining workers? And if we're retraining them, are they interesting in getting retrained and how are we going to be redeploying? And this process takes a while and it's not an overnight process."

"HOW DO YOU ACTUALLY have AI take on roles and responsibilities that unburden people?"

Remote Work ●

"I THINK I REALLY take an approach of, 'How do we study and learn what remote work excellence looks like, and then emulate that internally?' The 4-day workweek is not new, but there's lots of things we can do to structure a 4-day workweek well."

“HOW DO YOU READ a room? How do you take up those views if you are always online, and you haven't learned the nonverbal cues? If you're going to ascend, be a manager, be a leader, you've got to have that skill set. But you gotta practice it too. So, I think those are some of the challenges we really need to get in front of.”

“HOW DO YOU ARGUE?
How do you problem-solve?
How do you do all those things?”

“GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY to form those relationships that can then be the foundation of a more effective remote work.”

“GIVE THEM THE OPTION if they want to be in the office, have the office facility available to them where they can come and do their best work, do collaboration or whatever's needed.”

“WHEN I SAY HYBRID, I don't mean 50-50. What works in your context? If you've never had a remote working muscle, then hybrid for you can't be 50-50. It needs to be what serves your purpose, right? The stage and age of your company matters. The behavior of the executive team matters.”

“THIS WHOLE CONCEPT OF frictionless experience that connects all the worlds in which we work, I think it's something that we need to solve for from a behavior perspective, from a technology perspective, from a culture perspective. And what I mean by that is that we're gonna have scenarios where people are working like this. We're gonna have people who are in a physical facility, we're gonna have people who are working in virtual environments partnering with AI, how does all of that become seamless and with less friction? And when I have to engage in any of those environments, how does that become a bit of an omni-channel approach where you can just meet people where they are?”

Healthcare ●

“HOW DO YOU REALLY care for the whole person, avoid burnout, in this fast-paced environment, yet manage your rising healthcare costs?”

Communication and Connection ■

“A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY and being able to articulate what a community is, and how people are expected to show up in that has led to a reduced sense of tension that exists around political issues or DEI issues. Try to stay rooted in the fact that we're all citizens and we're all like members of this community and a community is built on a place in space where we're welcome to show up with different ideas and perspectives, but we respect each other's perspectives. Leading from a place of respect is really important to my approach as a people leader.”



Skills

“HOW DO WE DEVELOP not just the digital dexterity or fluency, but also how do we develop the cognitive skills, problem-solving, creative thinking, resiliency, adaptability?”

Workplace and Work Environment

“THE NUMBER ONE PREDICTOR of team performance is social cohesion. The other thing that we’ve been looking at is the remedy to burnout and the way people become resilient. I think that a person isn’t resilient, but a team is. And the idea that [we] need to take care of ourselves and that’s worth a commute sometimes. You know what I mean? It’s worth that to be in the same room and to solve problems.”

“IF THE IDEA IS that collaboration, visibility, community, wellness – if you can talk about the idea that teams are what make work happen and solve problems – sometimes you need to physically be in the same room. That’s what we try to talk to our clients about – it’s not a mandate, rather it’s a necessity to solve big hard problems, like we tend to get some success there.”

“AS YOU MOVE AWAY from so much role-based orientation and more toward project-based work, you’re not on a static team, which doesn’t mean you can’t get all the same benefits that we’re all describing, but it definitely will happen differently. How do people feel? How do people help generate some of that dynamism and connection and cohesion when you may be on four or five teams, and they may be constantly ebbing and flowing off one on another?”

Participants' Takeaways

FUTURE IS NOT PREDICTABLE

- As humans, we like predictability, we like certainty, but the reality is, we're living in an environment where there's increasing uncertainty. Change that's happening at a higher velocity.
- Disruption and complexity are our new normal, and our people's strategies need to be more agile than ever to be adaptable to what's coming at us.
- We have to continually evolve. We have to continually challenge ourselves to unlearn. Who am I not listening to? Who should I be talking to, to make sure I don't have an entrenched mindset that doesn't really reflect what's happening today? Leading is a team sport.
- How do we do a better job of building community and psychological safety within those communities? Adaptability, curiosity, learning agility, these are so important. So how do we hire or promote based on those values versus the traditional, 'Have they done this job before'?

KAMARAJ
5



HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE?

- We can't predict the future of work. If the past can tell us one thing, it's that it will change. In whatever we design, we're using agility. We're providing structure. We're building cultural resilience. We know what we're experiencing today, but this will change, especially with generational gaps and world events and all of that.
- We need new thinking and a proposition to the opportunity, motivation, rewards of work versus what we don't want. We don't want to go back to something – commutes, boring stuff, stagnant career paths. What's the opportunity?
- We need to keep our eyes focused on what needs to happen in the future and just work through and manage what's happening now. It's easy to get into fight-or-flight mode in these types of environments. Encourage the team to stay grounded, and skate to where the puck's going versus being highly reactive.
- Values and people networks are more important than ever.
- Being innovative, it's just a must-have.

MANAGERS IN THE CENTER?

- Leaders and managers are still assumed to be in the center.
- I think we have to start to move towards a world where the employee and the team is more the center and the managers and the leaders are more the peripheral players that help enable and inspire and influence and energize versus being the center of things.

IMPACT OF AI

- We just have to be thinking about AI all the time because it's going to influence everything we do.
- AI and the pace of technology, how technology evolves, it's changing the way we work, and it's changing how people learn, it's changing how they show up at their jobs, how they collaborate with others, and it's changing how leaders lead.

POLITICAL CHANGES

- Bringing your whole self to work. But now we're faced with political changes worldwide and within the country.
- The future of work, and particularly the people's function, cannot be dissociated from politics and geopolitics. In this time of immense change, all have direct implications for us, both as individual humans and as people who are responsible for the human side of business. And we really need to be thinking about that.
- We can't allow ourselves to get distracted or let the pendulum swing based on what's going on in the US.

HR ROLES HAVE EVOLVED

- Some of the things we've been dealing with as HR leaders fell into our lap. Our roles have grown. We become psychologists and counselors and while we're designing organizations and helping our leaders stay current with what's happening and solve some of the challenges like, 'What is your company stance with this political environment?', mental health and other health care challenges, hybrid work economics.
- We as HR leaders have to put on our own oxygen masks, right? Because we are being asked by the business to help them navigate through these changes.
- Re-architecting the people leader role and getting clear on what a core competency should be. Or what core competencies should be in a people leader role. I think we also have to hold ourselves accountable and measure against that standard. Because I think often we'll defer to the technical expertise and the traditional leadership competencies that we looked at.
- We're looking at the future of work. I'm thinking, what is the future people-leader and people step? What is that going to look like? Because everything is evolving. People leaders of 20 years ago don't have the same skill set as today. As I am hiring new leaders into my HR organization, what do I need to look for? What is the profile? Because these will be the future HR leaders.

Work Psychologists

THE FIELD OF WORK PSYCHOLOGY is vast, encompassing experts who study human behavior in work settings to enhance employee well-being, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. Work psychologists apply principles of psychology to areas such as leadership, motivation, team dynamics, and workplace design. They often rely on the same set of frameworks to address a wide range of workplace challenges – yet these frameworks are not always the right fit. There was an underlying sense of optimism that, with a shift in resources and a stronger emphasis on systems thinking, researchers and practitioners could bridge the gap between knowledge and application. The depth of their expertise serves as a solid foundation – one that, if leveraged effectively, could accelerate the impact of work psychology in real-world settings.

SANDBOX 6 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 Education, Development & Training	 In-Person & Remote Work	 Collaboration & Organizational Design	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning
 Technology & AI	 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors

PARTICIPANTS

TALYA BAUER

PhD, Cameron Professor
of Management,
Portland State University

TARA BEHREND

PhD, Professor,
Michigan State University

JOAN BRANNICK

PhD, President,
Brannick HR Connections

GILAD CHEN

PhD, Robert H. Smith Chair
in Organizational Behavior,
University of Maryland

ALEXIS FINK

PhD, VP People Analytics, Meta

CHESTER HANVEY

PhD, Director,
Berkeley Research Group LLC

TRACY KANTROWITZ

PhD, Chief Professional
Services and Product Officer,
PDRi

STEVE KOZLOWSKI

PhD, World Class Scholar and
Distinguished University Professor,
University of South Florida

MORTON MCPHAIL

PhD, Retired

MINDY SHOSS

PhD, Professor,
University of Central Florida

NANCY TIPPINS

PhD, Principal,
The Nancy T. Tippins Group LLC

SUZANNE TSACOUMIS

PhD, President & CEO, HumRRO

MO WANG

PhD, Distinguished Professor and
Lazillotti-McKethan Eminent Scholar,
University of Florida

The Current State

SUMMARY: Many were struck by how deeply intertwined work, technology, and social change have become. Discussions on AI, workforce development, and industrial-organizational (I/O) psychology highlighted both opportunities and risks. The shifting nature of careers, from stable lifelong employment to dynamic skill-based work, raises questions about economic mobility, retirement, and the long-term impact of automation. Concerns about AI's ethical use, legal uncertainty, and its effects on job selection and performance management reveal a workforce in transition. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that work cannot be viewed in isolation. It is shaped by interdisciplinary collaboration, social structures, and evolving human expectations.

LANDROCK
6

Current State of I/O Psychology

"SOME OF THE STRENGTH of I/O psychology from the get-go has been interconnectedness. It connects psychology to the end of human experience to society and the world of work. And that's always been there in different ways. I think that always requires us to push ourselves to think about trends outside our field."

"I THINK THERE ARE disciplines out there that are really powerful, that view the work we do very positively and want to engage, like economists, entrepreneurs, more macro researchers like sociologists. And we play very well to that. Also engineers and computer scientists, especially when it comes to AI."

"INTERCONNECTEDNESS IS A CRITICAL competency that we need to focus on in the field. Yes, we need to know the bread and butter of our field, but we need to push our students from early on to recognize that you live in an interconnected world that you need to be aware of and then find a way to work on it."



Technological Tools ■

"MY AREA OF GREATEST expertise would be in selection. The current state of that is changing rapidly with the advent of technologically enhanced selection tools. That ranges everything from asynchronous interviewing to gamification, and of course, the use of machine learning algorithms to power artificial intelligence."

"FROM AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, we're recognizing that AI is the thing of the day. A couple decades ago, it was computer-based testing and then it was remote proctoring, but you recognize the growing technologies from the different fields and the advances they have and see how we can use it in a way that allows us to still incorporate our standards, our methodology, so that we're making sure we're still delivering products that, as a field, meet our standards."

"I RECENTLY HAD A conversation with some computer science folks on campus, and they were creating a technology to replace Zoom, to do virtual work, and they talked about validating the technology. After listening a little while, I realized what they mean by validation is computing power, and load speed, and things like that. And my question to them was, 'Do people even like this? Can people sit all day and wear this heavy headset on their head and actually work? And how does this shape teams?'"

"I'M TALKING TO A colleague who uses virtual reality to train executives, as well as how venture capitalists assess teams of entrepreneurs. I have research that uses ChatGPT to measure different things. The scary part is that if you frame it in the right way, ChatGPT and humans agree really closely, correlations like 0.7 and so forth."

Uses of AI ■

"APA HAD A RECENT survey where they found that something like 30 percent of people are using AI in some capacity in their jobs based on their respondents, which, I think, tries very hard to be representative, but it's still going to skew towards people who are doing computer jobs on some level."

"I'D SAY IN MY world it's not so much that robots or autonomous entities are going to replace existing people, but rather it tends to be viewed as augmentation in some fashion.... How do you design these artificially intelligent entities in ways that enable better collaboration with people? I didn't give them social skills."

"I'VE SEEN A LOT of effective use of artificial intelligence in the military services, and they use it for repetitive kinds of activity. So it's the generation of test items for different forms of testing, and the Department of Defense has the most elaborate testing program I've ever seen. And the labor behind getting forms that are equated across year after year after year is unbelievable."

"CAN WE COMPLETELY RELY on AI? Wouldn't you always want human oversight? Would you ever send out a research paper that you've never looked over?"

AI Projects ■

"I HAD AN EXECUTIVE MBA student who's got an AI firm that works with medical professionals, hospitals, and so forth. What you're talking about is basically the language use. How that differs. He mentioned that he created this app that helps with FDA approval. Let's say you have an FDA team that also connects with a team in China. We use AI to basically help translate nuanced use of the terms so they can have a common discussion. All of a sudden you have an AI almost as a member of the team to basically translate and help each other."

"I HEARD A STATISTIC. I think 92% of AI projects fail. Why? Not because of the engineering, but because of the workspace and the people. Does it actually accomplish what they set out to accomplish and have people accept and use it?"

"I'VE YET TO SEE the intelligence in artificial intelligence... I haven't seen the promise realized yet. So there are a lot of expectations for what this is going to do and I think they are widely unrealistic. I also see the dark side. I'm not going to reveal too much, but one of the challenges in science right now is the quality of scientific publications, and whether or not we can trust the data, and the inferences that are being made."

AI Selection Tools ■

"AI TOOLS ARE DESIGNED to generally be pretty accessible. But in the work I do, in assessment and selection, it's like whack a mole these days. AI tools are popping up everywhere. There are paid subscriptions for \$250 a month where you can get access to an AI tool that will stream in real-time responses to live interview questions. So you're talking to a real person in real-time and the AI is telling you what to say. I mean, it's horrifying, frankly."

"RIGHT NOW, THERE ARE many, many rules, guidelines, and standards for employee selection, and it's not clear which ones actually apply to AI forms of selection tools. And there's been a lot of work, a lot of concentration, about, 'What should be the rules?' and I think that in the future we are going to come up with a set of standards that's basically saying, 'I'm going to have to be able to demonstrate the same kinds of things with these new, innovative tools that you've always had to demonstrate with more traditional forms of tools.'"

"I'VE ATTENDED A FEW legal conferences recently, and lawyers are equally confused about what to do about AI selection tools. A lot of the attorneys that I've heard are really questioning whether there's actual value above and beyond the traditional selection options."



AI and Education ■

“WHAT’S A RESPONSIBLE WAY even to equip people with AI skills? It struck me this week as my kids started back to school and they all brought home their class syllabi with all these anti-AI prohibitions. It’s not practical and I don’t know that it’s serving the next generation very well either. And good luck policing it too.”

“I’M CONCERNED ABOUT THE way we do workforce development and education. What are we actually training people to do? If it’s to think, then yeah, they shouldn’t use a shortcut of any sort, but that’s a good prohibition. They shouldn’t cheat. But if it’s to just do a prompt engineering job, then they should get as much practice as possible, I suppose, in that skill.”

Workers Partnering with AI ■

“I’LL POINT OUT THAT we also need to be training people how to work well with automation, and in particular, AI. Friedman pointed out years ago that one of the coming things that will happen with AI is not necessarily the replacement of workers, but the partnering of workers with artificially intelligent devices.”

“THE ISAAC ASIMOV VIEW of the humano-robot, the robot that looks like a person and has two arms and two legs, that’s not what’s happening. We’re not getting that. What we’re getting is a machine that is able to do things that appear to be intelligent but working alongside a human being.”

AI and Job Replacement ■

“THIS IS ALL AIMED at professionals. If I’m on a car assembly line, I need to be there. If I’m in a restaurant serving people, I need to be there. So these are folks who can be remote, but they’re going to be targeted by the future work bots and autonomous entities, et cetera. That’s the buzz. The bots are coming.”

“WE’RE BUILDING A SOCIETY rather than just trying to maximize profit or some other bottom-line outcome. It’s a very different type of approach.”

“I STRONGLY SUSPECT THAT the motivations behind some of the use of AI will be less altruistic, worker-oriented and more profit and efficiency-oriented. I’m a little concerned that we’re overlooking how that will affect workers.”

“ONE VERY CLEAR UPSIDE of new technologies is that a person maybe doesn’t need to do physically demanding labor.”

AI and Legal Trends ■

"I'M WORKING ON A paper right now and we brought in a lawyer that would generally deal with case law because there is not really anything out there that says AI is good or AI is bad from a legal perspective. What seems to be happening with the EEOC is that they're very much alarmed about some of the models that don't really predict based on criteria. Instead, what they do is they say, 'Here's a group of people who are the ten best performers you identified.'"

"THERE'S CERTAINLY A BIG focus in the EEOC on disability. They came out with standards for using AI with the disabled but not for anyone else... An older worker applying for an entry-level job is quite different from an entry-level person who just entered high school."

"I WAS SPEAKING WITH a woman at one company and she was talking about how AI-based tools review the materials that an individual sends in. So there might be a letter and a resume. One of the big differentiators for this job was whether you play baseball or softball. It turns out men play baseball, women play softball. Well, I guess that could have occurred in the past, you could have looked at it and said, 'This resume from a person with an androgynous name plays softball, therefore, it must be a woman,' but now the artificial intelligence captures that very quickly and easily."

Technology's Harmful Effects on Communities ■

"THESE DATA CENTERS ARE incredibly energy intensive, and the effects on communities, not just the people directly involved, with the second order effects, are not on our radar enough."

Manufacturing ■

"MANUFACTURING MAY NOT NEED as many people, but the people they need now have to do primarily troubleshooting issues and problems that come up with the machinery. And do heavy data analysis, critical thinking, and problem-solving."

Aging Workforce and Retirement Trends ■

"PEOPLE'S LIFESPANS ARE CLOSER to 100 than 65. And yet we have a retirement system that assumes a very different reality. Given population changes, is our system really enough for this? There's a general trend that the retirement age in all different countries is getting older and older. Those are for the countries that have mandatory retirement requirements. In the United States, we also see that two-thirds of the retirees actually do some type of paid work in their retirement."



Age Discrimination ■

“THERE’S EVIDENCE OF SIGNIFICANT age bias, at least in some industries where older workers have a terrible time getting hired, concerning performance reviews, et cetera, as well as the cost to organizations for increased healthcare for that population that makes them a little squeamish.”

“THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT age discrimination is when you enact age discrimination, you’re actually discriminating against yourself because everyone becomes older one day.”

“AGE DISCRIMINATION CAN BE in two ways. It could be discrimination against the older workers, but can also be discrimination against the younger workers. We would love to see a more comprehensive research study on this, especially how you would actually tackle the real world.”

Career Transition ■

“IF WE’RE TALKING ABOUT educating the workforce, you’re not gonna start a job and retire from the same organization, maybe not even the same occupation. So we need to think about career transition.”

“IT’S BEEN SAID FOR a long time that rather than having a lifelong job, you may not even have a lifelong career. Are people, in fact, changing careers? Are they in fact refocusing from their early education into new areas? I have anecdotal evidence of that, but I don’t know if there’s any substantive in-depth research on it.”

Retirement ■

“I’M AWARE OF ONE study of when people retire in China of all places, and it talks about how men versus women differ. Men are more likely to look for another job post-retirement primarily for cultural reasons. They want to maintain a sense of pride and so forth.”

“A LOT OF TIME people [in dying industries] just naturally retire. They don’t come back to the job market. The issue is when they just retire, their financial situation is not bad. But then in 10 years or even just in five years, they realize they have limited financial capacity. And then at that time, when they go back on the market, it will be very hard for them to find high-quality jobs. That’s because they didn’t really pay attention to updating their skills.”

“IN THE UNITED STATES long-term care system, half of it is, you are on your own. So basically, if you are above the poverty line, you are not on Medicaid, then you are on your own. You have to pay for everything yourself. And as soon as all your money runs out, then you are in Medicaid, and then the government will take over.”

“WHEN WE TALK ABOUT the effect of age and retirement, there’s a substantial difference based on the actual job functions being performed. The more physically demanding jobs are, the less you’re going to see people wanting to work longer in those jobs, or being physically able to perform those jobs longer.”

Generational Differences ■

“SOME OF THE RESEARCH I know on generational differences has largely been debunked and it’s not really widely accepted any longer, but it still remains out there in common parlance among executives who still think in terms of the Gen X, Gen Y, the millennial, even though there’s not substantive data to really support differences in those groups.”

Gig Jobs ■

“ONE POINT ABOUT GIG economy is oftentimes it’s subpar employment because people don’t work full-time. They don’t generally get the benefits they deserve. It’s actually used as a substitution for people who actually couldn’t find proper employment. So yeah, people always say, ‘It offers flexibility, right?’ But actually, it is a lower quality form of employment.”

Growing Inequality in the Workforce ■

“YOU REALLY HAVE ESSENTIALLY two different workforces with very different sets of experiences right now. You have a large portion of the workforce that due to the nature of their work, cannot work remotely – that’s anyone from hotel attendants to professional occupations such as physicians and so forth. When you think about the future of work, there’s so many different jobs that are included, stratified by income level and use of computers and AI and bot technology as well.”

Regional Differences ■

“IT WOULD BE GOOD to have an awareness of regional differences. Think about the regional economies, and how much that matters when we talk about the future of work. Michigan is a manufacturing economy and the future of a manufacturing economy is a different question than the future of the Bay Area, for example.”



Dying Industries

"JUST ANECDOTALLY, BUT I'VE definitely done some consulting in companies that were basically dying industries. You're looking at the employees that are working there thinking, 'I don't know how much longer you have. Hopefully, you can make it to retirement.' I don't have any data on this, but my sense is that a lot of folks in those industries aren't necessarily looking to upskill themselves to be able to make that transition."

Changing Work Attitudes and Expectations

"A LOT OF PEOPLE are frustrated with the people they work with, and especially supervise. The people that report to them have changing expectations about work, people not coming to work with the same attitude."

"CRITICAL THINKING, ABILITY TO learn, it's kind of a 1990s talent war idea. Just get the smartest people. Well, that led to Enron, so maybe we don't want that either."

"TREATING EMPLOYMENT AS A genuine opportunity for growth as opposed to a purely extractive proposition where it is, 'Let me get as much out of you as I possibly can for the lowest possible input.' And then if I break you and use you up, that's not really my problem. There's a line behind you."

Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other Characteristics (KSAO) Model

"EVEN FOR WORK DESIGN, the traditional KSAO model is not really out. You substitute things in the KSAO model. The knowledge, skill, ability, and others, depending on the job you're designing. If the job involves having it with AI or programming capability, then the KSAOs will be very different."

"WHAT'S CHANGING IS CONCEPTUALIZING work from distinct jobs to fungible skills, or talent pools that have been assessed or codified on KSAOs so that people could be deployed to different projects and in a super fungible way. This concept of a job order goes out the door. We're going to think of our talent and then design teams accordingly."

Performance

"WE HAVEN'T DONE A very good job of expanding the performance domain. We are looking at, 'Do you do your job?' We're not looking at the underlying skills very well. We are looking at it in an old-school kind of way. And now what we've done is we've added AI into the mix. We've added remote working. What kind of KSAOs does it require in order to be effective working alone, or working with a different kind of relationship?"

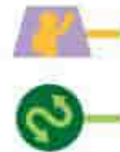
"I HAVE WORRIED FOR a long time about when talent management or disability law requires you to make a suboptimal short-term choice in service of a more important long-term choice. I've had situations as an HR professional. I'm sure those of you who follow disability law know that if there is someone who becomes disabled, can no longer fulfill their job at the company, but there is a job that's open for which they meet the minimum requirements, you don't get to hire the best person for that job. You have to put the person with a disability in that job that they meet the requirements for. Because that's a long-term goal of supporting employees with disabilities."



"DON'T FORGET ABOUT THE role of the government agencies and laws that would be inappropriate to select someone, an entry-level job, for long-term potential. You can select people for the job to which they may go within a reasonable period of time, which is not well defined. You can't say, 'I'm going to go to the best colleges and universities and select the people we think are going to be CEOs in the future.'"

Ability to Influence Others

"SO THIS IS FROM 15 years ago. What we found [at our large tech company] was that the ability to influence other people mattered more than technical skill in your ability to be effective and perform in that high-knowledge worker environment. Adaptability is important. We didn't call it 'learning agility,' but this idea of the ability to scan the environment, identify patterns that might make you shift a strategy, make a thoughtful decision about when it was important to stay the course and when new information would make you budge, that was a core differentiator for performance."



Legal Trends at Work

"A FAIRLY HOT TOPIC that's had some pretty high-profile cases is pay discrimination. The way that I look at it, there are two parts to it. One is, 'Are there actual differences in pay?' But the other part, and the part where I tend to have more involvement is, 'Are the jobs that are being compared actually similar?'"

"PROMOTIONS ARE A CLOSELY related issue. I've had several clients who have many women at the bottom of the hierarchy. And as the promotions go up, the proportion of women decreases and the proportion of men increases. There's no obvious reason, and it's a very difficult problem. Is it a self-selection problem? Are the women saying, 'I really don't want headaches, I don't want the lack of flexibility that's going to come with this, I don't want to have to be in the office because I've got three school-aged children at home?' or is it because of some forms of discrimination that keep them from being fully considered for these jobs?"



"SOME OF THE LITIGATION will include a steering claim that the company is steering its workers towards certain jobs. That's always a tough one to demonstrate empirically. The allegation is there at least."

"I ACTUALLY READ A thing on the job descriptions that are posted online. So you look at it and you say, 'Am I qualified for this job or not?' Someone had done research on these and said that there are certain characteristics of job descriptions that make it more masculine or more feminine. And all of the ones that are feminine pay less than the ones that are masculine."

"I WORKED WITH A company that on its face had neutral policies that had disparate impacts on women. One of them was that in order to be promoted, you had to go to the headquarters location, which was in a very expensive part of California, and a disproportionate number of men accepted that opportunity. A disproportionate number of women rejected it and for different reasons."

Legal Compliance in Remote Work ●

"ONE ASPECT OF REMOTE work that impacts the work that we do on the legal side is compliance with wage and hour laws. It's much more difficult to ensure that folks are taking rest breaks, taking meal breaks, not working off the clock – that's a lot harder to enforce. If you're in litigation, it's a lot harder to have data to show that there is compliance."

Impact of Remote Work on Socialization and Collaboration ●

"OUR FIELD KNOWS ABOUT socializing new employees and creating collaborative relationships that underlie innovation and organizational learning. That happens mostly informally with people interacting with each other, not sitting in a Hollywood squares environment. I've been amazed at how quickly we transitioned to remote work, at least as part of one's working schedule during COVID, and it persisted. I wonder about the long-term effects on organization effectiveness, because I don't see much attention to how we replace what we've lost."

"COMMUNITY ISOLATION. A LOT of things that help us cope with the stressors of work and outside of work, having close relationships, a significant purpose at work. It's going to diminish the mental state of the employees and the physical health of employees but then translating that means we've got a lot of unhappy, unhealthy people."

Onboarding and New Hires ●

“SOCIALIZATION AND ONBOARDING JUST are a perfect storm of all of these things because the remoteness, the newness, seeing and observing that people who are new want to be told exactly what to do, and it's such a paradox. But it makes sense, because there's uncertainty, no one likes to be unclear. It's easier once you've met people and you establish relationships to then go remote. But we didn't have that during the pandemic, and so I had no answers.”

“ONE OF THE THINGS I've noticed when trying to onboard people, even into my own team, is if someone is lost and they're 15 feet away from me, I can see on their face that they're struggling and I can go over and help them. And if they're on a computer, it might take me two or three weeks before I realize that there's a critical database they don't know how to access or whatever the issue is.”

“WE'VE HAD SOME INTERNS and some of the other younger folks that wanted more personal touch, like they wanted to come into an office, which surprised me a little bit. But those younger folks want to be able to access the more senior individuals and get more information, in-person development, and in-person mentoring, or at least establishing those connections because it's easier to do that if you see them in the hallway than to have to ask them for a Team's meeting or try to call them that way.”

Impact of Remote Work on Professionals ●

“WE USE THE WORD collaborate a lot. It's so much easier to collaborate, but I think that it's getting overused and people are really missing some [important challenging work]. What is really challenging to do? It doesn't mean you can't do it when you're working full-time remotely. I'm seeing that it's easier for people not to do it. They get pulled into other things. They may be trying to juggle other types of commitments, still putting the hours in. I'm not suggesting that these people aren't working like they're supposed to be, but it seems a little bit more, and I'm going to exaggerate here a little bit, but a little bit more like dialing in – doing what they need to do, rather than really thinking deeply about some things.”

Work From Home and Return to Office ●

“THERE WERE SOME PREDICTIONS that when things settle down from the pandemic, companies are going to start requiring people to come into the office a certain amount of time. And so we've been seeing that trend. And I see that trend continuing. You also see other companies who don't want to reduce their footprint from a company perspective.”



“WHAT I WOULD WANT to have happen is a hybrid solution. I think we need to be flexible. I think we need to recognize people’s commitments. But there is something to be said about being in person.”

“THIS IS COMING MORE from my experience with a couple large tech companies. In some of my conversations with executives, they’re just like, ‘I don’t know what’s going on. And I don’t like that.’ If you were really clear about what people needed to deliver and you were really clear about what the results were, and they were turning in those results, and you had good systems to support it, then there would be less of this underlying anxiety around ambiguity.”

“I HAD THAT ARGUMENT about having to return to office and anybody you hire has to be in an office. And it’s like, ‘Well, what if they’re the only person in the office? That’s dumb to force them to commute an hour, sit there, put on a clean shirt, all the things. And they sit in Hollywood squares all the time anyway.’ And the pushback I got was, ‘But somebody has to be first. And until there’s somebody in the office, the next person doesn’t have anybody in the office.’ So it was really taking a systems view as opposed to what’s functional for that individual.”

“[RETURN TO OFFICE] VARIED at first, but then I do see most people coming in on their own, like Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, because they see that other people are gonna be there, that’s usually when we have all-hands meetings or we’ll provide lunch for everybody and that type of thing. So we try to encourage that. And I’ve also seen the managers do that on their own too, saying, ‘Hey, why doesn’t everybody, if you’re gonna do three days a week, let’s have it these three days.’”

“I GAVE THE COMPANY a heads up saying, ‘Okay, I want everyone to start coming back to the office six months from now, so be prepared to start coming in slowly.’ And they started coming in.”

“MY AREA OF EXPERTISE right now is just running a company, so it’s less from a research perspective. We have professionals and we have administrative staff as well. The younger staff sometimes seem a little bit more entitled, but they are really valuing their personal life and work is not everything to them. So they really do want to be able to try to find a balance with that.”

“I’M FINDING THAT SOME of the older generation, they may have kids and stuff, want a little bit more flexibility in their schedule. I think it’s going to continue to be fluid, I’m not sure we’re going to ever get to an everywhere full-time remote. There are even our full-time remote people who ask, ‘Can we come in and meet in person,’ or, ‘I wish there was a way we can connect more,’ and we spend a lot of time trying to make them feel more connected.”

“AT LEAST IN MY experience, we’ve been much better at blanket rules. Everybody has to be in three days a week. Everybody has to do X, Y, or Z. As opposed to front-line managers who need to be in the office so they’re accessible. People in their first two years of their career need to be in the office as they’re ramping up.”

“WHAT I DID A few years ago is I purchased a townhouse near the office. As a corporate place so that when people from other remote locations want to come, we have a place for them to make it easy to come. You can stay a week, it won’t cost anything. It’s so much cheaper than a hotel, frankly.”



Interdisciplinary Work

“WE NEED TO BE more interdisciplinary in our thinking. We need to think outside our lane a little bit and work with people from other lanes. So if it’s AI, it’s not just human factors. It’s the people who write the codes, people who make economic decisions, political decisions that affect all that globalization and deglobalization decisions.”

Multidisciplinary Collaborations

“I REALLY THINK WE have to be multidisciplinary. I have collaborations with computer scientists for new measurement tools. Not for selection purposes, but for quality team interactions and collaboration, for analytics that we simply don’t have in psychology, and then computational modeling, which really isn’t with computer scientists but that’s kind of the domain that it speaks to.”

Challenges of Societal Structures

“THERE’S A NUMBER OF societal structures that support being able to work full-time in an office or an inside environment. A lot of those have gone, were always somewhat diminished, I think, but have been further diminished coming out of the pandemic.”



Is the Workforce Declining?

“UNEMPLOYMENT IS DOWN, BUT unemployment doesn’t count people who are not seeking a job, who are just like, ‘Forget it.’ That’s a different category of person. I think I saw that in some communities, something like 40 percent of men are in the workforce. It’s like, ‘It’s not worth it. I don’t want to work in fast food and not make a living wage. And so, I’m just not going to do it.’”



Lawsuits

“**SOME OF THE AI** lawsuits are more about the responsibility of the vendor rather than the artificial intelligence itself, like the Mobley versus Workday lawsuit, I think it is. And that’s a fairly micro level, but I have got to educate myself that the things that we’re talking about today didn’t exist when I was in graduate school.”

“**ONE OF THE OTHER** things that’s happening is we’re seeing this explosion of tools being built by people who are coming from a purely rational, statistical place as opposed to one rooted in principles of I/O psychology or coming out of an HR place. And so the argument I had with some of these people was like, ‘Hey, it predicts performance, that’s all I care about.’ I say, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa. There’s employment law here.’ They are like, ‘You know what? Don’t bother me with your petty concerns. I can predict performance. That’s what my job is.’”

Income Inequality

“**[RELATED TO] REMOTE WORK**, what happens when a bunch of really high-paid people move to a small rural town and that town is totally overwhelmed and their economy is distorted because of that? How do we think about the people who are affected by these changes?”

Economic Mobility

“**THE IDEA THAT SOMEONE** starts a low-level physical job and they still have to do it in their sixties because they had no opportunity for advancement is sort of horrifying to me. You look at the mobility statistics and they’re declining for the first time in a century.”

Young People Making Money in New Ways

“**[I WANT TO TALK about]** young people’s approach to work, their expectations around work, what they see online in terms of people making a lot of money doing certain things, and this notion of ‘Why would I wanna go work in a factory when I can be an influencer, or I can be some kind of a DJ or have my own podcast? We are going to need them and nobody wants to do that, or few want to do them at this point. So how do we address that issue?’”

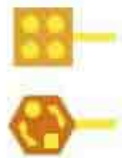
Connectedness Committee ■

"**WE HAVE A WHOLE** committee called the Connectedness Committee that focuses solely on trying to make these people feel connected to the rest of the company...Our Connectedness Committee would say, 'Let's have a happy hour at the end of the day,' or during the pandemic, it's like, 'Let's play virtual bingo.' They'll celebrate Black History Month. 'Let's learn a little bit about Black history...! Twice a year, we've been doing this for decades, we bring everybody in the company together for a day. So we're doing that in September. Like every single person. I mean, there's always a few people who can't make it. We'll come into Alexandria for like a day and a half. And they can stay longer if they want to work out of the office for a while. We'll cover that."

LANDROX
6

Post-COVID Workforce Struggles ●

"**A LOT OF ORGANIZATIONS** we work with are struggling to find people. They're not doing a whole lot of selection, because they just don't have the people in the pipeline. They need the butts in seats, so to speak. They're still reeling with the effects that COVID had on fundamental changes on the workforce and what kind of jobs people are pursuing."



The Future State

SUMMARY: The conversation underscored how work is evolving in response to automation, AI, and shifting workforce expectations. Younger workers are entering the labor market with different demands, while older workers face challenges in retirement security and long-term care. The rise of AI and skills-based workforces is reshaping job structures, but concerns remain about fairness, autonomy, and the societal impact of automation. Legal and regulatory uncertainty lingers, particularly around hiring practices and AI's role in employment decisions.



Preparing for the Future ●

“THE PARADOX OF TALKING to experts is by definition, expertise co-varies with age. So I don't know that we're the right group to be talking about this question. When I talk to my kids and my nephews and people in that orbit, it is very different how they're preparing and there's a hope or optimism that's missing here.”

“I THINK YOU'RE SEEING more younger people who have more advanced educations and skills are being more demanding about what they expect from work, in terms of work-life balance, in terms of working conditions and how they're treated and compensated, as opposed to those whose work is more physical, more traditional jobs, and whose demands are not heard well, and therefore they don't make them.”

Technology Making Jobs Obsolete ▲

“YEAH, I THINK THAT technology applications can make a lot of jobs obsolete. I'm a professor. So we're looking at teaching online and the AI now can actually perfectly develop a training course with an avatar to deliver the course. It doesn't even need my expertise much. I just need to make sure AI is not saying something obviously wrong. But most of the things that AI generates, there's no golden standard, so you cannot really say it's wrong.”

Skills-Based Movement ▲

“THERE'S A GROUNDSWELL OF interest, at least in reconceptualizing work in terms of skills. So, the skills-first revolution people, if you will, are still struggling to understand what that means exactly. In a perfect world, that reconceptualization would allow for considering what tasks and responsibilities could be done with automation and what requires human judgment for at least for the foreseeable future.”

“THAT'S THE JOKE, RIGHT? What do you call skills-based hiring? Hiring. It's the same thing.”

KSAO Model ▲

“I PREDICT THAT THE distribution of KSAs will be a little bit different in the future. Before, I think companies wanted to hire people with specific knowledge, specific skills, fit to the position. Job fit has always been emphasized in the personnel selection system. But I think given the technological advancement, especially the AI capability, actually, maybe the ability is what matters now.”

Knowledge and Training Changes

"WE SEE IN RAPIDLY evolving jobs like cybersecurity, where the knowledge changes so fast, [the approach is] get people in the door who've got some aptitude and some experience or general technical know-how, but not super specific."

"THE TRAINING BECOMES WAY more important. So basically not how you get in the door, but rather what you do after you get through the door?"

LANDRICK
6

Aging Population and Long-Term Care Industry

"GIVEN THE POPULATION AGING trend, down the road, we're going to see a lot more jobs in the long-term care industry and that industry cannot be replaced by AI or automation. That's going to be a huge challenge, actually, for the United States, because the US does not have this kind of training or trade associations in place to really facilitate the labor force."

Real Life Practice For Students

"I FIND STUDENTS HAVE this odd, in my view, perspective where they say, 'Okay, I want to go to work and practice.' And then they assume that's a tiny space. And I'm like, 'No, I think it's actually a much broader space.' And you do yourself a disservice if you come into training and say, 'Okay, I only want to learn how to do assessments for this one type of thing.'"



Workers Partnering with AI

"CAN AI FIGURE OUT laundry? That would be great. I saw something somewhere and they're talking about how AI can do writing and songs so you can do laundry. It's like, 'Fuck that.' I want AI to do laundry so I can do writing and songs. We are automating the wrong part of humanity."

"I THINK THE FUTURE isn't these rote proceduralized tasks, it will require some degree of judgment. Just the information processing, but there's some probability, whether we do A, B, or C. So if I can completely rely on this machine to do something for me, and it always does it in a predictable and reliable way, I'm good with that."



Skills-Based Work

"IF IT'S ABOUT HAVING a network of skills and basically picking and assigning, that's going to have some AI architecture in the background that's doing that. It won't be a person per se, I don't think. A lot of this is going to depend on what exactly is this organization or whatever you want to call it."

"I WONDER IF [AI assigned work] would drive more people away from traditional work if they're being managed by a bot, and they're only thought of as discrete skills. If there's a reduction in applications to traditional jobs, if people are seeking something else from work, that could have a negative effect on driving more participation in the workforce."

"HOW IS THAT EXPERIENCE, that deployment of just the skill packets, how is that experienced by the individual? We may move away from selecting for particular positions, but what is the experience of the worker? Do they feel like a cog in a machine, or do they feel like a contributor to the larger goal?"

Standards for AI ■

"AS FAR AS WHAT might happen in the future, I really expect there to be a ginormous lawsuit that forces professionals, both I/O psychologists and the legal system to say, 'Here are the standards that we need.' Fairness in employee selection that apply to artificial intelligence."

Research ■

"I THINK THERE'S A lot of interest in jumping in headfirst with AI approaches to improving or enhancing or optimizing selection and assessment. But I think that's misguided until we've got research to know proper use cases and implementations and guardrails, combined with sort of the legal and compliance framework that still exists. We're very excited about the research and the results so far, actually very interesting and promising that AI could act in some way as another part of our test development team."

Aging Workforce and Retirement Trends ◆

"HOW DO YOU LEVERAGE older worker human capital? So what do your organizations do to retain their older workers, or maybe how to organize the retired workforce for productivity?"

"AT SOME POINT, SOCIAL Security and Medicare are going to have to change, whether it's lessened or some people go off of it. I just worry about a large number of older people not having the income to take care of themselves from a medical standpoint. Things increase as you get older, but also I think it would have a huge impact on someone's health, with health decline along with the stress associated with the lack of income."

Is the Workforce Declining?

"A LOT OF THE change we see is noise rather than a trend. I think the clear trend is the labor force is shrinking because of the retirement of the older population, and the lack of immigration, or limitations on immigration. But those things can be changed. So if Congress passes a new immigration reform bill, we actually can see a huge increase of the labor force and a motivated labor force. I think we see a decreased trend right now, but labor force participation really is heavily associated with the economic conditions."

"IF UNEMPLOYMENT SPIKES AND we head into a recessionary time, people would become more desperate for something, some paycheck, to pay the bills. That could change on a dime if things get tighter."

Legal issues

"I WORK IN A pretty narrow area of I/O, which is primarily in dealing with legal issues. So for me, a lot of the change that is going to impact me is going to be related to changes in laws and regulations. A lot of that seems to be aligned with different administrations."

"FROM AN I/O PERSPECTIVE, I think we're always looking for ways to apply scientifically sound methods to address novel legal issues. Because the legal framework generally stays the same, but the different specific issues are always changing. So AI is obviously a hot topic, but even things like in the past couple of years, use of criminal history screenings, traditional validation methods don't really work great there. And so trying to figure out how to address that."

Immigration

"MUCH OF OUR WORKFORCE that's going to be performing jobs outside of offices is going to be immigrants. I think we're already seeing some of that with a declining population. The only way we retain our economy is by replacing those workers with immigrants."

"IMMIGRANTS OFTEN, MAYBE NOT the first generation, but at least the second, they often push education, unless that's changing. I mean, I'm here because of that. And my wife and a lot of other people I know. When we try to get graduate students these days, folks who are born here are too lazy to keep investing in their education."



Rising Inequality and Workforce Development ■

"THE KINDS OF SKILLS we're training people to do are not the same things that we need them to do in the future. We encourage everyone to go to college, and that's maybe not the right decision for most people. And we need more welders and more electricians and more elder care workers."

Job Autonomy ■

"AT SOME POINT, I think there's got to be some resistance to this becoming the new norm of work. So it's a question of, 'Where's the power?' Will enough workers just say 'No, we're not going to do this difficult call center job?'"

Job Automation ●

"IF WE START FROM the position that some parts of most people's jobs can be automated, people have to do the parts that are left over, those are probably the hard parts. A call center where the easy calls can be automated and workers get all the really complicated calls. And so now your job is only the most complicated, worst part of your job all the time and you can imagine, air traffic controllers are in the same spot where they're only dealing with the most stressful parts of an already stressful job all the time."

"IT'S NOT JUST HUMAN judgment, it's human care. Take, for example, elder care. Computers cannot care by definition. They cannot feel empathy, and that is an important part of a lot of work, the most work. The other thing they can't do is be held accountable for making a mistake, which means that societally, we actually do need people to be ultimately responsible for decisions that could potentially cause harm."

Performance ●

"HOW COOL WOULD IT be if that was our collective responsibility, building people's skills up and not just selecting and assuming that people are like a finite quality, but actually selecting on their ability to grow and then building them from there."

"ORGANIZATIONS DON'T HAVE TO wait for people to arrive fully formed. They can partner with schools, they can partner with communities to say, 'These are the kinds of things that we need. Can you please build that?'"

"IN DEVELOPING NURSES, NURSING schools and hospitals work together. That is a normal thing to do. It's very normal in trades. Can you imagine technology firms asking computer science departments, 'Please make sure they know ethics and how to be civil also?'"

Helping People Deal with Change ●

"[ONE IMPORTANT THEME GOING forward] is helping people deal with technological changes and change in general. Not only executives and mid-level management, but people, individual employees. Find some way to help them deal with change because whether it's technology, whether it's diversity, a more diverse workplace, that's going to be ongoing. And I think faster and bigger than it ever has been in the past."

"AS I TALK WITH my clients, I'm a firm believer that I can help other people change. I can create an environment where change is possible, but I can't make someone change. And so the only thing I can do in dealing with change is to change myself in terms of being more open, mainly."

"WE'RE BUILDING A SOCIETY that we want to live in here. So we should be building people who can think about who can care about each other and be decent human beings, keep society running. That can't get lost."

"WE'RE FILLED WITH A bunch of stressed, unhealthy, physically unhealthy people. And that is not good for organizations, even with all the improvements they might think they're making. It's not a good place to be in the organization and certainly not a good place to be in terms of society."

Mentoring ●

"THE MAIN THING I'VE tried to do over my career, but especially recently, mentoring and helping to bring along the generation that's actually going to be doing the work around dealing with all of these changes. In general, I think people are so busy and overwhelmed and stressed at work that the people in companies don't have the luxury to think about this kind of thing."

Some Jobs Can Be Done Remote, Others Need to Be Done in Person ●

"IT'S NOT GOING TO be long before someone decides that one of the criteria of interest (on artificially intelligent selection devices) ought to be whether or not a person will be able to work effectively in a remote environment. That seems to me kind of obvious. And the question I would raise is, 'Is that a legitimate selection criteria?'"

CAREER
6



"I'M VERY CONCERNED ABOUT the very large number of workers that we tend to not talk about much who will never be anything close to remote. They will always be on site. And that includes highly technical workers, people who are not just laborers, but skilled craftspeople, technologists, people who repair the stuff that we use every day that we don't know how to fix."

"I SUSPECT THAT PART-TIME remote work is the future rather than entirely remote work, largely because I think there are some things that simply can't be done effectively remotely, and both employers and employees are finding that out, but also because I think the emotional and joyful parts of work sometimes are going to get lost with the remote work. People are going to feel more lonely."

Participants' Takeaways

THE FUTURE AND CHANGE

- The future work challenges are interconnected and there is a need for a holistic, collaborative approach to address these issues.
- Technological and social changes have always occurred, and the key is to leverage these changes to benefit both humanity and the field.
- The “future of work” in general terms is unhelpful because work is highly sector- and population-specific, and broad discussions overlook critical differences in how trends like AI affect different industries.
- There’s a collective desire to use scientific knowledge to benefit society.
- I am cautiously optimistic, recognizing the complexity of the challenges ahead but also the availability of tools and multidisciplinary approaches to address them. Further collaboration across different fields is needed to find solutions.
- We should strategically leverage our expertise to adapt to change in ways that make our field more relevant, prosperous, and beneficial to society.
- Our field both draws from and contributes to other disciplines, which should shape how we train students and evolve professionally.

LANDSCAPE
6



AI

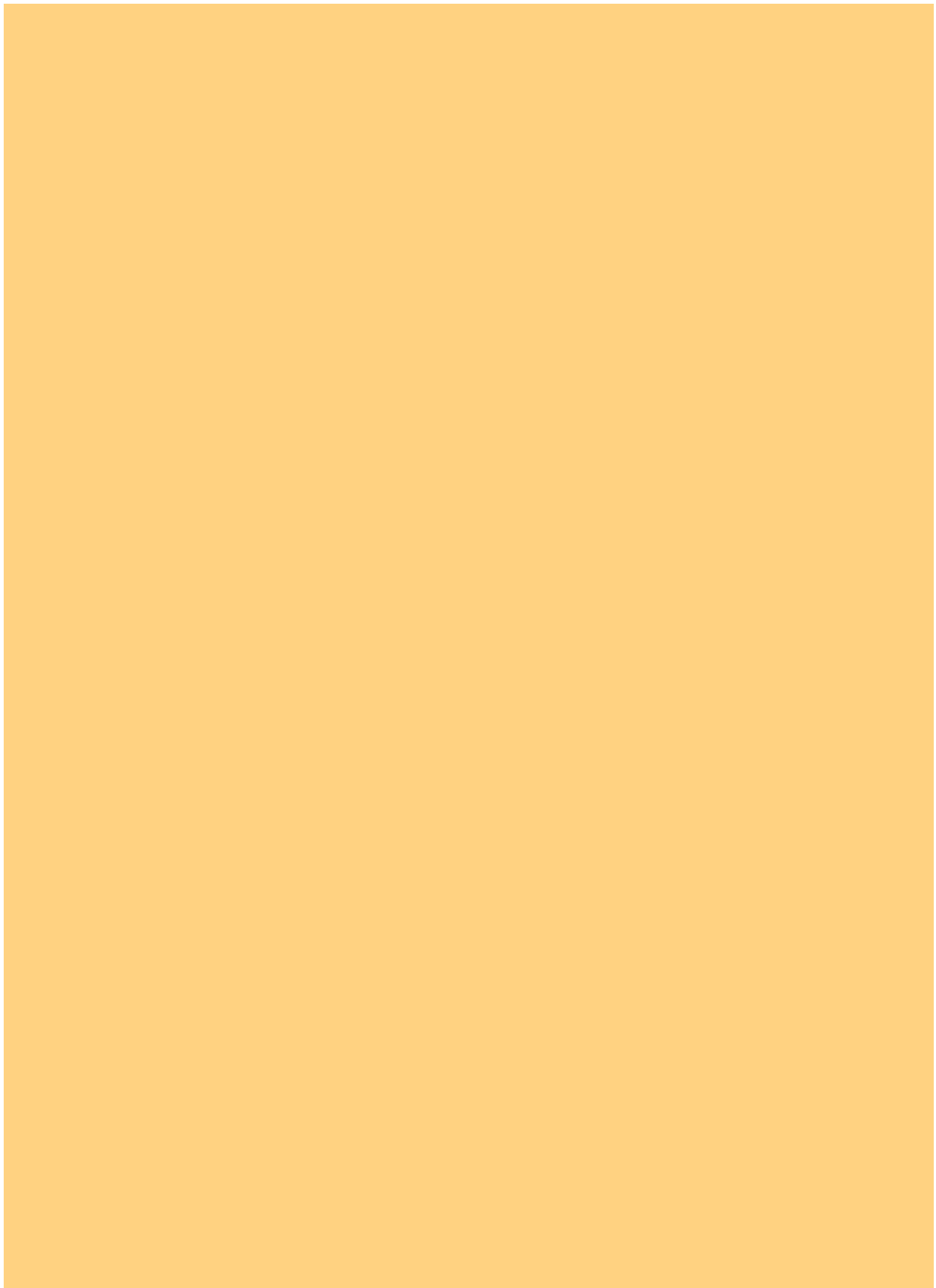
- There is deep concern that AI, if mishandled like past technologies, could harm organizational effectiveness and threaten societal cohesion and democracy.
- The failure to maintain a healthy system over the past decades is responsible. Greater collaboration across disciplines is needed to address these challenges and create a better society.
- There's potential for technology to exacerbate societal polarization and inequality. There's concern about a future where AI and other technologies create distinct hierarchies and leave certain groups behind.
- I expect AI to impact workers through job loss, collaboration with AI as a partner, or job enhancement that improves how work is done.
- It's important to include a range of disciplines in decisions about AI. The rapid changes in work due to AI will require expanded definitions of job performance and an inclusive approach to handling these transformations.

JOB DESIGN

- The complexity of job design is increasing due to technological advances and diverse workforce needs. Traditional job analysis tools must evolve to handle these complexities effectively.
- If we design jobs by the skills that are required, it can facilitate mobility between jobs. This also has implications in the future when people partner with AI to do their jobs.
- There's a need to rethink job design with AI and automation in mind. There are concerns about the high stress and complexity of remaining tasks that are not automated, and the potential impact on employee well-being and retention.

BROADER ISSUES

- Job degradation and remote work contribute to societal issues like lack of community and isolation. These factors could worsen the mental and physical health of employees, leading to broader societal problems.
- There are deep policy implications that need to get the attention of policymakers.
- Although organizations express interest in understanding the future of work, many feel too overwhelmed or under-resourced to seek out the information they need.



Building Owners, Developers, and Urban Planners

THE FIELDS OF BUILDING OWNERS, DEVELOPERS AND URBAN PLANNERS consist of the design, investment, and management of buildings and spaces to create functional, sustainable, and economically viable environments. They work to shape communities through strategic land use, infrastructure development, and thoughtful urban design. They provide vision, financial resources, and regulatory expertise to guide the creation and transformation of residential, commercial, and mixed-use spaces that support economic growth and enhance quality of life. Their work aims to integrate market demands, environmental considerations, and policy frameworks to ensure responsible and efficient land development. These professionals also play a critical role in navigating zoning laws, engaging with stakeholders, and adapting to evolving societal and technological trends.

SANDBOX 7 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 In-Person & Remote Work	 Collaboration & Organizational Design	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	 Technology & AI
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors	

PARTICIPANTS

MATTHEW AYRES

Workplace Research Lead,
Ericsson

RANDALL BOOK

Executive Vice President,
Colliers

JOSHUA CALLAHAN

Managing Director,
Head of Asset Management,
Roxborough Group, LLC

GREG FOGG

Executive Managing Director,
Cushman & Wakefield

ANDREW GRACE

Director of Economic
& Strategic Planning,
Office of Economic Opportunity
and Inclusion, City of Boston

CHARLES HARDY

Chief Architect,
US General Services Administration

EDWARD MCFARLAN

President,
Urban International Studios

PATRICK PAGTAKHAN

Director, Investments,
Concert Properties

JAMESON SKAIFE

Associate Principal
and Studio Leader,
Lamar Johnson Collaborative

LOUIS SCHUMP

Principal and Creative Director,
Gensler

LAURA WARNER

CEO/Design Partner,
Principal Architect
and Urban Planner

ELLISON YAHNER

Contract Project Manager,
Ellison Yahner, LLC

The Current State

SUMMARY: The conversation around work intersects with broader societal challenges such as equity, urban design, and shifting professional relationships. Remote work offers flexibility but disrupts collaboration, mentorship, and company culture. Younger workers engage with work more transactionally, while companies downsize but invest in high-quality spaces to attract employees. Cities with strong transit and mixed-use development adapt faster than car-dependent ones. Beyond individual companies, workforce planning, sustainability, and economic mobility require a systems-level approach. Aligning HR, IT, and real estate to create workplaces that support both business and employee needs remains an ongoing challenge.

7

Sustainable Cities, Livable Cities ●

"IN THE BAY AREA, [residents] have a poverty of choice. We're not building cities or communities or places to work that attract people, that makes people want to come to work."

"I THINK WE ARE clearly moving backwards in terms of sustainability, in how we envision cities. When you talk about Las Vegas and Phoenix, those are completely suburban cities that don't have any of the advantages of a real city of proximity, of co-location, of all the kinds of things that made cities work. That's why their carbon footprints are going up. They're completely disconnected, disaggregated, non-proximate cities. I think that remote work is having a big impact on that. Even in the Bay Area, we're seeing that development is really happening at the perimeter, not at the center."

"SAN FRANCISCO IS A really interesting case where they have a Financial District that was pretty much all single-use offices with a commercial base. Some cities are ahead and some cities are behind on this need to make it mixed-use and have much more residential so that work-live connection is happening."



"IN EUROPE, PEOPLE ARE back at work. It's amazing the difference when you go to London or Frankfurt or Berlin, they're back and I think one of the reasons is because live and work are more proximate, much better connectivity, they don't have those long commutes driven by suburbia. But it's also a better place to work, more active, more engaging, more interactive. These are places that are great places to be. The workplace is not just inside the office, as we all know. The workplace extends outside of the office and connection between the context of work and the urban context is something that we've truly failed at in the U.S."

Transit Accessibility ●

"SO, GOOGLE CANCELED ALL of its projects in the Bay Area, but they doubled down on New York. And I think there's a really clear reason why they did that. In Chelsea, in a very particular neighborhood, it's a much more interesting place to live. And it's much more transit accessible. Because of the transit, employees have many more options where to live and still get to work. I think we're seeing that in places like Toronto. The cities that have robust transit connectivity are emerging much quicker out of our current state than places like the Bay Area, which have dysfunctional transit that people are not using."

How to Entice Building Tenants ●

"MY MAIN FOCUS RIGHT now is on offices, trying to get them leased up and see how that works. I have one office in one market, which is completely full and there's high demand. What's happening in that particular market is that the offices in that area are being removed. There's a new multifamily being developed, so there's a scarcity of offices in that area and people just want to live in that area, so that office works now. That office is not in a core market. It's outside of Toronto. That one building is full and there's demand. Another market, there's lots of vacancy, around 11%. What can I do to change behavior and try to get tenants that are there to have their employees come in so that I'll retain them? But also entice new ones to come in to say, 'Hey, why would they pick this building?' And by the very nature of doing that, that would then make the building attractive?' What I'm hearing is that there is a flight to quality."

"A LARGE TECH COMPANY announced that they're going to have everybody come in five days a week. So that's going to change the labor part of it. Structurally, it will start to create the need for before-school and after-school childcare. That'll affect carbon footprint, it'll affect other things, but I want to see what that will do for buildings. We put a daycare in one of the buildings that I have. That one did have some positive feedback, we'll see what happens long term. Is there anything that can create a culture of wanting to come in?"

"I THINK THERE'S A great amount of opportunity to look at things and experiment with things. What are the things that are working? But every community is different in what they want. Some of it's parking, some of it's amenities, some of it's being able to allow a dog, and some of it's having coffee. I've experimented with a lot of different things. I'd say one thing that I measure is the cost per square foot per employee. Not too many people do that, but I do that because I think it's really an important piece I want to understand when I'm putting somebody in a building. What is it really costing me? I do a lot of tenant rep work, but what is it costing me to have those tenants in there?"

"A COMPANY HAS A hundred thousand square feet, they're moving into 30 thousand square feet because they realize they just don't need it. They're willing to spend. If they were spending 20 bucks before, they can now spend 40 now and go to a really nice building. So people are using that as a technique to get people to come back to work, to put them in a nicer building, more amenities, nicer things. I think that's very effective."

"WHAT I'M HEARING A lot from younger folks is they want this life-work balance but they think that the work environment is separate from healthy living. Healthy living includes access to park space, nature, as well as having good health care and having access to a gym. That's the whole life balance thing. Life-work balance includes having that access to those amenities."

"I ALSO TAUGHT GRADUATE-LEVEL programs and you could see the impact the pandemic had on students and how they socialized with each other and how they worked collaboratively and what their expectations were with each other and with the faculty. I've been to a number of career fairs with a lot of young people. The first question is, 'What is the work from home policy?' It's not, 'What's it like in the office? What's your office?' It's, 'Can I work from home?' It's really disheartening. That's kind of the expectation. So I think it's going to be an uphill climb for sure. I don't think there's an easy way to change people's minds."

"AS A DESIGN FIRM, we were back in the office in September of 2020. We were very early. Being under a construction company, our owner felt that it was important to support those essential workers, the construction laborers out in the field. If we're trying to convince clients to build new office space, to rehab their office space, but we're not using our own office space, we're not sending the right message. So we went in very early. I appreciate that."

"RACIAL RECKONING AND THE consequences of that was all happening while we were socially isolated. Now that we have come back traveling, doing things, the intensity of that, the extremeness of that has dissipated, but the impacts of it are still really pronounced, if not more magnified, at more polar opposite ends of the spectrum. Some of that is reflected in our politics. And it's not just us, but it is in other countries as well. Extreme polarization is present in a lot of our society."



Competing Interests ●

"A FEW YEARS BACK we came back after the pandemic and workers from a large technology delivery company were going to downtown Seattle. There was a big positive article written in the Seattle Times about the fact that it was bringing all these workers back, the cafes were full, the businesses were better, etc. etc. But then there was another article written a week later, from the perspective of the nurses and doctors working at the local general hospital, which is also in the city, who now found it harder to go and get lunch, harder to park, harder to arrive at work on time because of the congestion of the city. When it comes to cities, there are competing interests."

"WE HAVE BUILDING MANAGERS who have to go to buildings. There was a conversation, 'They have to be there five days a week. Should we compensate them more? Should we give them this? Should we give them that?' And there was a group that said, 'Yeah, let's do that.' There was also an equal amount of people on the other side going, 'No, they applied for that job. They knew it was in the office. They knew they were going to run buildings. They're doing their job. Why should we give them more?' And this is a person who's working at home four days a week and comes in one day. We gave you flexibility. We didn't give them anything. So how do you start to make this more equitable?"

Challenges and Limitations of Remote Work ●

"THERE ARE SOME ADVANTAGES to working remotely like having a little bit more control over your schedule. But I don't think all remote work is healthy for society or for individuals."

"I WANT TO TALK about the remote work from apartments. When I worked for architecture firms and construction companies, the people who are making those decisions about work from home are usually at the executive level who have really spacious homes and really nice home offices. If you look at the employees, they have school tuition and loans. Young people are buying homes much later. Housing is much more expensive. The number of people who live in rentals is like half of our population. So when you think about remote work and you think about, 'We're gonna save money by getting rid of our office space.' What the companies are really saying to the employees is, 'You are now responsible for your own office.' It looks very different if you live in a studio apartment, or if you share an apartment with a roommate, and you have a kitchen island, and both of you are working from home."

"AS A MANAGER OF staff, I think they're having a hard time focusing. One of the reasons is they're in unpredictable environments. When we have office space, we have a more predictable space for people to collaborate and model work habits. If you're in a virtual meeting, you can be talking to someone who's actually shopping and you wouldn't know it. 'Cause you can't see them on the screen. There can be some advantages to an on-screen collaboration because you can see a screen more easily together, but other types of collaboration need to happen too and focus is often not there."



"HOW DO YOU MOTIVATE people to come back? I was at a convening of some architects, vendors, developers, and one person teed up that the CEO wanted people coming back, so they actually got a ticket every time they showed up at the office and it went into a raffle for \$10,000 a month. Didn't change attendance at all. He then said, 'Well, I'm going to up the ante more at the end of the year, take all your tickets and you put them in a box and you get the corporate jet to go for a three day family vacation to the Caymans.' Didn't change it at all. So bribery doesn't seem to work."

Returning to the Office ●

"I HAVE ONE CLIENT that's a Fortune 100 company. Their mandate is one day a week in the office, on Thursdays. I think the idea behind it is, 'If we can get enough excitement about one day a week, maybe we can get them in, two or three days a week.' But it's literally been four years. They haven't had a mandate until two weeks ago. I just don't get that. That's not my world. I think you've got to see people. You got to feel the energy. You've got to be able to communicate."



"OUR COMPANY HAS GONE to five days a week [in-person] working because collaboration is so much more productive in the office. We love to collaborate. We're better when we collaborate. It makes such a difference. And I do think, at their heart, most businesses are like that. We can really redesign life and work together as a more integrated process so that it's easy to get to work. There is flexibility for co-working, but we really make it easy for people to get to work. And when they do get to work, places inside the office and outside the office are great places, exciting places, dynamic places to interact with their fellow employees and friends. We know that's how innovation takes place."



"I WANT PEOPLE TO come into the office because I have to lease up these spaces. If they don't come in, then tenants will shrink. And that's not good for me because then I have a vacancy. So I want them to show up sooner rather than later, and selfishly before their renewal comes up, a year or so ahead. So I'm thinking of finding ways to try and motivate them to come in from the landlord perspective or an investor perspective."

“ABOUT PERSONAL BIASES AND preferences and comfort level. You're the CEO. It's good to see your team working around you and feeling like you have control and your finger on the pulse—that necessary productivity. It's feeling like, 'Okay, I gave up all of my power to my employees over the last five years. I want some of that back.'”

More Holistic View of Workers ●

“THE PEOPLE WHO WE'RE talking about that have the choice to work remotely or go to the office are typically not the same workers who are being injured on the job. I think if this conversation is really about the future of work more holistically than just white collar professionals, then I think that there's a maybe more interesting conversation to be had about essential workers. I was telling somebody the other night that during the pandemic, I was super glad that the dry cleaner was an essential service, because to get up and go to work, I really needed to have real shoes and a pressed shirt, but those people didn't have a choice of whether to do that job remotely or not.”

Transactional Relationship with Work ●

“I'M HEARING FROM MY daughter and her friends who are in their mid-20s that they don't think that they'll ever love their profession, which I find to be very sad. I love my profession, I love the work I do. They don't think they're ever going to find that. So they are having a transactional relationship with work where it's just about the money.”

System-Level Problem Solving ◆

“AS WE THINK ABOUT work and workplace, you could say that I'm solving the problems of my company and my company only. They've got a view on what that means in terms of their organization, the benefits to them, et cetera. I think that somewhere in this, there is a shared system of values, planning, and design that actually goes beyond the walls of my buildings and into the cities and the neighborhoods and so on, so forth. My concern is that in a way, the dam is broken and I'm just trying to plug one hole in the dam. What we actually need is a team of people who are looking at the whole problem and designing and setting up a much bigger system for success.”

Interdisciplinary Team ◆

“HOW DO WE ASSIST organizations in creating interdisciplinary teams between HR, IT, and real estate that can craft relevant employee experience?”

"I SEEM TO SEE all the time some CEO throws out a mandate, but he hasn't brought all the business together. It's just his belief and he's going with his gut and we'll get some publicity out of it. But I work with HR teams, real estate teams, IT teams, and there's no leader at the top figuring this puzzle out. So, chaos. The rule, just take all the incremental steps. You don't even have to figure it out. You just have to incentivize the teams similarly so that they're forced to figure it out themselves. But right now their success metrics are entirely unaligned."

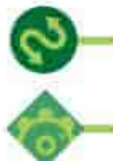


Human Beings as Social Creatures ■

"HUMAN BEINGS, FOR THE most part, are primarily social creatures. When you meet people in person, it's much harder to hate them than when you don't meet them. Hate is more convenient in the abstract than it is face-to-face. If you talk to gay people who don't live in places like San Francisco or Boston or Toronto, their acceptance in their community by people who know them is shockingly high given the politics of the area. I think that alone could make an argument for why people need to come together."



"THE NOTION THAT PEOPLE need to be observed to be productive, people need to be together in order to collaborate – those assumptions are wrong. You need social capital. It's like a battery, a laptop is totally portable until it's not. Social capital and your ability to maneuver outside of the community is real. Depending on who you are and how much time you spend with an organization, that can last quite a long time remotely before you need to plug back in. We can make reforming work as a plug-in place as a metaphor, as opposed to a productive place. When we talk about productivity, what we really mean is billability. Everyone is productive all of the time whether they're riding the bus and thinking about their project, or they're sleeping and thinking about their project, people are productive all the time, they're just not always billable."



"THIS WHOLE POLARIZATION AND what happens when we're all virtual. I've lived it myself where I've had people that through email and indirect communication are just baseball batting everyone. We pick up the phone or see him in person, 'Well, I didn't really mean that,' and all of a sudden all that goes away."

"IN OUR CONVERSATIONS AROUND work, the impacts of the pandemic, and how things have changed, we're not being fully honest about the advantages and the disadvantages and the costs and consequences. I feel like we're being quite lazy in accepting because we were subjected to this profound change and then had to adapt to it... There's a false sense of security and protection and a lack of being really honest."

Workers Want Predictability ■

“THEY WANT PREDICTABILITY IN their life. Has nothing to do with the work or the mission of what we’re doing, but they’re looking for things that are impacting their lives, and then they’ll come. I was asking my one son about his work. ‘What are you guys doing?’ He goes, ‘Well, they’re saying we’re coming back. My boss just bought a home over in Michigan.’ So we’re sending mixed messages. When you get to management and leadership in companies, I could be working on an island for a year and I’ve got backlog work that I’ll probably still be behind. The new folks aren’t like that. They need mentorship. They need the connections, and to build those networks.”

“THERE WAS A REALLY, really good opinion article in the Wall Street Journal [in 2024] about on-call employees. So with all the technology that’s happening, this large coffee store chain knows, ‘Do we have a lot of people coming in on this day?’ Employees are working part-time because of the healthcare benefits. For the company, it’s not efficient to pay for healthcare benefits. And then there’s the added piece of, ‘You’re going to be on-call because we’re going to completely make your schedule around the demand of the work that’s happening.’ I know this anecdotally because we’re sponsoring a Ukrainian family and on-call work is what’s available to them. The family doesn’t know if they’re working tomorrow. And these are really, really hard-working, dedicated people who want to work more. They cannot get a set schedule, which is impossible for raising their child. I think that’s something that’s going to happen more and more because if I were a company, why would you want to pay for labor that you don’t need?”

“I THINK I SAW something about a large technology delivery company and their recent decision. There were questions about employees self-selecting to leave the company and the reduction of the workforce. There’s also an equity aspect. They’ve got workers that are required to be in their office or in their factory or in their warehouse. I don’t know that it necessarily needs to be done that way. I think you need to understand, identify what people need. If there’s some sort of equity, I think then maybe it is a different adjustment to pay and benefits and perks and other things.”

Natural Life Cycle 🗝

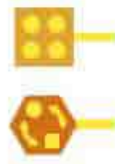
“ONE OF THE THINGS that has to be considered is people’s natural life cycle. Life is different at different points in their life.”

“I’M IN REAL ESTATE, it’s a range of ages. It’s interesting to see where they are. As you hit certain times in your life, you need remote work. And other times, it’s not so great. From what I’m seeing, the young people need that social aspect, but then when they get a little bit older, they need something else. As you get older, you want stuff with meaning, you’ll need things to do, like volunteer work.”

"FROM WHAT I REMEMBER, growing up, my parents worked 9 to 5ish. Then when I started working in the Bay Area, it was California, so people were pretty relaxed. But we were there from 7 in the morning until 6 at night, we'd go for dinner. Every time we released software, we would go back in and be there until two in the morning. I know, it sounds a bit crazy. But we were in our twenties, it was collaborative, so coming to the office actually worked because everybody was around the same age. We were all fresh graduates. You're just hanging out. Yeah, we were tired... but we weren't alone. That was the thing. 'Cause we were expats coming in and therefore made that company work."



"FOR PEOPLE IN THE trades, there's a large union presence there. It's physical work. You don't really need breaks when you're doing intellectual work, where you're in the mind and problem-solving. You can take breaks, but you're never really turned off or really shut down. So I think it just depends on where they fall. There's a lot of gig work as the city has become more expensive so people need to do multiple jobs to potentially keep it going. So they're going to keep working and grinding harder. I have colleagues in the Midwest where I grew up and I think they still have relatively free evenings, they're still done at six. So they do work longer hours, I think because things are competitive. Kids want to hustle to get into these schools and that naturally forces kids to be wired a certain way to push harder. I don't think I could get into school now if I tried, they're just too smart."



Differences After the Pandemic ●

"THE LAST FOUR YEARS really just highlighted existing issues with the system. It's not like they are new, they are just highlighting them. It's bringing them to the forefront. Even on-boarding employees is done differently now than it was done pre-2020 because we had to find different ways. We're finding some of those better ways, where we're actually taking care of people and doing the connectivity of our cities and the location of our offices and where we go to work and the vibrancy. It's either there or it's not there. When it's not there, people find other places. Over the last four years, the places of excitement or interest have migrated more to the suburbs and left some of the city."

"HOW DO YOU BUILD trust with people who are working remotely? I just think that's a really interesting thought. How do you onboard people? This is all new. How are companies really measuring success? I think in the past it's always been about money. I'm not sure it's all about money as much as it is right now because our interest rates have changed. There's a lot of complexity that people are having to figure out and deal with."



"WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT, a lot of things shut down. The pandemic was more than a year of forced remote [work] and I think that structurally changed society. There's some knowledge that was lost. There's also some habits that were lost. Some of the culture was lost."

The Future State

SUMMARY: The conversation around preparing for the future reflects uncertainty, adaptation, and the need for systemic change. Many industries, especially real estate, are navigating economic volatility, workforce shifts, and evolving urban landscapes. While some see opportunity in declining office values and changing work patterns, others highlight the lack of long-term planning. Cities are rethinking zoning, housing density, and mixed-use development to remain viable. Younger generations, shaped by remote learning and new economic realities, will drive future workforce expectations. Businesses, in turn, must rethink talent attraction, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the role of physical spaces. The pace of change is accelerating, requiring new data, insights, and problem-solving approaches.

Preparing for the Future ●

“HR, IT, AND REAL estate, those are very different personality types, different skill sets, different success metrics, different language. So how do we help organizations form interdisciplinary teams designed to create experience as opposed to productivity or a carpeted factory floor?”

“WE DON’T PLAN FOR the future. We’re just in the present. For a lot of us who work in the commercial real estate world or the residential real estate world, it’s been a rough 24 months across every vector. Interest rates go up, and lo and behold, valuations go down, costs or supply chain and design stuff, constructions, nothing’s been easy. Maybe there was 18 months where if you owned a resort hotel in the United States, you were doing pretty well, but even that’s over because all those people are in Europe now, enjoying a strong dollar.”

"WE HAVE TO START to think about how we reinvent our downtown. We have to start to rethink the cost of housing, which I think is going to eventually drive people towards more density, more proximate locations. We can't just keep expanding out because of the infrastructure cost of that. I'm cautiously optimistic about the future because [President Biden] is forcing us to make changes. A lot of the businesses I deal with are thinking about, 'What's the workplace going to be all about? Where do we want to be? How do we really get people to come back to work? Cities are absolutely focused on, 'Okay, how do we reinvent ourselves because we're going to go bankrupt in the current status quo?"

"I HAD A CONVERSATION a couple of nights ago around the office furniture industry. Depending on who you listen to, we probably have enough furniture to last a really long time. It's not necessarily the wrong furniture. The idea was creating offices that people want to come to, for whatever reason. Those preferences change over time. How do we change that environment? Does furniture become a service rather than a product that you buy? Not unlike Uber or some of those neighborhood groups where you swap lawnmowers so people have one lawnmower between five families. Shared economy stuff."

"I'LL ANSWER FROM THE city's perspective. We have been updating our zoning, finishing plans, doing good business housekeeping, and stuff because things have changed. We need to change and we need to adapt to those policies, which in some instances were outdated. We're trying to meet the changes where they are. We hear there's a need and try to meet it with incentives for office to residential conversion, bringing new types of businesses into downtown that replace the types of businesses that serve the office clientele. On the flip side, since so much business is being done in our neighborhoods now, we're still dense in our neighborhoods. But we're very expensive. So we're trying to figure out ways to take advantage of the decline in office values, as a way to accommodate things that we couldn't do. The flip side of these dramatic declines in values is they present opportunities."

"I THINK WE'RE AT an extreme of the pendulum, to come back to my hope and optimism and belief in cities. After 9/11, people were saying, 'Oh my god, we're never gonna build skyscrapers again.' We built skyscrapers again. We built them for the right reasons, we built them for the wrong reasons, but we built them. I hope that we will find some balance."

"THE WHY IS REALLY important. My business is helping cities and developers plan future districts at the urban scale or district scale. Where do they want to be for the future? And it really is all about why: 'Why do you want to plan this way? What are the drivers for this?' It really is all about forward-looking and trying to work with them. What I personally try to do is work with them to understand how you go from the now to the future, in a transitional way that makes sense, recognizing that in real estate, there are huge capital investments, huge amazing amounts of capital. And you're betting on the future."



"WE'VE SPENT THE LAST 12 months aggregating additional talent into the organization. We're a very small organization, so each person is a meaningful add for us and we have gone out and we think we have upgraded our internal talent. Then we're working very hard within the senior team to try to make that talent stick, meaning they like their job and feel appreciated and will stay."

"THE FUTURE REQUIRES US to acknowledge that we're not widgets. Everyone is let out of the box that we all fit into. And we're not all going to fit back in the box. I think that's why I sort of feel sorry for the executives who think their mandates are going to work. 'We're not going to change anything, but we're going to make you come back.'"

"TO PREPARE FOR THE future, we need to go get some much better data and insights and be able to start to measure those. Let's say the expectation of the future is, 'I think it is pulling away faster from the trajectory that we're on.' As the years go on, what we're offering is going to look even less and less like what people need. So, at the moment, I think we're trying to put people back into a box that doesn't match."

Looking to the Future ●

"JUST THE PACE OF change. We're no longer in those 10-year steps that real estate used to have. It's going to have to be the resilience and the flexibility that has to be built contemporaneously."

"PRE-PANDEMIC, A LEADER IN our real estate team came to the group and said, 'You know, behind the scenes, you had an attentive team that's looking at a large-scale campus redevelopment. We're going to rebuild the campus. We're going to redevelop the 72 acres. There's going to be massive buildings constructed for workers of the future.' My immediate reaction was, 'Using what planning principles and what guidelines?' Essentially, they're the ones that we've been using for the last 10 years. So it prompted a piece of work. I intentionally went to the leadership of the company and said, 'What questions do you have around the future of work, whether it's technology, people, learning?' And we actually took those questions to 110 16 to 20-year-olds, and actually said, 'How are you thinking about these things?' Again, not to say, give us the answers we're going to design for them, but give us insights and perspectives, the way that we engage with them."

"FROM THE WORLD ECONOMIC Forum, there are two things that I think are super interesting and that keep me awake. 75 percent of the global workforce will be Gen Z and millennials by 2030. I can't remember the other statistic, but it's a scary statistic, not just on how many people are in the workforce, but the skills that we won't have but need in the workforce by 2030."

Young People Are the Future ●

"WHEN I LOOK TO the future, my focus is on the 12-year-old of today. We're in a group of people that do this for a living. We're all talking amongst ourselves and think we all can figure this out. But you've got a 12-year-old who went to school remotely, had friend connections differently, all that kind of stuff in their learnings on what they're going to go to and what they want to come into. Going back to our buildings, from planning to actually getting done is a 10-year process. So in 10 years, the new college grads are 30 years old. They're the leadership in the management organization. So how does that all play out?"

"THERE ARE 28 AND 30-year-olds nowadays who don't have a driver's license. Everybody else is going, 'Why? How can you live without a driver's license? What are you doing?' And that speaks to the commute, that speaks to how work flows and what they do. There's a lot of different things pushing and pulling on the conversation that we've got to bring into it."

"I THINK YOUNG PEOPLE, given the cost of living and their consideration towards environment and sustainability and family and things like that, they'll be making a choice between, 'Do I own a car or do I own a house?' or 'Can I afford to own a house? Can I afford to own a car?' So the decisions around where they'll live and where they'll work and how they'll do things are very different."

"HOME OWNERSHIP IS GOING down. People are renting, which makes them far more mobile. Maybe I'll go work in Minneapolis for four years, then I'll go down to Phoenix, then I'll go to LA. Learn the new migratory pattern of workers that we're basing on some historic ones. They're not flying the same way."

Why We Work ●

"IT'S NOT NECESSARILY JUST about where or how we work, but I think the pandemic opened up this Pandora's box around philosophically why we work. There's been a very incomplete conversation or understanding of that. There's a lot of systemic, societal, behavioral stuff that goes on."

Nature of Change ●

"MY GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT going forward is we're not going far enough or fast enough or in the right direction at the moment. Whether it's a development of part of a city or the development of a building for a company, these are multiyear things. The speed of technology, the speed of the workforce that's coming in, are coming way faster than we can build and design for. I think that's our Achilles heel."

Interview

7



"NATURE OF WORK IS changing and it affects folks who have to make capital decisions or position market decisions for a world that is more virtual and less place-specific."

"I'M TRYING TO BE mindful of the disconnect that seemingly exists between what leaders think they want and what employees in their organizations seem to want. I'm trying to help my clients figure out a good, comfortable middle ground where they can feel good about investing in this idea of a physical place. But I'm also trying to ask the right questions at the onset, such that I go into it without this bias that they need to have a physical place to manifest their work. I openly say to people day one, 'Why do you have an office?' Because I think in my small piece of this whole thing, the office generally in the last 30 years has been very formulaic, 'Everybody in my industry does this,' so therefore we're going to do that. Today that's not the way it works. People are struggling because they don't know what everybody else is doing and other people don't even know what they're doing. So it's like this dealer's choice kind of thing. So I try to go into it with an open mind and ask people good questions."

Embracing Change ●

"EMBRACING CHANGE.
WE'VE ALL seen a lot of change. We're going to continue to see change. Look, I'm not going to change change. I'm just going to look at it and I'm going to deserve it. You can either be in it, or you can be working towards it. Change is good whatever it is. You just got to get adapted to it."

"I AM CONCERNED ABOUT AI, but I'm going to embrace that change. I use it every day, not a lot, but ChatGPT and I have a pretty good relationship. What can I be doing as one of a million, 10 million people who are real estate brokers, adding value to clients and companies? So I'm always looking at what I can be doing. What aren't I doing? What should I be doing? I'm just questioning myself a lot."

"MY ENTIRE LIFE IS ruining people's lives by changing things. Hopefully for the better. Hopefully, we take the time to help them understand that it's for the better. I think that people shortchange that activity. We're going to have to spend much, much, much more time on it. Change is good. We have an opportunity to learn something."

Flexibility ●

"EVERYBODY'S GOT HYPOTHESES RIGHT now about the future and what to expect to happen. None of them are tested, and it's going to take 18 to 24 months to actually see what's sticking and what's not. So we're still in that learning phase. So I think as we go forward, we just have to keep trying things and keep doing things and listening. And then try to figure out, 'Hey, maybe this will work for that. Let's try it out and see what happens and then be able to be ready and able to change.' Flexibility is key."

Attracting and Retaining Talent ●

"I ACTUALLY THINK THERE'S a lot of good innovation around company business models because they're being forced to compete in new ways for talent. I've become very focused on demographics and a shrinking workforce. That will accelerate, maybe not in the next five years, but over the next 25 years. There are just, at least domestically, fewer and fewer babies being born every year. The population will be shrinking at some point. My sense is employers, including our company, are having to think about new ways to attract employees. The cliché 25 years ago was employees always try to impress, make themselves look impressive in order to get a job. That power dynamic has just changed for white-collar work in 25 years. Young 20-something employees have no problem asking, 'Can I work from home? Can I work from home over the summer? Can I do this? How do you do this? What is your mission?' All of these questions are asked by many of them in a very mature, appropriate fashion. Those are fair questions. I would say when I was graduating college, you wouldn't ask a potential employer those types of things. It would seem out of bounds or above your station to ask for those things."

"COVID CHANGED HOW COMPANIES attract and retain human capital, good human capital. Getting smart, young people into the organization is absolutely critical and COVID definitely changed the game. It really is interesting to see there's a lot of innovation going on with companies to try to attract and retain in terms of where they locate office space, workplaces, completely reinventing itself around and focused really on collaboration. The whole highly amenitized workplace is a whole new invention of the workplace. Now I think that's expanding out to the place. Where do we work? What's the place like? How do we use that to attract and retain the people we need? Because I do think at heart, we know businesses know, and I suspect data shows, face-to-face is really the core of real collaboration."

Companies Undecided About Workspace ●

"THERE'S A LACK OF conviction on the part of companies around what they should do. That lack of conviction is creating further disruption in office markets because it's very complicated for a company today to say, 'Hey, let's go spend millions of dollars on a new facility.' They're worried they're going to get it wrong. And rightly so. They've been playing with this balancing calculus. 'Do we do something that we believe as leaders is important for the organization from a productivity perspective, but may end up disenfranchising a fair amount of our employees?' or, 'Do we continue to pivot towards something we may not believe is the right thing for the org, but we think is going to create more stickiness around our employees? They're going to be happier in theory.'"

Interview

7



How to Entice Building Tenants ●

“THERE ARE AMERICAN MULTINATIONAL companies that come up [to Canada] and desire termination of a 10-year lease in year seven. That’s usually what they asked for. I’ve noticed they also put requirements on environmental, social, and governance. So there’s the environmental part where there has to be accessibility. What happens with these older buildings? How will that affect it? What’s the investment that needs to be made so that we can do it strategically? What effects will government external forces have? In terms of strategic forces, there’s obviously competition. There are also substitutes, but it’ll be interesting to see what government intervention does.”

“WE’VE HAD A WHOLE new group of individuals come into the workforce, a lot of different ages. Who is making the decisions? In my world, most of the decisions are getting made up on the C-level and they really don’t talk to anybody down below. That’s starting to change a little bit. We’re starting to see younger people wanting to make more decisions. Whether that’s right or wrong, it’s not my decision, but I see a lot of that taking place. With interest rates being twice as much as they’ve been for a long time, the cost of everything has gone up. I personally don’t think \$10,000 is much for an employee to come to an office.”

“IN A PERFECT WORLD, I’d like to see everybody back five days a week. I’m not saying that selfishly. I’m saying it from a production standpoint. ‘Cause I don’t know how you evaluate what you’re getting done. If you’re profitable, that’s great, but if you’re not, the people are starting to really look at all the costs and I think a lot of mistakes are getting made ‘cause people think they know what they want and they’re making mistakes. Maybe the right decisions aren’t happening. It’s more of an emotional thing.”

“I LIKE THE IDEA of a child care center. Things that are hard for an employee to get on their own would be things that would be attractive to get them to be at the office and not in their house. Like having a really good gym. It’s hard, it’s expensive to go to the gym. But if there’s a gym on site that people can use easily – and child care and other services and amenities that make it easier.”

“WHEN I TALK TO employees, they say drive time, the inability to be able to go to a doctor’s appointment, daycare, those are the things that I think that are really affecting people. In the past, I don’t think they’ve really had much of a choice. When COVID came, it changed everybody’s mindset.”

“HOW DO YOU SPEND a little more time with nature? How do you put that into an office building or create something? I’m a little older than most of you but I’m just finding nature is just a really, really good space for me to be in. I love to take a walk every morning. I just think it’s important. It balances my life.”

“IDENTIFY THE REASONS THAT people come to work. What is the amenity that is driving them, the motivator? I think that there’s incredible reluctance to shift the framework of design from architecture and space to human behavior and preference. I think that the lessons of the pandemic are wide and many. What we believe, and I believe certainly, is that allowing for personal preference, not based on how old I am or my job role or the organization to which I belong, but how I, as a person or the group that I work with, our preferences, determine when and where we’re going to work and why. That requires the same skill sets, but a

“AS A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT and urban designer, urban planner, there’s definitely been more appreciation for the creation of outdoor spaces. That’s definitely a nice bonus for me. I don’t have to fight for these outdoor spaces and projects that are demanded. It’s really interesting though. I know that there’s been a number of corporate office rehabs that I’ve worked on where it’s all about the amenities. How are we going to entice people back into the office? Is it adding these incredible gym spaces? Is it having outdoor conferencing? Is it walking paths?”



“SOME PEOPLE WHO FEEL more strongly about work from home. I’m close to our neurodivergent, gender-divergent colleagues. Being at home is feeling safe. For those of us who are not in that category, it’s hard to realize the stress it puts on the neurodivergent and queer folks to leave home. It requires bravery that none of the rest of us ever even knew was required. That’s what I mean when I talk about looking at human-centric design, as opposed to business-centric. Let’s set teams next to one another based on their personalities and not based on who they report to. Which is fairly radical in my world, and seems to make sense to me.”

Micro-interventions ●

“WHEN IT COMES TO development and construction, the assumption is always to scrape it and make it bigger. Gut the building and make it newer. One of the things that we’re looking at are these micro-interventions that from a design process point of view or a design implementation point of view or from a facilities point of view make a huge difference. We did a series of guidelines for the GSA. One of them is around the effect that lighting has on the workplace. There were a couple of different projects where the photographs look exactly the same, but one is working really well and one isn’t working really well. I think the report’s called Light Matters.”



Growing Cities ●

"THE HOT NEW COOL city changes like every five or ten years. Some of these cities are going to run out of water, so they're not going to be able to grow either. So I think there needs to be a lot more work on, 'Why are people choosing those cities and are those growth numbers? What are those growth numbers related to versus how many jobs are they actually offering? How is the workforce growing in those places?'"

Transit Accessibility ●

"IF YOU THINK ABOUT transit, the robotaxis, flying electronic helicopters, and different things are not that far away, those could be game-changers. It could take cars off the road. It could give people an easy pathway to get from A to B if we redesign the cities to be transit accessible. I see a future in transit that is very different from what we're experiencing today. The cities that have good transit are doing better."

Work, Live, Play Communities ●

"I LOVE THE IDEA of having everything in one area where you live and work."

"I'VE BEEN FASCINATED BY the 15-minute city. Our house view has been more towards suburban office than urban office. And it's not because urban centers are dead, lots of young people are coming back.... How hard is it to move people around by land on roads or in transit? Transit's underfunded and roads are full. So a fix to that is give up on all of that. Put an office and put everything next to each other. I think the 15-minute city model is interesting because it can work in a downtown and CBD environment. In some ways that's the hardest for places like San Francisco that do not have housing. Downtown LA built a ton of housing and it did not actually fix the desirability of working downtown. So that's an interesting reverse case."

"THERE'S AN INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT in Toronto called the Well. It was built as if it was a dream. The Well is a multifamily complex, it's got commercial space. You can live and work and go to restaurants in that area."

"THE PEARL DISTRICT IN Portland is a place to check out. I just went up there. There were a lot of folks, senior folks, walking around looking like they're having a really nice lifestyle."

"IT'S A CONTINUATION OF the whole urbanized suburbia. Let's try to create places to live and work where people currently live. San Francisco is a 15-minute city. I live in San Francisco. I'm 15 minutes from downtown. The problem is the employment office sector is so much bigger than just San Francisco. It was a regional employment center that people from a regional point of view just couldn't connect to or didn't want to pay the cost of connecting to."

“WALKABILITY TO AMENITIES IS a huge driver of real estate value. That’s where people want to be.”

“EUROPEAN CITIES ARE MORE vibrant because they’re more mixed-use in their nature, amongst other reasons. People live where they work. We are trying to do it intentionally.”

“I’M SEEING A LOT of similar things here in Chicago. I do work a lot across the country, but there’s definitely been a conversion of office-to-retail, office-to-residential, office-to-hotel that I’ve been a part of. There are definitely shifts in the economy towards hospitality. Those with money are definitely spending more money and there is a very large need for high-end hospitality and high-end condos in downtown and a lot of those conversions. At the other end of the spectrum, Chicago cut a lot of funding to major new park projects downtown. They’re like, ‘We have the River Walk. We’ve got Millennium Park. We need to focus on the neighborhoods.’ So there was definitely a huge push to invest in the Southside, the Westside in particular, but definitely all of the neighborhoods.”



Different Lifestyles ●

“WHEN I WAS MY son’s age, I was driving. Now we have to push these kids to drive. None of his friends want to drive. They just want to be on their phones, and they want their parents to be the chaperone. It’s like, ‘I’m connected. So I don’t need to drive to see them.’ We’re always connected, we’re never really alone, but then we’re never really together either.”

“OFFICES AND CITIES WOULD have to account for the mix of ages and lifestyles, but there might be a way to optimize it. The trick there is, ‘What is the overall goal of the city or the place or the office or the company? What is the main goal?’ If I know that my main goal is to lease it up, keep it leased. I just want people to come in. So I need to know who’s the tenant and how do I then entice that particular one to come in. But if commuting times are really tough, you want to look at places that have good commuting, affordable housing, that still have access to a beautiful city environment, arts, and things of this nature. Once you’ve met the basic needs, we’ll always want more.”



Natural Life Cycle of Workers ■

“IN THE TWO COMPANIES I've worked for most recently, the highest attrition was in the youngest, early career employee. This future talent, the 12-year-old or the current 25-year-old that's in our workforce, is pioneering the next generation of workers. Their commitment to companies and their desire to actually have multiple sources of income for that flexibility. The notion that they are going to set up residence and stay somewhere and commute for the next 30 years, I don't believe is the life plan that they're setting up for themselves. Some of it is going to be forced because cars and housing and commute and environment are things they're going to make decisions on. But I think it's a very different worker. I think the idea of coming together is right. But the idea of coming together for a 60-year-old or a 40-year-old or a 25-year-old are all different. If you're 25, I really agree with building the connection. What we are describing is a society that needs to continually learn and learn quickly.”

Diverse Communities ■

“WHEN I LED SOME panels about accessible design or universal design, the numbers were really astounding. I just looked this up last night, but 1 in 36 children have autism. Not only that, but 1 in 4 adults in the United States has some kind of a disability with cognition being the primary one, mobility being secondary. These trends are only going to increase as our population ages. So I think there's two parts when thinking about preparing for the workforce. One is that with hybrid and remote work, and technology, there are opportunities for people with disabilities to work who never could have entered the workforce before. So there's that component. When I think about my own work, the flexibility while having a family member with a disability is also really, really critical. I don't have the ability to just say, 'All right, sign him up for after-school care, and it'll be fine.' I think the number of people who will either be caring for a person in their family with a disability, or an aging parent is only going to continue.”

“WE'RE REALLY FOCUSED ON neurodiversity and wellness, trying to figure it out. What is that? How does that impact and play in the office? It's not only design but also in the execution of work and what we do.”

Technology ■

“IN MAYBE 10 TO 15 years when there's quantum computing, that's going to change the whole game with health and a lot of different things. If you have a disease, it'll be able to map out what that disease is and how you get better from that.”

AI ■

"I'M CONCERNED ABOUT AI. I think it's really important that it be a tool for humans, human-focused, and helpful as opposed to just letting it go, not regulated, and not controlled by humans. The other thing that concerns me about AI is people learning things. I saw this commercial where the father was like, 'Oh, this is so great, I'll have my kid use AI to write this thing.' But your kid needs to know how to write and communicate. So that's not using the tool in the right way. Just like we use the internet, we use it to our benefit. We need to find ways to use it to our benefit and to regulate AI so it doesn't create fake images and steal identities."

"I THINK ONE OF the things that concerns me about AI is that it's expensive to understand it, research it, make it work for you – just like a lot of new technologies. As a small business, it's always a challenge to find the resources to make sure you've got the knowledge you need to use it in your team, get them trained up."

"I WANT TO TALK about AI for a second. Sam Altman's been quoted as talking about the need for universal income. Obviously, he and others believe that AI has the potential to replace a lot of work. I think about this concept of why. People kind of questioning, 'Why do I work? Why do I choose to live my life this way? What's in it for me?' Then I wonder how AI is going to evolve. I find a lot of people were kind of calming our angst around it by saying, 'Well, AI is really just going to help us do what we do. It's not going to replace us.' In some cases that may be true and some maybe not."

"AI WILL BE INFLUENTIAL, but it depends on how it plays out. That's the key. I use it all the time. It's not going to replace me, but it's a huge benefit. It's an incredible research tool, just amazing. I'm watching Waymo cars drive around the neighborhood all day long, and they're unbelievably good driving. From where they were three years ago, it's been night and day. It's moving at such an amazing pace. I don't think AI is going to replace people. It's going to reconstruct jobs, how you do your job. It's an amazing assist. That may mean you need to hire fewer people to do the same job, but it's not going to replace a core staff that really owns the content, owns whatever you're trying to do as a business mission."

Worker Retention and Immigration ◆

"I THINK WITH INTEREST rates coming down now, that'll likely spur some activity in the market in terms of people being able to loosen up their spending, but it also could be a sign that we're heading into a recession. So we'll see over the next two quarters. In Ontario and Canada, if we hit a recession, I think employment here will still be relatively good. People my age will likely stay where they are because it's risky to lose your work right now. But those who are younger are probably able to be more flexible and be able to move quickly. That trend has always been the case. So I think retention in those ranks will be a little bit different. Right now there's a shortage in the trades in Ontario – just the people able to build the buildings and the housing. So we'll see if that will correct."



"IN TERMS OF IMMIGRATION, the New York Times did a really great article about where young people are. Young people are going to generate future economic support for the older people who are retiring. What's happening is the younger people are in the southern hemisphere. They're trying to migrate to the northern hemisphere, which is lacking workers."

"IN TERMS OF THE aging workforce, we've always used immigration to solve our aging workforce problems. Silicon Valley is 50 percent immigrants. I mean, it's incredible. You wouldn't have Silicon Valley without immigration, and I think that's across every employment sector in our cities. Cutting off immigration is the risk, not the aging workforce."

Globally Distributed Workforce ◆

"IN THE CONTEXT OF what's happening with AI, and what's happening with remote work generally, and a globally distributed workforce, it begins to look a lot like manufacturing. I don't mean to be draconian about this. If a company's going to really pivot toward a global workforce mindset, the idea of localized labor pricing goes away and a U.S. employee suddenly becomes very expensive. So a software engineer living in San Francisco and earning \$250,000 a year, if a company's looking to employ a similar caliber software engineer, the odds are you might be able to go to India and get the same quality for much less."

Remote Work ●

"I WAS JUST THINKING a little bit about this concept of proximity bias and what happens on the ground inside of organizations where you work. The pandemic has created this new narrative for employees where it's like, 'Hey, this is what work means to me.' If you're good enough or you have a skill set that's valuable enough, you have this opportunity to engage with your employer in a different way about your skills. There's a certain transactional element, but I also think that it's a real-world thing that happens inside of organizations. If I'm working at your company, and I aspire to climb that ladder, I suspect I'm going to be more successful if I'm in and around you more. I'm demonstrating the skill sets that I have, that I would be with the same skills, but yet remote. So I think there's an equality issue that comes into play."

"I THINK THERE'S A really strong fundamental feeling that the workplace culture and process within that workplace culture is critical for their business mission. They're worried as I think they should be that they're going to lose that as it gets to be more and more remote work."

"IN OUR BUSINESS WE can see the newer employees, the younger employees clearly want to come back to work, both proximity to the senior staff and managers, but I also think just being part of the workplace culture. The isolation is hurting them socially. From a business skills point of view, I've already mentioned the tragedy going on with coming into the workplace. I think that's going to filter up as they move up in the organization. It will be a more transactional environment as opposed to a more collaborative, holistic place, where people really love their job, love the people they work with. I do. I love my job. I love the people I work with."

"WHAT DO WE THINK about CEO sentiment as evidenced by the KPMG study that recently came out? Are CEOs really leaning toward bringing everybody back to the office? Is that a real thing? Why would they be thinking like that? It's obvious they're not ignorant and they're not unintelligent people. They realize that employees are having this totally opposite conversation about wanting more flexibility. Why would CEOs be driving to bring people back in this environment?"

"WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND why people go to an office. As a manager, architect, planner, I need to know what it would take to get people to come back into the office. I can require it, but I also need to keep up morale. So I have to balance that out. Younger folks who graduated college in the last few years, they've actually never worked in the environments that I've worked in. The ones I found great to work in, wonderful places with people to collaborate with. That whole, creating a sort of synergy and a group identity, I guess you would say. That sort of bonding is very difficult to do online. There are some really interesting examples where there are two firms that were going to merge, but they failed because they couldn't get their cultures to merge because everybody was online. So that ability to create a culture is really problematic online."

Data and Insights ●

"DATA AND INSIGHTS ARE important. Part of a real estate team would measure traditional office metrics of attendance and the number of people in a conference room, the number of people sitting at a desk. I think they're interesting, I don't think they matter very much in the big scheme of things. What matters is whether you can connect somebody's attendance to the fact that they are growing their network and that growing of a network is valuable to somebody. The contribution of a number of people collected together have got a stronger network or have got a certain amount of attendance seems to indicate correlation rather than causal, but that is better. That could be retention."



"I'M LOOKING FOR INDICATORS that tell me whether something is beginning to emerge. So I want to be able to segment populations. I don't want to look at all software engineers in my company as all software engineers. I want to look at them and say, 'Well, these guys are doing the kernel code kind of coding, and these guys are doing live site applications. Their project times, their complexity, their team size, the team, they're all different, but then they're also different in their age and what they're trying to do.' So I want to see people as more than just a job title. I want to see their patterns of work, career stage, life stage."

Retirement ●

"I'M 65, I'M GOING to work until I'm 75, might go to 80, 85. An attorney friend of mine just retired two days ago at age 83. He didn't need to work that long, but it's like, what else do you do? If there's not another purpose, I hate to say it, but a lot of people retire and then three, or four years later, they're gone."

"EVEN IF I WAS financially able to stop working today, I would still continue because everything's competitive. Things are competitive, work as well as in life. I'd want to be relevant in the business so that I can also shepherd my kids into certain things."

"I THINK RETIREMENT COULD be isolating but it depends on what situation you put yourself in if you have the privilege to do that. My folks, my mom and her husband, they're academicians, but they've chosen to live in a place that they're pretty isolated in Maui. They're not around other academicians. They love their retirement, but I do think they're isolated and I think they get lonely for other people to have those intellectual discussions with and to do the volunteering and the philanthropic work. Especially after COVID, it got very isolating for them. So I'm wanting them to move from Maui to Honolulu, to be near the university, because they still have a lot to contribute and they still consult. They're in their eighties and they help others, they help students and they do all of that. So that can be fulfilling as a retirement, but I think isolation is a problem. Being able to walk and not always drive to places."

"I VOLUNTEER ON BOARDS. When I spoke to my friends, it's the same thing. We're just wired that way. If I'm not working for the company I'm working with, I would need a purpose. I can vacation probably for maybe two to three weeks and then I would need some purpose other than that."

Participants' Takeaways

CHANGE

- We are in an incredibly transitional moment in time.
- Don't get upset about it. It is what it is. It's reality and working through the reality of what that is and just getting to the other side. The unknowns of the future are forcing companies to reevaluate and redefine why people come to work. I think that's a huge transformation – how management thinks about their business itself. It's not a dichotomy between life and work, but it's a more integrated view of life and work, a holistic view of that.

7



NATURAL LIFE CYCLE OF WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES

- When you're young, you'll want the social aspect. Then as you start to have kids, you'll have more needs for those kids. Then as you get older, you might want to do more volunteering and have different needs. When you retire, you'd want some kind of purpose, like volunteer work or board work or something along those lines. I think after understanding the actual life cycle, a community space would likely be built that way.
- Our employees are part of families. Those families may be caring for elder generations or younger generations, or they may be living apart. We need to look beyond seeing somebody by their job title or their position in the organizational hierarchy.
- I think a lot of folks, especially younger generations, are looking at work as very transactional as opposed to something that they love to do, which is a different situation to respond to.



COLLABORATION

- Like-minded people working towards a goal that can help shape the future. Understanding that this group of people are individuals thinking, 'How are we going to use space? What does it look like? What are the things that are important?'
- From entry-level to the top level, having conversations like, 'This is an opportunity right now to build a more resilient way of how we work and how we come together.'

IMPORTANCE OF WORK

- A productive worker is a happy worker. Most people want to do things frictionlessly and intentionally. If they're productive, they're going to walk home feeling like they've done something.
- Work is a key component of how we live, and the choices we make, and we have the luxury, at least in a small subset of our society, to take a step back and think about how we organize that. It's important because if you think about the key things that make up a society, work is probably right up there.

MEASUREMENT

- I think the evidence isn't coming through singular sort of measures or metrics. It is bringing together different data sets and insights, looking at them through different perspectives, and segmenting them in different ways. It's really important to bring different data and insights together. Otherwise, we are going to be making a lot of gut and heart kind of decisions.
- They will completely change in three to five years as seen by this current transitional movement.

BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON WORK AND WORKPLACE

- What are we thinking about that might be able to extend beyond that, especially when it comes to cities and infrastructure? I'm mindful of who's not here, who's not around the table, who's not showing up on the screen.
- So many people have different ideas of, 'I could work this way, or this is just what's expected of me.' That seems a little bit up in the air and that seems difficult to manage.

SOLUTIONS

- Anytime we do design work, we're talking to the users.
- The ability to make these small adjustments to things that we know can make a huge difference and address some of these complicated and huge problems with just small adjustments.
- The length of charge will vary depending on your experience with the organization, your role within the organization, who you are as a human, what you feel like that day when you got out of bed, but that we start thinking of it as a place to charge up.
- We need to question and look and reset. I think it's important to bring various thinkers together to try and act quicker to try and solve problems faster. But do not think you've solved it for an eternity, you've solved it for the next three years.
- Companies are trying to figure out how to meet their employees where they are, and how to aggregate talent ultimately. Now you're seeing cities trying to deal with the same issue.

Public Policy Professionals

PUBLIC POLICY concerns the examination of the need for laws, regulation, guidelines and actions to respond to a public need. The aim is for governmental officials to establish laws and institutions to correct the perceived problems in a continual process that involves elected officials, governmental employees, lobbyists, and public policy experts. Public policies govern and include various aspects of life such as education, health care, employment, finance, economics, transportation, and other elements of society. The implementation of public policy is known as public administration. The policy process is a complex political process in which there are many actors: elected politicians, political party leaders, lobbyists, civil servants, publicly employed professionals, judges, non-governmental organizations, international agencies, academic experts, journalists, and even sometimes citizens who see themselves as the passive recipients of policy.

SANDBOX 8 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility
 Education, Development & Training	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	 Technology & AI
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors

PARTICIPANTS

KIMBERLY ALVARENGA

Director, California Domestic
Workers Coalition

ANITA CHANDRA

Vice President RAND Social and
Economic Well-Being, RAND

MAUREEN CONWAY

Vice President & Executive Director
Economic Opportunity Program,
The Aspen Institute

GAREN CORBETT

Director, California Health Benefits
Review Program,
University of California

ROBERT ESPINOZA

CEO, National Skills Coalition

STEPHEN KNIGHT

Executive Director, Worksafe

DAVID LEVINE

Professor, University of California,
Berkeley

VICTOR RUBIN

Consultant on policy to
California Labor Lab,
otherwise retired

STEPHEN SHORTELL

Dean, School of Public Health,
University of California, Berkeley

JOANNE SPETZ

Director, Philip R. Lee Institute
for Health Policy Studies,
UCSF

LAURA STOCK

Director, Labor Occupational
Health Program,
University of California, Berkeley

MIKE WILSON

Senior Safety Engineer,
Cal/OSHA Research
and Standards

The Current State

SUMMARY: The conversation around work, equity, and economic policy highlights deep structural challenges that shape the future of labor. Immigration policies remain disconnected from workforce needs, while political and economic systems reinforce inequalities that disproportionately impact low-wage workers, immigrants, and marginalized communities. Housing affordability and transit issues further widen economic divides, forcing essential workers into unsustainable commutes. The rise of gig work and the erosion of job quality reflect a broader shift in power dynamics. At the same time, emerging movements around shared ownership models, skills-based hiring, and job quality metrics offer potential paths forward.

HANDBOOK
8

Political Process

“THAT’S AN AREA WHERE I feel impacts our democracy and democratic participation and really limits the voices that are part of the process. Despite many earnest legislators, the voices that are being heard are the ones that are most affluent. So even when we check the box and say, ‘Okay, we’re gonna expand access to Medi-Cal,’ we’re not going to provide those desperately needed pay raises for healthcare workers and not have the minimum wage – it’s been years of the same issues. We know we have millions of vulnerable patients, and we have millions of vulnerable workers. And yet, even when we have the political consensus that investing in healthcare access is a good thing, we don’t prioritize that because the political leverage is not there, for those voices to be heard and to make that a priority in our budget-making processes.”

“OF COURSE, CALIFORNIA HAS things that make us such a wealthy state in terms of the tech sector and certain zip codes resulting in billions of dollars of tax revenue. But we had a hundred billion dollars surplus two years ago and then a \$60 billion shortfall. Even in a state that is so much better off in a lot of the measures than other states, we have huge fractures.”



"FOR THE FIRST TIME in a long time, a number of elections in California matter at the national level. You're seeing campaigns from both parties actually making some modest strides to actually engage voters in some of those districts in Central Valley and so forth. But so many people in many of these areas feel very disenfranchised. If you haven't voted in three or four of the last major elections, you're not getting any campaign literature. People view it in a very transactional basis. But I think if we really started to rebuild some of the institutions, even in the local county-wide basis that support democratic engagement, at least you start encouraging voices. You encourage people to participate in the process instead of being pushed further and further out."

Social Safety Net

"THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET as a whole and how that plays beyond health care, is really in the big picture – a big difference between the U.S. and many other higher income countries. California is in many ways more generous than many other states. We have broad coverage for Medicaid, but Medicaid pays very poorly, so a lot of the health system doesn't want to deal with it. So it's a mix. I think that social safety net plays into a lot of the availability of resources and what kinds of jobs are offered and how well they're paid or not paid and so on. There was a nice effort to put out proposals for expanding health coverage in California – doing our own plan like Massachusetts did."

Child Care Policy

"I SPENT THE FIRST 15 or 20 years of my career working on child care policy, child development policy. I've been going back through my files and my early publications and projects recently and so much of it is still unresolved. The larger social and political lack of commitment to everything, from the public sector's role in incentivizing employer-supported child care, to providing care for kids with special needs, to upgrading the pay and benefits and skills and job security of child care workers, to figuring out how what we used to call 'welfare to work' child development, would be genuinely helpful and help people get into real jobs with good job quality and career ladders. How do we reconcile the gender imbalances in care, and all of the economic and cultural issues from 40 years ago, 30 years ago that feel like they're still unresolved in the United States? And the trends that people were describing in some fairly dark terms about getting further away from a commitment to equality will make that even harder. But I don't see any fundamental way of resolving the work issues, the future work issues that a lower paid workforce faces, without addressing child care and child development."

"IT'S TAKEN A LONG time [for change]. It's very hard because of the nature of the workplaces and the employers and the flow of money. In child care, there has always been, at least in a place like California, pretty highly unionized staff of child development centers associated with school districts or otherwise supported by state of California funds and those are center-based care. There's been a lot of organizing of family daycare operators who get public subsidies or whose clients get public subsidies. And so while it's not necessarily traditional unions, or it's other forms of organizing, it has to be tied to and relevant, responsive to the nature of the funding source."



Immigration Policies

"I WANT TO TALK about the impact of immigration policies on workers and whether or not, as a country, we are prepared to adapt and evolve our immigration policies to acknowledge that immigrants have always been a big part of the economy, and yet our policies don't always tap that in a way that's constructive or positive for the workforce.

Healthcare Workforce Challenges

"WE STUDY A LOT of healthcare teams, not only the workforce shortages that we face, particularly in primary care and behavioral health, but there's an awful lot of burnout and turnover, some of it COVID-related, but even before then. It's a long-term issue. A lot needs to change in the workplace environment itself and the way in which we lead and manage our healthcare organizations and in other sectors as well. We have the Healthcare Workforce Commission in California that came out with a series of recommendations. I guess a few have been implemented. How we advance the work and the recommendations is something that I think we can do more immediately and in the short term as well."



Dangerous Working Conditions

“ECONOMIC INSECURITY UNDERMINES EVERY other aspect of life and undermines democratic participation writ large, but also undermines every other element of life like the health of families and the health of children and their development. I see this through the experience of workers who are injured and made sick on the job. Whether it’s through fatalities that occur at construction sites, or a large silicosis outbreak in California, which is a permanent, disabling, and often fatal lung disease from inhaling silica particles. We now have 180 cases of silicosis. Every single one is a young, Latino worker from Mexico or Guatemala. They are a very vulnerable workforce and they’re not unionized. Many of them don’t speak the language. Some of them speak an indigenous language from Guatemala primarily. They’re working in conditions where they have no agency whatsoever. As a consequence of their economic insecurity, they’re compelled to do work that’s extraordinarily hazardous. In this case with silicosis, we have 13 of them who’ve now died of silicosis. We have 19 looking trying to get a lung transplant that gives them 10 more years. I compare that to a workforce in the state’s refineries that have been unionized since 1960. They have powerful worker participation, rights that really affect how the refinery is run, how the safety of the refinery is protected, how their safety is protected, and how their economic security is underpinned, all through a union contract and their power in the workplace. It’s an extraordinary difference.”

“FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF my organization, we’re really thinking about how we protect people today, through existing regulations and enforcement of our existing regulations. And what are the problems that are coming?... This is part of the emerging workforce in California. Low-wage labor working in dangerous jobs. In a very narrow way, what [has been] done at Cal OSHA is increase the authority of [the] field personnel to close shops where the dangers are most extreme and without really having to do anything else except look at what they see right in front of their own eyes – to order those shops to shut down until those hazards are abated. It’s a small thing, but it empowers workers to understand and to take action on the hazards that are in front of them.”

“DISCUSSIONS ON THE FUTURE of work almost always are focused on the people who would like to work full-time remote. Well, that’s not an option for those we used to call essential workers during the pandemic. We saw at that point, everybody was working remotely except for those who couldn’t, which were immigrant workers, workers of color, low-wage workers. So, I do think elevating that perspective and also just remembering when we talk about the future of work, many jobs are not changing. They’re not improving, they’re degrading and the working conditions within those jobs look exactly the way they did a hundred years ago.”

Labor Code Exceptions

"WE'RE PREPARING FOR THE future with the focus on trying to build the highest possible floor for California workers. The incredible whole field sieve that is the current workplace with so many holes that people, whole sectors fall through. Domestic workers under California law are not defined as employment. In the labor code when they define employment, there was a clause saying, 'Comma, except domestic workers.' We have just gotten that partially overturned if you work for an agency. But if you work directly for a homeowner, you're still not protected by the occupational health and safety rules. So as long as those kinds of exceptions exist, whole segments of people who tend almost always to be women and people of color, are being allowed to drop out or below a minimum level of quality work. These are affirmative choices that we make to let that happen. That resets the balance for the rest of us in a contingent place. So we are working to try to eliminate those unacceptable, discriminatory exceptions."

SANDBOX

8

Prison Work

"MY ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN working on the indoor heat standard for a decade. It was passed in June and all workers, not just prison work, but guards and nurses and all workers in California prisons, are exempt from the heat protections. So we're now partnering with prisons rights groups and building a coalition to try to eliminate that unacceptable hole where this chunk of workers have been allowed to fall through. Prison labor is on the ballot for the upcoming election in California. Prison work is actually pretty rampant, including huge multinational fast-food companies. As an example, there was a huge tornado that destroyed a candle factory in the Midwest three, four years ago. A whole bunch of workers were killed and most of them were actually bussed in from the local prison. This just landed with me because my daughter's buying all these scented candles, and she recently learned that they're being made by prisoners."

Societal Issues

"A LOT OF PEOPLE have been talking about the impact of some of these societal issues like climate change and what are going to be the impact on low-wage workers. What tools do they need? What are the policies and practices – who controls them?"

"I ACTIVELY TRY TO figure out personal decisions around disaster resilience, as I grew up in hurricane country."



"HOW ARE WE CONSUMING our information and how is that affecting people's sense of agency? Connection, cohesion, how we produce knowledge, how that knowledge gets used for everything from voting to action, and other more localized perspectives. That trend, we've been talking about it as truth decay for the last decade [at my organization]. How do we think about that in the context of cognition and health and well-being and work and expectations for employers and a whole raft of concepts?"

Direct Care Workforce ■

"IN REGARDS TO DIRECT care workers, the issues we're seeing are all related to poor job quality. We often see low wages, limited training and advancement opportunities. We see a general lack of respect and recognition, limited career pathways or advanced roles and because of all of that, we see high poverty rates and high turnover rates. In fact, most direct care workers leave within the first 90 days. And so the question that needs to be answered is about financing and to what extent do we regulate and to what extent do we incentivize."

"IN THE HEALTHCARE LABOR markets, a lot of job growth is coming out of low-wage jobs. One of the biggest growing, specific job areas is what we call the personal direct care workers, home health aides, home care aides, nursing assistants, all low-wage jobs, increasing unionization in California, but not as much nationally. Those are not remote jobs. They are decidedly in-person jobs. There are a lot of different reasons that pay is low for them, partly Medicaid doesn't pay well. So the Medicaid-supported programs can't really pay the workers better. So there's this whole trickle-down around those wages. Let's look at where a lot of this job growth is until we build the AI robot that can take care of your elderly person with dementia."

Domestic Work ■

"THE PERSPECTIVE I BRING is the perspective of domestic workers and immigrant women, women of color. Half of our base is documented and half is undocumented nannies, caregivers, house cleaners that work in the private pay sector. We continue to deal with systemic racism and the history of enslavement in our country. Our members feel completely invisible. I think the issues that really were highlighted for me is the future of work, and the flexibility that people have been advocating for in their work, whether they want to work remotely, part-time, full-time, where they want to work and the flexibility that comes with that. Our members have been highlighting the need for health and safety rights for many years now. It's really ironic that within that conversation, there's a complete unwillingness to recognize the home as a workplace. Give people basic dignity when we have given a lot of other workers that are working in different places."

Long-Term Care Workers ■

“THERE ARE ALL THESE employers that are like, ‘Oh, we can’t retain long-term care workers and they want to spend all their time talking about wages being too low.’ No question, the wages are too low, but that’s not sufficient. There are irregular work schedules. There’s a lack of guaranteed number of hours. There’s the sending people to client after client with no continuity of the client. There are a lot of other things that make a person in any job feel disrespected and not valued.”

Undocumented Workers ■

“MANY PEOPLE IN THE direct care context, out of financial necessity, often hire workers off the books, and many undocumented workers work off the books. What impact is that having on their lives, and what impact is it having on broader sectors? What’s missing in this analysis is just a deeper historical analysis around racial disparities and racial inequality in regards to wages, job quality, and career pathways.”

LGBTQ Workers ■

“MANY LGBTQ WORKERS STILL live in states with little or no protections related to employment discrimination. When we’re talking about older LGBTQ workers, they’ve often faced a lifetime of employment and education discrimination, which means higher levels of impoverishment.”

Aging Workforce ■

“ONE REALITY IS THAT we are an aging workforce and the growing numbers of older workers will shape the future of work, and our economy in general. While the public fascination is often with people who have the resources to retire and choose second or third careers, the reality is that many older workers are forced to work into later life. One in ten direct care workers is aged 65 and older.”

Gig Work ■

“WE SPEND A LOT of time talking about the future work with this idea that people are doing gig jobs and people are wanting to work remotely. Yet for many, many people, the work is the same and degrading. In fact, it’s interesting to look at the statistics around gig work. Of course, gig work depends on how you define it because many even traditional jobs like hotel housekeepers and others are being transformed through misclassification and a bunch of other issues. But the new definition of gig work as people who get their jobs remote is a relatively small percentage, and it takes up a lot of space in conversations as opposed to looking at some of the issues.”



Shared Ownership Models ◆

“THERE'S LOTS OF LITTLE ways systems work against a shared ownership model. Incentives for women or minority-owned businesses go away once it becomes a worker-owned business, even if all those workers are women and minority. Even though co-ops and ESOPs and other shared ownership models have shown that they can be very successful enterprises, I feel like all our narratives are about the unicorn entrepreneur that owns the whole thing and they are a command-and-control kind of person, this economic narrative that if you allow worker engagement and participation, that's just going to ruin the whole enterprise. Even though most of us are workers, somehow we buy into this idea. So we've been just trying to promote different kinds of shared ownership models, which is a way for people to also have much stronger economic rights. Economic rights are based on ownership, and if you own equity, you have much greater rights, certainly, than you do as a wage earner.”

Job Inequalities ◆

“ONE-THIRD OF JOBS ARE low wage. Workers are really the experts and we all struggle with tapping into that expertise because the workers are busy trying to keep from being evicted. They are living paycheck to paycheck.”

“AT MY ORGANIZATION, ONE of the things we try to do is a variety of public events and communications and things and try to lift up issues that are shaping the future because I do think that we're a little bit stuck in our thinking. There are some forces that we can't control that are going to determine the future of work. I think we need somehow to reorient the conversation so that we can make policy choices that are going to make a difference. Do we want to have good jobs? Well, then we should say what those are. We should measure them and we should say, 'Okay, what's making them better? What's making them worse?' We shouldn't just say, 'Oh, well, a home health aide, that just has to be a terrible job because we've decided that they're low wage, or low skills, or whatever.' That's a poverty job by policy choice.”

“IN CALIFORNIA AROUND CLIMATE change and resiliency, we see it in the cities, but also statewide. What I worry about is we're really driving for a low-carbon or carbon-neutral economy. But we have the possibility of doing that while also building a very unequal society. We're really worsening inequality, and we're seeing that with the jobs projections. More than 50 percent of new jobs by 2030 will be in low-wage occupations, making less than \$19 an hour. Historically, economic stress and insecurity generates votes and sympathy for authoritarian regimes. We've seen that around the world. And so that's what I mean by social and economic insecurity being socially destabilizing.”

Dominant Economic Narrative ◆

"WE HAD THIS CONVERSATION around the time of the 75th anniversary of the International Declaration of Human Rights and we thought, 'Well, why don't we have a conversation about why we can't talk about a human rights-based economy?' It was an interesting conversation and got a lot of different perspectives. One of the journalists in the room came out and said, 'The standard supply and demand model is just so ingrained in people and it's so easy for them to understand.' But it's this win-lose idea of an economy. It's been a real struggle to think about how we counteract a narrative that is so deeply ingrained in so many ways. I, perhaps like many of you, live primarily on philanthropy. Where does philanthropy get their money? Usually from a business success. Different philanthropies are different. Some more so, some less, but in general, very friendly towards this standard economics view of how people make money and what needs to happen. So it's just a real challenge when you're trying to drive a new narrative, when they're really clinging to the old narrative, and you're trying to say no."

"THERE'S A NEED FOR a new narrative on who today's worker is and the challenges they're facing because what you see in the press feels so one-sided."

Concentration of Wealth ◆

"IF MR. BEZO'S \$200 billion was instead largely in the hands of his 1.5 million employees, who built that fortune, we would be living in a different country. We might not be facing the imminent return to power of fascism in this country specifically and around the world."

"I WANT TO RECOGNIZE the power dynamics. I just think that it is really problematic. Why is Jeff Bezos untaxed? Because we allow that. And we sort of buy into this idea that he's like this amazing entrepreneur and we're all better off and he deserves to be fabulously wealthy."

Taxes ◆

"ON THE INCENTIVES FRONT, we didn't say anything about taxes here, and we have this long-term trend in the differential between the tax on capital and the tax on labor. We had the Bush tax cuts and then the Trump tax cuts. So we have a very favorable tax structure now for capitalists and a much less favorable tax structure for everybody whose income comes through ordinary earnings."



Market Consolidation and Employee Autonomy ◆

“WHAT WE REALLY ARE seeing is continued consolidation in the market efforts to create more market power, both among insurers and among employers. All of that means that workers, regardless of whether they’re the janitor or the doctor in the hospital, have less and less autonomy, or perceive that they have less autonomy in their work, especially for some of the higher-paid occupations. They’re really holding on to what power they have left. It’s physicians not wanting nurse practitioners to do anything, which the Health Workforce Commission made some points about. All the way down to nurses still not allowing home care aides to administer their client’s Tylenol, which is silly. I think a lot of that is actually an effort to hold control in the few places you can have any control because there’s so many other components in our healthcare markets being so private industry and profit-focused that workers really have few opportunities for power. The lowest wage workers continued to be in the less empowered positions.”

Worker Equity ◆

“WE ARE LIVING IN a political reality where many people and entities are trying to preserve the status quo, and so in many cases, we’re not just talking about the future of work. We’re talking about the future of worker equity. We’ve eliminated affirmative action. We’re attacking DEIA laws at the state and federal level. We’re blocking unions. We’re attacking the social safety net – from Social Security to Medicaid. And we’re seeing a rise in private equity and corporatization, which is all kind of really harming workers, specifically those who have always struggled.”

Community Development Financial Institution ◆

“I HAVE A MODEST role in helping my health professions university invest in the community. One of those investments is in a community development financial institution that is singularly focused on job quality in small businesses in general, and in particular, small businesses run by entrepreneurs of color, or entrepreneurs in underrepresented and underinvested areas. This is important on so many different levels. There’s a nice local example in Oakland. This is a small but growing trend that I hope will continue not only in large employers or unionized workplaces or government employment but in the small business sector and in even the nonprofit sector. We’re starting to see a lot more attention and awareness to that. That’s a potential positive trend in this CDFI. When it loans the money, it’s also providing the assistance to the people starting and running those businesses to pay more attention to benefits, pay, retention, training, and workplace culture. There’s a whole world out there of how to build job quality, but it’s really hard in small businesses. But that’s one place where I think attention is starting to be paid, where folks never would have thought about it, or they would have said out of hand, ‘That small business is the last place you’re going to look for job quality.’”

Social Determinants of Health ●

"I SPEND MY TIME in health policy and there are certainly some modestly encouraging signs and there are plenty of grim statistics to see. We're actually bringing the conversation of social determinants of health into the frame in healthcare, particularly in the world of Medicaid or Medi-Cal in California. We recognize that you can't prevent ER visits if folks can't get access to nutrition or they're at home in an apartment that's 105 degrees and they're elderly. There are a lot of these obvious connection points. At least, we are trying to move the gears of our very clunky health care apparatus and financing mechanisms to bear and see some improvements."

SANDBOX

8

Hospital Safety ●

"I'M A MEMBER OF a national health care reform group. One of the issues we're addressing is patient harms, patient safety in hospitals in particular, but not just hospitals. You may know the statistic that one in four patients suffers an adverse event, harm, in our hospitals. About a quarter lead to serious outcomes, death, or morbidity. The others not so much. But nonetheless, it's a huge issue. Costs a lot of money, and we can do a lot better."



"SOME INTERVIEWS AND FIELDWORK research was done of janitors working in hospitals, and they discovered some that didn't do their role, but in fact helped patients and patients' families with their care. They would go out and tell a nurse, 'I don't know if you know this but so and so is having problems with this.' They viewed themselves as members of the health care team. Team-based. They didn't make as much money but their job was much more fulfilling. And they had a culture in those hospitals of supporting them to do that. 'Okay, if you didn't clean this today, but you helped so and so and you told the doctor so and so, and that really helped get that patient well.' I was just impressed by that example of what we'd like to see in more team-based care, and that includes the janitor, who probably sees the patient more than anyone else going in and out of the room, etc."

Worker Safety ●

"SOME OF YOU MAY remember Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill from a number of years ago, actually in the Bush administration. He had an interview with Wall Street reporters when he took over as head of a large corporation. They asked him, 'What are your big plans?' He said, 'My number one priority and strategy is workplace safety. I want my workers to be safe.' The reporters were flabbergasted by that comment. Here's this big CEO talking about employee safety. And he really meant that. And he turned around that corporation because, for the first time, those people felt that they were really seen, that their work was really important, that their injuries mattered."



Individual and Collective Well-Being ●

"I SPENT A LOT of time working on well-being-related matters, both at the individual and the collective level, and we've got a lot of work to do, not just because of the diseases of despair, but we have an absence of collective well-being, which is showing up both in workplace and in community and has myriad of impacts, and it may or may not be exacerbated by technology and some of these disruptions that are going to happen in the workforce."

Job Quality ▲

"WE HAVE THIS JOB Quality Center of Excellence where we're trying to provide different kinds of tools that people can use. There are workforce development organizations that really aren't aware of the job quality of their frontline workers and aren't really thinking about it themselves and so need some help. 'How do I run my organization to make sure I'm modeling what I hope to see in the places where I'm helping to connect other people?'"

"WE'RE TRYING TO COUNTER unproductive narratives like the skills gap, which I think is just an unproductive narrative, even though I have colleagues who still use it. I try to discourage that because I feel like it puts the onus solely on individuals. It doesn't lead us to systemic change. Productivity is as much a function of how companies choose to design a workplace as it is a function of the skills and abilities somebody brings to that work. And yet we put all the conversation on the skills and abilities somebody brings and no conversation about the choices companies are making about how to design."

"REGARDING THE SKILLS GAP language, it's something that I hear around registered nurses. Employers are saying, 'Oh, these new graduates don't have the skills we need.' Well, historically, you all create clinical placements for them when they're students so maybe you have something to do with them not having the skills you need."

"WE DON'T MEASURE JOB quality in this country. We measure basic statistics, sometimes we disaggregate and report that data, but no job quality."

Importance of Job Quality Metrics

"I NOTED THE JEFFREY Pfeffer piece on dying for a paycheck. The numbers that he comes up with contrasts with the occupational fatalities number from the Bureau of Labor statistics data. I think it has a lot to do with how they calculate it, but I just think that the metrics that we use matter. We don't actually do much to try to measure job quality in our economy. We do a lot to measure the numbers of jobs, and we don't do anything to look at whether they're good, bad, or indifferent, and whether they're good for people. We have all kinds of conversations about whether policies create or destroy jobs, but not whether they make them better or worse. I think what gets measured, gets managed. We really do need a much clearer set of metrics that we view as fundamental to describing whether the economy is healthy or not. Not just how many jobs there are or whether people are working, but the quality of those jobs and what work actually means for people's lives."

SANDBOX

8



Skills-Based Movement

"MY ORGANIZATION FOCUSES ON the skills-based movement, the ways in which workers who occupy jobs that do not require a college degree, how they're supported both in their training, their career pathways, and their economic mobility. We're preparing for the future in which those jobs will continue to be a big part of the economy, and yet what we're seeing is that too often, higher education policies and workforce policies tend to focus more on the four-year college route. They often do not address the kinds of wraparound needs that many workers need, like childcare, transportation support, long-term care."



Jobs and Housing

"PEOPLE ARE LEAVING CALIFORNIA because we don't build housing and because of NIMBYism. I'll put on my economist hat. I don't think economics does a good job of addressing global climate change, or new technology. But it's just really hard to build in the Bay Area. It's crazy expensive. Prices are double what they should be if it's allowed at all. We're not taxing congestion and pollution. Those are really bad and they're killing lots of people in America. And destroying lots of lives. So urban policy is not usually thought of as workplace policy, but I think they really interact closely. We have to build a lot more housing, make it a lot more affordable, and we have to tax driving so the jobs and houses are a lot closer to each other."



"LIVING NEAR WHERE YOU work. What a privilege that is and that privilege is being taken away from low-wage workers, in particular. It's a very unsustainable situation because you take a city that's impossible to afford to live in, but they still have a great need for low-wage workers to do direct care, to work in the supermarkets and hospitals and other places. The impact of that is that people are commuting for very, very, very long hours every day, which has a huge impact on many aspects, not only climate change

"MY ORGANIZATION WAS TEACHING a health and safety leadership class at a community college in Oakland that was on a Tuesday night for people who were workers, worker leaders or worked in unions. We had a number of people in that class who were bus drivers in San Francisco and they lived in Stockton. They described how they needed to get up at basically 3 in the morning in order to be able to begin the commute to arrive at their workplace."

"IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO AFFORD to live in the college town where I work. The research university is an employer with many, many low-wage workers. The university gives lots and lots of subsidies to faculty and other high-wage workers. Meanwhile, custodians and others don't benefit from that. And I know that many have been talking about even something so simple as having subsidized parking because parking is unbelievably expensive. So again, you take an institution, even one that considers itself to be a progressive institution but low-wage workers are invisible. Their motivations are to attract the best faculty, the best students, but there's an assumption that the people who are keeping the place afloat are going to be there in any case."

"WE STILL SEE HOUSING prices in the urban cores being unattainably high and rents, in particular, really have been inflating a lot. So there's this natural instinct to move to the Central Valley and to leave California entirely. That has a lot of implications for carbon emissions. We can talk about white-collar workers and executives flying to China all the time for their business. That in and of itself is a carbon problem. We still don't have great public transportation systems. People live in Stockton to afford a house, but find that the best-paying job is going to be in Fremont, and don't have a great way to get there. A lot of these issues really affect the low-wage folks."

Technology ■

"WE TEND TO DESCRIBE technology as if it has its own force, and not how technology and AI are making their way into organizations."

"WE NEED TO BE really careful when we talk about technology. We need to be talking about why and how people are incentivized to make the decisions about how to develop and use technology and whether those incentives need to be changed."

"WHEN IT COMES TO technology, as many of us have been saying, it's not a neutral thing. It has to do with who's controlling decision-making over technology. Can technology be engaged towards those goals? Are there ways that technology can be used to mobilize people? To give them tools to work together? To give them access to information about their rights and solutions? Can there be a way that low-wage workers can immediately be able to access or document the problems that they are facing? Can technology be brought to that particular goal of addressing the inequities of power in the workplace and building the ability of people on the bottom to be able to influence their own lives?"

Community ■

"MAKING SURE THAT I don't get insular in terms of being able to be in community with lots of different people. That's an intentional thing, but something I have put more in overdrive in the last few years."

"TRY TO LEAN INTO community. I have two kids. My oldest is 11. My youngest is 6. I engage her less about what's happening. Certainly from a social justice standpoint, she's engaged and aware. But from a political standpoint, systems of government, public policy, I grew up in a very political household, very civically engaged. In some ways, I feel like I'm going slower with exposing her to many of the things that are going on because I want my oldest, and also my second one, to still have a childhood where they're not full of anxiety, because I think anxiety is understandably plaguing a lot of young people. So somewhere in that mix of teaching the ability to have confidence in themselves, to lean on friends, to build community, to nurture relationships, are really important. And to adapt because I think the one thing we know is that the world is going to be less predictable. The rates of change, hopefully for good, but likely for a lot of things that are bad, are going to accelerate."

HANDBOOK

8



The Future State

SUMMARY: Discussions about the future of work consistently return to power, inequality, and technology. AI and automation promise efficiency but risk-deepening disparities. Care work remains undervalued, collective bargaining erodes, and dangerous conditions persist as profit takes priority over people. Policy can help rebalance, but globalization and political instability complicate solutions. Work is both a driver of change and a reflection of systemic forces. The real question is not just about jobs but about the kind of society we are building.

Societal Issues

"PEOPLE WHO ARE MORE able to work across sector and span boundaries, who can deal with the complexity of what you can call the 'polycrisis,' or these emerging transitions and systems all at once, whether it's climate change and technology, tend to be better in a disruptive environment. That's important for the next generation. The young people will need to be resilient, able to adapt, and deal with uncertainty."

"IN OUR COUNTRY, OUR grinding political systems, social change tends to respond only in times of crisis. On one hand, I am cautiously optimistic that if we can lower the dysfunction in our politics, that some of the emerging threats to our country, to our social fabric, to our country and world, from environmental geopolitical tensions, warfare, religious strife – that we can form some areas of new collaboration out of that sense of urgency, that crises historically helped us move much more quickly. But I am gravely concerned that not only is our system of government designed for us to be a bunch of farmers who come and argue a little bit, not too much, and come back next year, but that we're just not able to grapple with the multifaceted problems at the local, state, national, and global levels that we are facing today."

“FUTURE ANALYSIS WILL NEED drilling down and more fine-grained analysis of local labor markets and demographics in our state.... As one example, climate change is going to be pervasive, absolutely pervasive. When, and maybe not in our lifetime, but when the major earthquake hits, that’s going to hit disproportionately vulnerable people. The buildings that have been built to withstand 8.0, but there’s a lot of areas where they haven’t been built to that standard. Another example would be the influence of AI and technology on farming. So I think we’re going to see a greater permeability or intersectionality of the different types of jobs and workplaces. You might think that AI will have little to do with farming and producing walnuts and the state farm workers and the winery workers and so on, but probably not.”

“I’D SAY IN THE short term, I think there’s still going to be some confusion, fracturing. I never believe that the U.S. is as polarized as people are stating. But I do think we are still trying to figure out what is community, and reframing that conversation will happen in the second half of the 21st century. We’ll probably go through some increased difficulties, some of these overlapping disasters that we have will continue to chip away at. But they will also eventually be part of the wake-up call. So I think in the short term, we have a rough road ahead. But in the mid to long term, I actually think we’re going to reimagine what community is. I think we’re gonna be thinking about government very differently.”

“OBVIOUSLY WE HAVEN’T MADE enough progress on climate change. And we have a loneliness and isolation problem, the civic fracturing, inequity widening, all these other negative things. But there are some things, maybe not as disruptive, that Gen Z just accepted, like issues of diversity. Social disruption is fundamentally based on a different set of conflicts – not to say that there aren’t people with extreme views in some respects – but the stuff that we now take for granted, in the history of the world, actually moved relatively quickly in terms of social change. I feel like it’s the last gasp of a certain generational perspective on those topics, which is why I’m saying it’s going to get bad before it gets better.”

Political Process

“THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE who have this broader expertise who can serve as counterweights to the political and policy debates in Sacramento are just not being heard. At some point, the system is going to break, and the question is whether that’ll be precipitated by some of the events occurring at the national level. There is the fracturing of social solidarity, people participating in the process. And we have historical context to show what happens when disparities get too great in societies. Whether that’s in five years or 25, I don’t know. But we certainly are turning up the heat on a whole bunch of the things that create those kinds of pressure cooker situations.”



"I THINK ADDRESSING THAT power differential by more protective regulations, higher level of unionization, et cetera, is the key. We can't talk about future work without looking at that.... What laws get passed? What even brings it to the attention of the regulatory? It's so enmeshed in whose voices are heard, who has the ability to participate in the political process because their paid lobbyists could be there every day as opposed to workers on the front line."

Domestic Work

"SOME OF THEM DO work in the home and don't get paid for it, like childcare and other work like domestic work. People are beginning to talk about infrastructure. I think that is really important and valuable work. If we can get to a place where we value that work, I do think that eventually will have an impact... There are some policy people and researchers who would understand this more than I do, but it possibly requires some shifts in our values, in the way that our society sees certain things. The domestic workers that I work with, they're undocumented, they don't have a formal union, a lot of them are legal residents so not all of them are undocumented. But because it's a private one-on-one relationship, they are organized and they themselves speak with their employers all the time about the importance of making these shifts. So I think it's happening at the worker level, at the employer level, and within those who do this type of work, even for their families. So I do think that there's hope."

Job Inequalities

"WHEN WE THINK ABOUT the future of work, we really should be thinking about the economic viability of our population in California and beyond. The nature of work is changing. For some groups, the leverage that they have has increased, while many others are being left behind. In white-collar jobs, we tend to think about AI and remote work. It's really difficult to put one's arm around the challenges and opportunities when we have so much of our workforce that really are not dealing with those elements, but much more fundamental challenges to their health and safety."

"THERE ARE SO MANY jobs that can't be part of that conversation. It's not even a choice. No matter how much expertise and knowledge they have to do their jobs well, they continue to be told that they are unskilled workers and minimum wage is the best they're going to get. You go do a home care worker's job for a day and you tell me that they're unskilled. That's the future of work stuff that I'm worried about. That feeds into income inequality and this kind of bifurcation of the labor force. I also think it plays into education and the need to value training that is outside post-secondary degrees. I have a PhD. I love higher education, but we really need to emphasize trades and skilled trades. We have huge shortages of skilled trades and we need to think about the working conditions that are associated with skilled trades because those are very difficult jobs. Oil field workers are skilled people who have incredible occupational injury rates."

Resetting Power Imbalance at Work

“THE COUNTRY WAS FOUNDED on slavery and forced labor. It is still a signature part of our economic system. We have a ballot measure in California this year to try to get slavery out of our constitution, Prop 6.”

“I WAS ALSO STARTLED by the positive presentation of the impact of AI. Whatever it might be able to do in some utopian environment is going to be turned into this racialized power inequality situation. Maybe the 1930s-era labor structure that was destroyed by Taft-Harley is not the ideal way to structure work, but certainly to replace it with these loopholes that allow billionaires to exploit people is deeply troubling. It also has all kinds of racialized and gendered elements.”

SANDBOX

8

Remedies for Dangerous Working Conditions

“THE VEHICLE FOR WORKERS to generate some agency and to protect their economic security and raise wages and improve their working conditions, is through unionization and collective bargaining and there are just massive barriers against the rights of workers to organize. We’re in the very bottom of OECD countries in terms of union participation and 94% unprotected by a union contract. We’re on the path to worsening inequality, generating more poverty, and there are things that we can do in California – state actions that we can take – outside of the National Labor Relations to improve the rights of workers to organize in creative and effective ways.”

Collective Bargaining

“THERE’S LOTS OF THINGS I think we can talk about around improving the ability of workers to organize and collectively bargain. Childcare workers and home care workers are not in sectors that are traditionally organized through collective bargaining. There are other models of organizing that we can do in California to support those workers to take collective action. And things we can also do in California to support traditional collective bargaining and organizing.”

Addressing Imbalances

“THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS, AS I see them, are the differential in power, race, low wage, and inequality. So in that sense, it feels like the directions for the future is, how do we address that imbalance? On one hand, there are technical issues about what new technologies we use. I feel like that conversation addresses a narrow band of the workforce who are working in conditions that have not changed for many, many years. So the issue of AI, et cetera, are kind of less relevant in some workplaces. So it’s more like, ‘What do we do?’”



"HOW DO WE CONTINUE to understand what those power imbalances are and how do we build the capacity of the people who are impacted to advocate? That means how do we support efforts to promote collective action and unionization? Obviously, we're not a union, nor are we an organizing group, but we can build the skills and provide people the skills that they need in order to participate, to understand what their rights are, to know how to influence policymakers, to know how to organize, to create the strongest cases for the things that they need in the workplace through collective action with others."

"THERE'S A LACK OF guardrails. There's a deep imbalance. The power is not shared. The decision-making is unidirectional, including on AI. I'm trying to remain positive. I don't think it's gonna be bad, get worse, and never reverse. I think it's going to be bad for a few more years though. I don't think we've hit our low point yet."

"I ALREADY TOUCHED ON the fact that workers are the experts, and economic equality begins with an inclusive recognition through an occupational safety frame of the unequal distribution of wages, income, and wealth. Workforce inequalities across race and gender is a matter of life and death. So, we seem to be at a very contingent moment right now between status quo or something different."

Need for Scaling Innovations

"THERE'S A VITAL ORGANIZING sector and there's actually a very vital nonprofit sector sometimes constrained by the nature of their funding or the nature of their mission, other times, much less so. But I don't think we have a problem with innovations proliferating that can be valuable to vulnerable workers and people who are on the bottom rung of a ladder of racialized inequality. Our problem is getting beyond the cutting edge, getting beyond the innovations, getting beyond what's done in a few progressive places to become state and national policy, that's so absolutely critical."

Technology

"GENERATIVE AI IS BOTH a source of potential good and also a source of great harm if not regulated and understood properly. We recognize that AI will displace workers and it will require rapid reskilling and new occupations, et cetera. How do we prepare as a country, to first understand in really clear ways, what impact AI is having on low-income workers, in particular people who do not have the four-year degree? Trying to understand what are solutions that can benefit both them and their employers and their industries?"

"I'M USING AI EVERY day. Preparing for the future, trying to figure out how it can be used for good, as well as all the obvious ways it's going to be used for quite terrible purposes."

“AMERICANS WILL GET OLDER, that’s the one thing I think we can predict. I’m not very good at predicting, but there are definitely scenarios in which technology is used for monitoring and for alienating people and for escapism and not for empowering groups of people to come together and build community and solve problems they care about. There are other scenarios where it works much better. So, I’m completely confident to say these are all possible and completely incompetent to say what shall happen. But I do occasionally think, ‘Oh good, I’m old, I’ll be dead before the worst scenarios come out.’ Which is not a great way to think of the world I’m leaving to my 20-something children.”



AI ■

“THE EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY aren’t due to technology. If we were having a discussion 40 years ago, it was that schools had to change to focus on teaching people how to work together to solve problems. And if we had this discussion 30 years or 20 years or 10 years ago, we had that same refrain. Schools still are way better at teaching multiplication than teaching people how to work together in a group, a diverse group, to spot and solve problems. Which is essential and now artificial intelligence is one of the tools they will have to learn to use because of all of the bad things about job destruction and job deskilling and monitoring by billionaire-owned corporations that’s going to happen. At the same time, AI can help CAL/OSHA target its inspections better. Augmented reality might let any worker do an ergonomic scan of their workplace. There’s a zillion ways in which these technologies can also be useful, which are not guaranteed to happen. The bad ones are guaranteed, and the good ones will require schools and workplaces and some philanthropists maybe to work together so that augmented reality technology that’s headed our way is not just used to enrich powerful people and the ones who own the technology.”

Technology and Schools ■

“IT WOULD BE GREAT if folks who are not normally asked, ‘How can this artificial intelligence or whatever enhance your life?’ can work with technologists. The technologists can do anything, they don’t know what to do, so they do what capitalist companies tell them and that leads to wonderful inventions and horrible inventions. It would be nice to create a complementary set of research efforts that are directed by the folks who are not professors or engineering students or students in business schools. Our students have plenty of influence with technology. It’d be nice if people who weren’t at the university also had influence.”



Macroeconomic Considerations

"I THINK THERE ARE broader macroeconomic readjustments that are gonna come down the line as baby boomers are basically going to be spending their savings. There's this agglomeration of wealth, a lot of which is in housing value that is likely to get spent down with age. Partly to provide health care for themselves, but partly because it's like, 'What are you going to do with all those houses when you're in a wheelchair?' and that actually has a lot of implications. Some of which could be good. Maybe housing prices actually drop and younger people can afford houses more easily. On the other hand, if you have this reduction in savings, that reduces investment returns and means young people's savings may also get devalued."

Prospective Payment for Healthcare

"PART OF THE REASON there's so much fighting among the health professionals over power and so on is the way we pay for health care in this country – fee-for-service – and we need to get rid of it. We need to move much more quickly to, call it what you want, risk-adjusted prospective payment, capitation, global budgets. Once you get that on top of the organizational level, you have every incentive then to keep your panel of patients well, to innovate in workforce, what you delegate, you're fighting over the fee-for-service, the nurse practitioner versus the PCP, or the pharmacist versus others, etc. You're part of a team, you may be solid, there may be some incentives for productivity, but by and large, it's in your interest now to keep those people well, not have the internal fights."

Hospital Safety

"WE ARE WORKING ON getting hospitals and others to not only mitigate and decrease patient harms, falls, ulcers, medication errors, sepsis – a big killer – and all kinds of other things, but to use AI and related technologies to predict in advance, where safety events may occur and prevent them."

Changes in the Healthcare Sector

"HOW DO WE INCORPORATE AI technology and new forms of work? Some of it will be replacement, but more of it will be altering the way in which current workers from primary care physicians to others, actually do their jobs and how that interacts with patients' ability to take advantage of the new technologies. We're going to need new workers or kinds of work that will be more cross-sector work. So, for example, a community health worker or a social worker hired by a hospital or a primary care practice will need to know not only that job role but also how that job relates to and is a part of housing and transportation and food and so on in terms of the social determinants of health. So we'll need training, broader training in those kinds of workers in order to function effectively."

Participants' Takeaways

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS

- We need to fight for worker protection and social and economic equity through the political process.
- The political process shapes our economy. We need to think about engaging people beyond voting and helping them understand issues as they arrive and have some influence outside of the voting cycle. We need to think about sustaining engagement with the democratic processes.

POWER DIFFERENTIALS AND INEQUITIES

- We need to be careful about when and how we're raising issues. We need to think about how we build coalitions and ways that people show up for each other.
- The system is driven by choices. Those choices are driven by power. It's important that workers are consulted because workers are the experts on work.
- How many of the issues around inequality we discuss have their fundamental roots in racism, sexism, bias against immigrants, and so on?
- The problem is an incredible power differential and inequities, racial, wage, immigration status, etc. That is driving the experience of most workers and it's really important to reframe our discussions about the future of work to take that into account.

HANDBOOK

8



POLICY STRATEGIES

- We talked about employer benefits but there is a broader social safety net that helps support all of that.
- The issues of workforce and work are entwined with the democratic policymaking processes. The structures of our democracy are at the local level.
- Community engagement, social solidarity, and economic disparities in our communities urgently need more attention and engagement than we've been able to pay.
- We talked about the basics of hours, wages, working conditions and safety and health, but we also really need to be talking about the quality of work life and dignity of workers and having agency to control their work life beyond these basics.
- Strategically, there are many things we can be doing through state policies to lower the barriers to organizing, collective bargaining, and striking, to protect workers, and their ability to go on strike as needed.

UNIONS

- For all its imperfections and problems, it is a fundamental pathway to balancing power in the workplace. It is sanctioned in public policy and law and has been shown to underpin economic security for workers and combat racialized poverty, economic insecurity, and everything that grows out of that.
- Worker cooperatives are a natural outgrowth, but there are many regulatory barriers.

- Prioritizing very strategically and rolling out over time, paying attention to the opportunities to make more rapid progress. It's going to be a combination of incentives. We do live, for better or worse, in a capitalistic market economy here in the United States, and need incentives as well as sticks, mandates, requirements, etc.
- In-home care and low-wage workplaces are dangerous, they're small businesses. We need new organizing strategies that we've played with in California and have been successful, but we need more.

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

- We need innovation in the future of work and organizing with individual employers. However, the goal should be for policy change on a broad level and institutional accountability on a very broad and powerful level.
- How do we reduce these inequities around wages and discriminatory practices and so on? There's disparity in maternal, infant, and child mortality and morbidity rates in the state. So thinking about the future, these kids are the future of California. Those first couple years of life are so important to their later development.

TECHNOLOGY

- While innovation and technology are bringing huge sums of national wealth and opportunity, they also represent some pretty large existential threats. How we engage in that debate is absolutely crucial.

- We need systems to get the needs of the not prosperous and technology to overlap. You can give technology development to the less prosperous and give them technologist consultants to help make products and services that serve their needs. Another approach is you give the skills of technology development to people who are historically invisible and say, 'How can you use artificial intelligence tools, augmented reality or 3D printing to solve problems that matter to you?'

MULTIPLE GENERATIONS

- CEO or company leadership or industry leadership that doesn't necessarily reflect the demographic transition that's happening. We've also talked about people having to stay in the workplace longer. So how do we deal with that intergenerationality and that multigenerationality, both culturally workforce expectations and then big systemic change?

SECTORS

- Are there sector-specific things happening? Are there core things that are happening across sectors, regardless of type of industry?

CLIMATE CHANGE

- It's hanging over many of the discussions of the nature of work, worker safety, domestic workers, and the sort of functioning and health of families and communities.

Government Officials

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS are involved in developing, implementing, and overseeing policies, laws, and programs that serve the public. They manage resources, enforce regulations, and ensure effective service delivery at local, state, and national levels. They provide leadership and governance to uphold democratic principles, address societal challenges, and balance diverse stakeholder interests. Their work ensures transparency, accountability, and adaptability in policy-making while fostering public trust and engagement.

SANDBOX
9

SANDBOX 9 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 Education, Development & Training	 In-Person & Remote Work	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	
 Technology & AI	 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	

PARTICIPANTS

DAHNA BATTS

Director, WorkLife Wellness Office,
Center for Disease Control

CASEY CHOSEWOOD

Associate Director for
Strategic Priorities,
Director of the Office for
Total Worker Health®,
The National Institute for
Occupational Safety and Health

MELANIE EGORIN

Assistant Secretary for Legislation,
US Department of Health and
Human Services

GREGORY GOCHANOUR

Regional Attorney for the
Chicago District,
Equal Employment
Opportunity Commission

RICKY GONZALEZ

Legislative Aide
Agriculture and Disaster Policy,
United States Senate, Office of U.S.
Senator Laphonza Butler (D-CA)

KEVIN KAMPSCHROER

Chief Sustainability Officer,
US General Services Administration

LEILI KHALESSI

Communications Advisor,
Benefits Division, State of California
Department of Human Resources

DIANE SMASON

Attorney Advisor to the General Counsel,
U.S. Equal Employment
Opportunity Commission

ABBY SNAY

Deputy Secretary for
Workforce Strategy,
California Labor and Workforce
Development Agency

LIZ YORK

Sustainable Design Expert,
General Services Administration

The Current State

SUMMARY: Work is at the center of broader debates about inequality, public policy, and technology. Remote and hybrid models have reshaped expectations, improving flexibility but straining culture, connection, and equity. AI and automation are redefining job access while sometimes reinforcing bias. Mental health concerns, fading job stability, and persistent incivility add to the strain, and leaders still struggle to measure productivity or set fair policies. At its core, the tension between autonomy, oversight, and engagement remains unresolved.

SANDBOX
9

Public Policy and Government

"HISTORICALLY, WHEN WE LOOK at trends around employer-driven training, the vast majority of those investments go to managerial and executive employees. Folks at the bottom should be served better by our public systems. Our public systems have not been as forward-thinking, as nimble, and responsive as they should be."

"PUBLIC POLICY IS A way to worsen inequities as much as it is to improve upon them."

"MORE PEOPLE ARE ADVOCATING virtually. A lot of Congress's work is meeting with constituents from each state. But the more that people are meeting with us virtually or requesting that, the less we will have to meet in-person. I think there's always going to be a need for in-person meetings. I think they're better, to be honest. But... some meetings can also be done virtually."

"PROBLEMS THAT HAVE COME up with the technological approach is that it works very well for people who are sophisticated in the use of technology. But a big part of the population that [government agencies] serve is not them, and are being left out, excluded."



Adapting to Remote Work ●

"OUR BIGGEST ROADBLOCK TO [healthy workspaces at home] right now is that nobody in the federal government wants to tell people who are working at home what kind of home environment they should have. This is people's personal space. Nobody wants the government dictating how you set up your bedroom or how you decorate your house or anything like that. So we've developed some guidelines for people working at home, saying, 'This is helpful, this is healthy.' We won't pay for an ergonomic chair at home, but we will give you an ergonomic chair in the office. When I started [working], there was only one class of workers in the entire federal government that was allowed to have an ergonomic chair, and that was air traffic controllers. Anybody else needed a person in the government to make an exception to get an ergonomic chair."

"IF I HAVE A remote-capable job, why do I have to come back to the office? People during the pandemic took different jobs or different living situations. For their families, of course, that's created tension."

"REMOTE WORK AND MOVEMENT out of the state are related to the cost of housing. People who either left the Bay Area for less expensive locations in California or moved out of state stated that the primary reason was to be able to buy a house."

"CALIFORNIA'S RATE OF REMOTE work is higher than other states due to the kinds of businesses and jobs that we have here."

"I THINK THAT WOMEN tend to take more flexible jobs, in order to deal with other needs in their lives."

"THE TENSION BETWEEN WORKING on-site and remote work, it's just an ongoing tension and I don't know how or if it will be resolved or if people will reach some level of peace with it."

"PRE-PANDEMIC, IT WAS ALWAYS how do we justify the travel? Post-pandemic is, how do we afford the travel? There's not so much justification. The big post-pandemic change is people recognize we need to get physically together in the same place at the same time."

"I'M GENERALIZING, BUT JUST want to consider the various generations and their expectations of the workplace. I think a lot of folks, in different generations, are really choosing, 'I want to be happy and I may not work in the place where I live,' because of that."

"IT VARIES, OF COURSE, from workplace to workplace and what the needs are of the workplace. It doesn't surprise me that many people want to be working at home at least part or all of the time."

“ANOTHER CHALLENGE IS THE oversight and expectations of leadership. Things have been slower, and there have been very strong signals sent about people returning to the office. Each department has an oversight letter from Congress where we have to report how many days people are in that office and what are the performance metrics. There is a perception around both productivity and use of space and all of these other questions. How do you work on behalf of the American people if you're not in the office?”

Mental Health of Remote Workers ●

“OUR EARLY RESEARCH SHOWS that the poorest mental health is among people who work remotely full time. Now, that isn't to say that there are no other benefits that come from that – family, caregiving, those roles that especially female workers take on, they may benefit from that level of flexibility.”

“WE'RE STRUGGLING WITH [THIS mixed environment]. We do have some remote workers, we have folks who are on-site all the time. I think the majority of the people who telework are in office a day, or two days a week at the max. So we have all of these different types of arrangements, which I think from a wellness perspective, is good. I agree, I think the most flexibility helps people manage what we call 'work-life harmony,' as well as their productivity, and for a lot of folks, their emotional and mental health. But I do hear from folks that it also has been at the cost of people feeling isolated and lonely and not having that connectedness, especially for newer staff, who were brought on in the past couple of years. They've never been to the campus. They've never really met their teams face-to-face.”

“I WAS WORKING ON the entire plan for the agency to consolidate space and to understand what people needed and what they wanted. We did a lot of focus groups. I actually had leaders and managers who said, 'This is not going to work for us, this remote thing.' And then they actually went through it. They came to the meetings and said, 'We thought it would not work for us and it's working even better. And what we have done is we've changed the way we work. So now, once a week we have a 30-minute meeting where we're not really supposed to talk about work, we're just supposed to be with each other and understand what each other is going through.' And just that little bit of empathy and sharing made their work a lot more effective. And people felt connected and the best thing about teams is when they feel psychological safety.”

“I THINK THAT A lot of the traditional wellness programs are focused on the individual and what can be done to empower them or make them more resilient. But I also think there is a shift to what the agency can do to help an individual and create the conditions that help individuals be more resilient. It's also on the agency and what is their role in that? Just in general putting people first, rather than, 'Okay, I'm, just here to do a job, I'm just an employee.’”



"WE HAVE A HYBRID type model since we have staff all over the country and around the world. So we're trying to put more resources into mental health services to help people with those emotional health issues. Along those lines, just the level of stress and workload and all of those things contribute to people's overall well-being and that kind of unhealthiness that folks are feeling. We are trying to expand wellness programs and looking at mindfulness and helping people with other methods to reduce stress in addition to the physical activities, and more sleep, but how do you mitigate? How are you using apps or tools that are out there to help you? We offer classes and we do mindful movement, like yoga and tai chi. We try to provide those services in a hybrid environment so if you're not going to be there in person, you're going to participate in meetings there, working from home on a particular day. So, we're trying to really attack the issues related to mental health, stress reduction, and management."

Remote Work as an Enticement ●

"HIGH-QUALITY TALENT, YOUR BEST employees, your most productive employees, are demanding this flexibility."

"THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS not in a position to say, like some big companies do, 'Well if you don't want to come into the office, get another job.' Because we recognize that it's actually more important to have good talent who's willing to work in the federal government in ways that the private sector may not care as much about."

"YOU CAN'T PUT THE genie back into the bottle. People have figured out the advantages from a personal point of view and organizations have figured out the advantages regarding talent and everything else. Why would you go backwards? Would you let go all of that high-quality talent just because they don't want to move to Washington, D.C.? And the thing is that we have found by doing nationwide recruitment, the number and quality of applicants has gone up dramatically. Where we used to get 50 applicants for a job, we're now getting 150 in 24 hours."

"FROM A RECRUITMENT, RETENTION point of view, how do we make people think that civil service is an important part of a work, a future work and employment opportunity?"

Productivity of Remote Workers ●

"IS REMOTE WORK GONNA be as productive? In our work, over the years some of our very best ideas have come from walking down the hallway, overhearing a conversation about a case that's going on and that person remembers something they did and then there's a discussion and then it flows into a conference room and then you meet and these things just happen. And when we went all remote for the pandemic, there's none of that. As a manager, I really was very concerned about that because I saw it as a threat to our ability to do our very best work because the collaboration that happens in the workplace was not happening anymore. We had hired a couple of new attorneys during the pandemic and they weren't getting integrated at all. And I really was concerned about them. I thought it was interesting when we started to return to work part-time – we're two days a week now. But two of our trial attorneys brought up, early on when we got back in the office, they said exactly that, 'You know, we really miss this ability to learn from one another and it's not happening now when we're remote.'"

"BEING ABLE TO HAVE the right words to talk about one's productivity at home, or productivity if you're standing in an office, is important. In my previous life we used to have a pretty inartful term about having your ass in a chair. But you can be productive in many places in many ways. And how does it impact people who choose public sector work, and how do you entice people in that work?"

Managing Remote Workers ●

"WHEN WE LOOK AT engagement trends for remote workers, hybrid workers, in-person workers, 70 percent of the variance in employee engagement is attributed to an individual manager. So it's a way of saying a manager makes the biggest difference in how people ultimately feel."

"WE ALL NEED TO figure out how to measure performance in a more effective way because managing by walking around and managing by who you see, is not managing."

"WE HAVE TO BE more intentional. I've worked for and seen managers who are intentional. I've seen what they've been able to get from their workforces as well. And I've seen managers who are arbitrary and what they've been able to get from their workforces. And I think that being intentional is something that we have to do, we're going to need everyone to understand and take a look before we're going to crack the whole nut."

"EVEN IF THERE WAS a mandate for everybody to come back to the office, flexibility is something that any manager is really going to have to honor. There are a lot of workforces where it's difficult to manage a poor performer. When you have a great performer who just needs a little more flexibility, you want to keep them."



Mental Health and Well-being ●

“WE KNOW OUR DEMAND for mental health services has gone up—folks just dealing with anxiety, depression, interpersonal conflict in the workplace, etc. And so we are expanding our Employee Assistance Program services, increasing the number of counselors, but also, contracting with external counselors as well.”

“THIS IS A LITTLE surprising. Some surveys that we did internally found maybe 20 to 25 percent are concerned about their financial well-being, worried about having enough income to pay bills, worried about the cost of living as far as housing and food. So we’re also trying to provide resources, coming in to do webinars and provide resources around that. But also, doing some things around sustainability. We actually have a garden at two of our campuses and staff can come and learn about how to grow their own food, and look at the health benefits of that. Also, the sustainability benefits of that.”

Meaningful Work and Worker Well-being ●

“THE U.S. IS LAGGING behind other countries. Much of Europe with its psychosocial standards for work that defines a good job, high-quality work, the whole concept of decent work. There are other models out there in areas that are not quite as diverse or challenging as the U.S. labor market but are successful. We could benefit from learning from them. Using some of those guideposts for us to follow or to try to move in that direction is gonna be important.”

“ENSURING WORKER WELL-BEING DOES make economic sense too. As researchers, we should be telling the story that there is an economic advantage to having a healthier job. If you want less turnover, if you want less burnout, if you want more engaged, productive workers, there is a way to do that. The science is pretty clear on how to do that. And it will benefit the bottom line. The challenge is that the economic arrangements of jobs are not the same. The incentive to keep one worker for a lifetime has gone away. And businesses are focused on the next three months, the next stock, profit margin cycle.”

Safety Concerns and (In)civility ●

“WE’VE DONE SOME SURVEYS, more on bullying and demeaning behavior and not being civil, so to speak. I don’t know if it is due to folks not being face-to-face and not having those opportunities to connect as humans, as well as doing your job, but those statistics are things that I definitely think are on target.”

“I’M SHOCKED ABOUT HOW bad bullying still is because it was really bad when I joined GSA and it’s gotten way better. There’s much less bullying in the workplace now than there was even 20 years ago.”

"HALF OF THE LAWSUITS we file involve some component of verbal harassment. People just don't treat each other civilly, or kindly, with respect. I don't know why that is, and it's just really sad and unfortunate. But the cases I see are just sometimes shocking, I can't believe that people talk to each other this way in the workplace. And I don't know where that's coming from and why, and I don't know, really, how to fix it."

"MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, people do not like the people they work with, and they feel bullied by them and micromanaged. And I don't know if it's a power trip for people in power, and I wonder, what are people trying to prove? Is work their outlet for making a name for themselves in some way, for getting recognition they don't otherwise feel? The need to control other people is really harmful and pervasive."



Inequities in the Workplace

"AGRICULTURE WORKERS AND HOME health care workers or lower-skilled health providers or home care providers have typically not benefited from any of these opportunities for remote work."

"ANYONE CAN, WITH A very low skill level, fit into a certain number of jobs. Service jobs are a good example where people are treated like widgets, not as individual workers with hopes and dreams and aspirations to move into a better direction for their work."

"MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED in these marginalized populations to find out what's working. Some of [the] Total Worker Health research does go into some of these marginalized populations, lower-skilled workers. But there's a big gap there. We need to push from a public policy standpoint and a funding standpoint to look at some of those jobs that have the fewest opportunities."

Unionization

"HISTORICALLY LABOR UNIONS HAVE been a source of worker power for workers who otherwise don't have it."

"A COUNTERCURRENT TO THE benefits of unionization is the growth of small businesses and small enterprises. That is a hard environment to think about how you optimize working conditions and work design and job security, job engagement, all those positives that we're trying to create. How do you duplicate those found in a large company where we see really positive developments for those tiny mom-and-pop type businesses or groups of 10, 15, 20 employees? A significant number of workers in the country are in those small and medium enterprises, where many of these benefits are not going to show up."



“OUR RESEARCH SHOWS THAT there are opportunities in small employer spaces as well, but they tend to mimic more the, ‘We treat our employees as a family, we’re connected on a very personal level,’ and the benefits that accrue from that are positive. But in general, they are a less formal, less organized set of benefits and more relational benefits from that work experience.”

Job Instability

“ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS that you would associate with federal work is stability, I don’t think people who are coming into public service now are expecting the same degree of stability. I don’t think anybody is expecting [my] group to be here 50 years from now.”

“IT’S CHANGED EVERYWHERE. **ONCE** the social contract was broken in the 80s and the 90s, between employers and employees, that was the end. And when Ronald Reagan fired the air traffic controllers, that sort of stability might be desirable, but it’s over.”

“PEOPLE ARE NOT EXPECTING nearly as much as they were before from federal employment. And yet they’re still coming for public service.”

“THIS IS THE PLACE where harassment shows up in the federal government, especially among senior leaders. It shows up in appropriations language that zeros out people’s salaries down to a dollar. One of the things that the federal government and public service has provided is not the place you go to make a million dollars. It’s the place you go for other reasons. And one of them is stability. The federal government has historically been, or public service has been, a place that represents what should be the standard of employment, which is stability, opportunities for promotion and movement, recognition of the need for sick leave, annual leave, certain benefits including, job-connected health insurance, not just for you, but for your family, with a 75 percent match from your employer, so it is affordable.”

“STABLE EMPLOYMENT WITH GOOD benefits is the reason many of the team members I work with have worked for more than 35 years in the federal government. It has provided them that pathway and growth opportunity, in a predictable manner.”

Upcoming 2024 Presidential Election

"IN 10 DAYS, OUR country could look very different, especially for those of us who work in the government. I don't know about the rest of you, I am and my colleagues are on pins and needles. It's very scary. I worked through the prior administration, and there were a lot of changes made that affected us and the rest of the country as workers, things that I never thought I would see in my lifetime. And the thought of some of that coming back is really, really scary and it's real. And I don't know what that's gonna mean, but a lot of what we're talking about can kind of go in different ways depending on what kind of administration comes in. And that in itself is sort of disturbing, that there can be these two very different ways of leading the country."



"I THINK PEOPLE'S WORKPLACES are going to be affected in all sorts of ways that you can't even imagine. For example, there was an executive order that you couldn't do training on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. I mean, if we wind up going back into things like that, I feel like what I have observed about the workplace and people already not treating each other very well, in terms of discrimination, complaints, and harassment. How is that ever going to get better if we're not open to some of the things that I think are necessary to move us forward and move the needle forward? I feel very much like we may be taking many steps back soon and it's a very scary feeling. I feel like everything is up for grabs and that uncertainty is just very unsettling."

"WE DIDN'T PREPARE FOR the Trump administration the last time in a particularly intentional way. This time, it seems much more real. I think that what we're preparing for is a future that we don't really quite understand enough to prepare for it well."

"HOW DO YOU WALK into a room on the Hill with people who fundamentally disagree with you? You start at a place of civility and a belief in what the role of government is."

Work Is Evolving

"WE USED TO THINK that work was a place that you went to, and now there's been talk about it being things that you do. But the reality is something different, that for a lot of us, work is a team that has a goal."



"A LOT OF DECISIONS are being made trial-and-error style as opposed to following a research base or a best practices model to try to figure out some of these unknowns."



Worker Expectations ●

"THERE ARE NEW EXPECTATIONS of employment that today's new workers have that workers in my generation or generations before didn't have when we entered the workforce. Because there are choices. More choices about how you work, the work arrangement, the trend toward solo work, gig work, intermittent work, the choices out there for workers are much greater than they were in the past. So it is incumbent upon employers to create an environment where people want to contribute."

"ANOTHER DIMENSION IS THE idea of splitters and blenders. A splitter is someone who would prefer that their work and their personal lives are split. 'I work 8 to 5, I shut down the computer, I'm done.' And a blender might prefer a blend of both, they don't mind maybe logging in later, it allows them to have their own sense of work-life balance."

"[THE COMPOSITION OF] SPLITTERS and blenders in the workforce, Gallup's research shows, is 50-50, but what is happening is, we're not quite there. There are more people who are splitting that would prefer to be blending. What will be driving the future is this persistent desire at this point for the workforce for work that works for them. Whether that means, 'I'm a splitter. I would really like to be done at five. That makes me feel good.' It's not a generational thing. I think it's what works for you."

Workplaces ●

"PEOPLE AREN'T COMING BACK to buildings, so our big technical problem is: how do you manage a building that's built for 100 people when only 35 people are using it? It's a problem because the water gets stagnant and it's not fresh and the air is tougher to move around and you get people to move to single parts of buildings."

"LAW FIRMS ARE DOWNSIZING their buildings because everybody recognizes all of the time that the lawyers are spending in the office, 95 percent of them are doing solitary heads-down work. Solitary means you don't need to be in one particular place for it."

"WE HAVE ALL THESE assets, they were radically underutilized before the pandemic, but nobody recognized it. But the pandemic made people realize it, because when they came back, they said, 'Oh my God, this building is empty.' Well, it was empty before, you just didn't notice. But now you really notice it because you're looking for other people. Things have changed because we diversified the workforce geographically in a way that wasn't there before."

"IN REAL ESTATE, THERE is an entire conversation about the value of office buildings, and who controls the value of office buildings. This is part of what is forcing the hand of these big companies to bring people back in. Looking at our own portfolio, we're trying to figure out what we do with our buildings because we believe that we're never going to have all those people back 100 percent of the time."

The Built Environment

"IN MY FIELD OF sustainable buildings, technology, and creating healthy work environments, [the state of the field] is exactly where it was 30 years ago in terms of how the field uses the information from human resources and other fields. It's not integrated much better now. But there's a greater understanding of the impact of the built environment on the health, well-being, and effectiveness of the people who are in the building."

Training

"THERE'S SLOW UPTAKE AROUND skills-based hiring and moving away from credential-based hiring. Evaluating people on the basis of their skills could open the doors to workers who do not have four-year degrees. But that requires also cultural changes in the workplace, changes in expectations in hiring, really developing a shared skills taxonomy so that we have the language we could share."

"AS WE TALK ABOUT people being only college ready, we miss an important part of the pipeline. When the emphasis is on college, as opposed to other professional training, we've lost a lot of technicians and the technical trades that help the healthcare system. A lot of the people who run both our technology as well as our hospitals have union and/or tradesmen jobs that they entered early in their lives and grew in their careers."

Retirement

"IN HEALTHCARE, WE ARE reaching a tipping point around retirement. People used to be able to make a living working in specific parts of the healthcare workforce with opportunities to grow. The fact is most of our primary care providers, pediatricians, and other sort of less specialty healthcare providers are of retirement age. But there has not been investment in growing that part of the healthcare workforce to address this particular problem."



Discrimination Against Women ■

"UNFORTUNATELY, I'M JUST NOT feeling very optimistic about the future, at least in the area that I work in – employment discrimination. I don't see it getting better. I see the status quo remaining and or getting worse, especially in the movement of women in high-level jobs. And I'm now talking more about the private sector because that's where we see charges of discrimination. I think government has historically been better about that, although not great. Getting women in positions of equal leadership I think is so critical, because women have such different styles of interacting, and styles of work that I think could be so beneficial. But I don't see the reins of power loosening up."

"I HAVE TWO DAUGHTERS in college, and I don't know how to advise them. Like, this is the world. It's been like this forever, and it will likely continue to be like this, and it's discouraging. And not to mention equal rights across the board for people of color and immigrants and the backlash. That's what our country is made up of. And so, I just find the kind of prevalent mood about how we treat other people to be so discouraging that I don't really feel that optimistic."

"A GROUP OF WOMEN... came to me and said, 'We want to complain. We don't like where this is headed.' And I went and had a meeting with them and they said, 'All the senior people and all the white men, they get all of the offices and we have to sit in the sea of cubicles. We know that's where this is headed.' And I said 'It's not where this is headed. It's absolutely not.' And I explained to them the trends that we were finding and some of the bright spots, and they were so happy that we were really looking for equity and inclusion. People using space for space, not using space as a status symbol. And I think as long as people think space is a status symbol, we have a problem. We have to change the way physical space is used and shared and given so that it's supporting the actual work that's needed to get done."

Technology ■

"TECHNOLOGY ITSELF CAN BE very beneficial, but also can be a tremendous source of additional strain and stress for workers. So finding a way to help manage some of those challenges becomes more important. For every solution that technology can provide, it can also have additional elements of stress. Basically, technology evolves at a faster pace than we do as humans. So having to manage that mismatch of skills, I think, is going to be a continuous uphill battle."

AI

"THE TECHNOLOGY THAT'S CERTAINLY on everybody's mind in the workforce world is AI, what AI is likely to mean for the nature of jobs, and the jobs that might be going away, the changes in skill sets that may be required."

"THERE'S A NEED FOR greater transparency regarding job matching to job posting. Using algorithms to screen resumes, they really carry a lot of inherent bias. The technology is moving faster than any of us have been able to really pick that up, in ways that just perpetuate inequality."

SANDRIS

9

Managers

"THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR, MANAGER, is so critical. Our research shows that when it comes to health outcomes among workers, that person is the most influential, not only in their work health but really their lifespan health. Work is such a powerful determinant of so many decisions that we make and influences so many choices and controls our time and controls decisions around how we get health care, how we access it, our health behaviors and activities. Frontline management with the flexibility or lack of flexibility that comes from that relationship is critical. We make the case that it's far more critical than your own personal physician when it comes to influencing your overall health and well-being."

The Future State

SUMMARY: The future of work is shaped by the tension between preserving stability and adapting to disruption. Policy and elections influence who benefits as industries shift, with secure, unionized jobs giving way to lower-paying alternatives. The core issues remain: access to opportunity, modernizing outdated work models, and creating workplaces people choose to use. Well-being now spans mental, financial, and social health, while questions of job security and power persist. The challenge is to move from holding on to what's fading toward building what's next.

Preparing for the Future ●

"ONE OF THE THINGS right now that I'm engaged in is pulling together academic experts in these various areas to help us outline the best evidence-based practices and put those into an easy, quick toolkit in the next 12 months to help describe how distributed teams can be most effective."

"THERE'S A LOT OF things that we do the way we've always done them without analyzing or thinking about them. I know we can't think about them all at once, but if we just started to work on the mindset of, 'Okay, well, how can we make this work?'"

"REMAINING FLEXIBLE, AND TRYING to keep up with technology."

"DESIGNING A LOT OF communications and systems that influence the way that we communicate with our own staff. That has looked like designing a one-on-one template that managers use with their staff with questions so that they're meaningful conversations about well-being and engagement. So even if that person doesn't know how to ask the question, it's there. It's a toolkit that will help you get there."

"WHEN YOU LOOK AT the future of agriculture and protecting it, you have to look at the workers and the impact of some technological innovations that are actually making it easier. There's technology that enables farm workers not to have to bend and stoop, to do things more upright, that's better. We always have to be conscious of ways in which technology can make jobs easier and better at the risk of eliminating jobs."

"WITH CLIMATE CHANGE AND shifting towards a carbon neutral economy, we're looking both at job loss in the agriculture sector, as well as new opportunities."

"I DON'T KNOW HOW we change the conversation where every word I use is gonna be charged one way or the other. Let's be more progressive, let's try to get to where we're looking at, 'Okay, if climate change comes the way we think it's coming, what is that going to do to our farming?'"

"WHAT ABOUT FAIR WAGES? Why does an architect make more than a person that delivers the package to my front door? Because both of those things are important. How do we value the human behind both of those in a way that makes sense economically but also makes sense humanly?"

"I'M SUCCESSION PLANNING, BECAUSE I'm really trying to mentor and groom other people to take over, and to move aside myself. I've been with [my organization] for 50 years, that's probably enough. I'm extraordinarily hopeful about the future because of this experience. The people who had joined our group in the last couple of years have been spectacular. The people who are coming into government service now, or who've been there for 10 or 15 years, are extraordinary. I think the quality of people is significantly higher than when I joined the federal workforce in the 70s."

"TO BE HONEST, ON a personal level, I am trying to wait out the last few years of government service so that I can get out with a pension and do something else. And not have to be part of the morass that I see over all workplaces including the federal government."

Work Is Evolving

"SOME OF THE BIGGEST challenges facing workers of today and tomorrow are how they will continue to evolve their skill set to manage the sort of expectations of new work. Predictions are that many jobs that people have today are going to disappear. They'll be replaced by technology moving in and dramatically changing the landscape. So the need to continually upskill and retrain and learn new things to stay pertinent in the workforce is going to be important."

"IT'S GONNA DEPEND ON what employers need, and unfortunately, that's going to be the driver for the lower wage workers. They don't have a lot of flexibility or opportunity to grow skills. They're gonna be at the mercy of what the employer offers. Whereas employees in high demand with a lot of skills, with the ability to rapidly change their ability to contribute to whatever setting they're in – they're going to be driving the future. They're going to have tons of choices because of their relative rarity in the workforce, the shortage of workers qualified to do the higher level work, perhaps more advanced work. They're going to have tons of choices and opportunities to craft the job they want. Then there's going to be a big part of the workforce that's just going to be on the opposite end and have to take what they can get. So the more we think about finding a way to give that flexibility, that freedom of choice, those opportunities to workers across the board, it's ripe for public intervention, for the government's role there."

"WE'VE HAD GROUPS SIMILAR to this where we've pulled people together and asked them about what they think the future of work is. We've gotten it down to these four pillars: physical space, technology, policy and operations, and the social aspect. What are the levers for each of these pillars? What is it about physical space that makes people effective in work? How much time do they need? How can technology best support the future of work? What kind of policies do we need to have in place? There's probably some connections between the EEOC claims or EEOC filings and employers who are not being flexible. Finally, that fourth pillar, social, we need to develop relationships."



Change ●

"THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO just don't want anything to change. And things have changed, are changing, and will continue to change. If there was some way we could get the national mindset to change towards, 'Well, where are we going? What are the threats that are actually coming our way?' Like doing a SWOT analysis for the country, or farming and food, or hospitals and health care. It's like we just want to stay where we are and not change, and fight against anything that's trying to improve or make things better."

"THE JOBS THAT ARE being lost in fossil fuels are, for the most part, solid union jobs, and the jobs that so far are being created in alternative energy sectors pay a lot less."

"ELECTIONS MATTER, AND ELECTIONS shape public policy, which will shape the future of work. These things don't happen in a vacuum, and we have the power to make some decisions, but that kind of depends on who's in power."

Meaningful Work and Worker Well-being ●

"I DON'T FEEL LIKE the future is hopeless because I do think there's some momentum building around this belief that work has to mean something more than just an income. And because it's so influential in so many elements of our life, that it's a worthwhile public investment to say we need to optimize that experience."

"EMPLOYEES ARE GOING TO continue to demand agencies and organizations pay more attention to their well-being, and pay attention in a holistic way. So not just the traditional, physical health, but also mental health, financial well-being, social well-being, etc."

Keys for Healthy Work ●

"WE LOOK AT SOME of those softer things, beyond just wage, for example, but the opportunity for advancement, engagement, feeling like I belong in a workplace, or I'm valued as an individual, to me is really the long-term key to success here."

"WE HAVE THIS INCREDIBLE opportunity to really take a good look and start to make changes to evolve towards a new way of working. But we have to consciously say it's important to understand what the realities are and then start to work on what we're going to lose if we don't adjust."

"WE NEED TO FIND ways to make the technology work for us, to understand those negative consequences of the ways we're working, the stress and strain of the online environment. And figure out how to give people more boundaries to protect their mental or even their vision health."

Safety and Workplace Violence ●

"THE EEOC CAME OUT with a study in 2016 on sexual harassment and one of the many recommendations was civility training in the workplace. If you establish a baseline of how you treat people respectfully, that should, over time, decrease unlawful harassment."

"A UNION PRESIDENT FOR teachers in Massachusetts said that the number one concern is not feeling safe in the workplace. For all sorts of reasons, they don't feel safe and protected. And that kind of surprised me, especially in that kind of workplace. I think there are more opportunities for or vulnerabilities to violence in more physical type workplaces. I hadn't thought of it in educational settings."

"IN TERMS OF WORKPLACE violence in schools, as an educator, that actually isn't surprising if you think about what our kids express about their fears of going to school. Why wouldn't you expect to see that mirrored in the educators that are sharing the workspace with them?"



Mental Health of Remote Workers ●

"WE NEED OTHER INTERVENTIONS. You come together every three months for a team-building meeting that's a whole week long. You really get to know your workmates. And then you have these interventions in your weekly remote work. So that you are feeling supported and you are feeling connected. I've seen this work and be effective. I think we need to be able to try it and study it so that you can have data that shows that you can be a fully remote worker and not be in a worst place for mental health because I think that there are so many benefits to being a remote worker, meaning you can live wherever you want and still contribute to something important to you."

"WHEN IT COMES TO just the measure of mental health, fully remote workers have the worst. The best are hybrid workers. And then somewhere in the middle are those who are full-time on the job. We can find the sweet spot that enhances mental health, but also continues to honor the flexibility of work arrangements."

Remote Work ●

"PEOPLE RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE of [being in the same place at the same time]. But how do we organize it? How do we manage it without mandating it? The Patent and Trademark Office started telework years ago. Because they said, 'You can work anywhere in the country, provided you spend your first year in the headquarters building learning the procedures and the process, then you can move anywhere. At your own cost, you have to come in twice a year.' Employees can live anywhere they want, at the cost of two week-long trips to Washington, D. C., Alexandria. And that was just one program for an organization that had almost all solitary workers."

“OUR CURRENT STATE ISN’T fixed, we can envision a better form of remote work than we have today. And to me, that’s really where our energy should be, and not pulling people back to the past, or even being satisfied with where we’re at today, but thinking of what is the optimal way for people to work. Is it bringing your new attorneys on for an intensive one-month experience where everything is in person, but then allowing them to have the flexibility to work wherever makes sense for them? Or is there a way that we can develop, design the work experience in a healthier way that isn’t like the past or isn’t like today, but somehow leading us into the future?”

“WE NEED TO BE intentional, not arbitrary. And I think that’s been one of the things in the workplace since the workplace began that you seem to luck into the choice assignments or you happen to sit next to the senior partner and so you get her ear on what’s going on. And that’s not the way it should be. People should have opportunities based on, ‘I work hard. And I’m asking for it. And I have the potential, not just because I already completed that, so you’re going to give me more of the same. I want growth.’”

“THE SCARY PART OF being remote is that it’s transactional. And we have to get back to get the relational part that happens in the real world, bring it back into this new hybrid environment, and have the relational part be a part of the boss’s responsibility and the technology’s responsibility and the structure of the way our workplace works. Everything has changed. We’re not putting it back in the box.”

Managing Remote Workers ●

“DRIVING THE FUTURE IS through leadership development. 70 percent of performance fluctuations are based on how a manager shows up and is able to really support those different levels of engagement. And they range from, ‘Is it clear what’s expected of me at work? Do I have the materials that I need to do my job? Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day? Have I received recognition or praise for my work? Does my manager care about me as a person? Does somebody care about my development? Do my opinions seem to count at work? Do I care about our mission? Do my colleagues care about quality work? Do I have a best friend at work? In the last six months has somebody talked to me about my development?’ So, that’s what we focus on – creating a culture where engagement is everybody’s responsibility.”

Addressing Inequities in the Workplace

“IT’S A GOOD INVESTMENT because lower-skilled workers still represent a very large swath of the population of workers. But it also represents where some of the most unsafe, most challenging, highest disparities, all of those negative outcomes are concentrated in that pool of workers, too. So it makes economic sense.”

“THERE ARE HUGE DISPARITIES by industry and occupation. What is it about different types of work and different arrangements, different sectors of our economy that are driving such different health outcomes? And then using that information to push public policy, to push OSHA into creating a psychosocial standard, to have them better enforce certain elements of public policy. Because that’s the boat that really can lift everybody. And so many people trade their health for wages. We need to think about not just keeping people safe, but what is it about a good job that actually adds to their longevity and their well-being and their ability to contribute to our society, especially when the workforce is shrinking.”



Public Policy and Government

“PUBLIC POLICY HAS AN opportunity to influence equity and to incentivize companies who are willing to move, to look at this through a health equity issue, to let all boats rise, not just a few when it comes to these interventions.”



“PEOPLE TAKING MULTIPLE SMALL jobs with smaller firms to piece together an income is also going to become increasingly common.”

“FOR RESEARCH TO BE really meaningful, it would be good to drill down into some selected sectors. Industry sectors really vary by working conditions [and] worker power. It would be really valuable to look at two sectors in particular – the agricultural sector and the care sector, since I’m California-based. And for both of those, remote work is just not possible. We have impacts there of an aging population, the ebbs and flows of immigration. There are big impacts there and huge issues around wage equity and the impact of technology, especially in agriculture. There are opportunities through public policy to end working poverty in those sectors, especially in the care economy.”



“THERE’S A LOT OF talk in the workforce world and health care about career pathways. We could move a home care worker up to a nurse. We need people to do those jobs. We still need, with an aging population, we need people to take care of our families. Let’s look at some ways to just make those jobs better jobs.”



“WHEN YOU LOOK AT health outcomes across industry and occupations, you can see 5–10 times the risk of certain health outcomes just based on industry and occupation. It’s the very nature of the way those jobs are designed and the content of them and the lack of benefits and opportunities that’s driving those health outcomes.”

Upcoming 2024 Presidential Election

“ONE OF THE VERY unsettling things is what happens with Schedule F – basically working at will, you could be let go for no reason whatsoever – eliminating all the civil service protections, rules that were put in place during the Grant Administration. There’s a whole piece to the senior executive service in the government, which is all the senior-level people short of presidential appointments who are career people and have been running the government forever. Their status can be removed, and they can be replaced, with anybody, people who don’t have experience and knowledge but will tow the party line. And there’s a real threat in those levels. Every agency has that threat.”

“BACK IN 2005, WE landed on the word agility. That’s what we really needed, to be agile because we couldn’t really address everything that was going to happen in the next business cycle. And I think we need to be agile again.... What’s going to happen is going to be different, really, depending on a whole lot of things.”

“NOBODY PREDICTED THE FINANCIAL meltdown of 2007. Nobody predicted that Lehman Brothers would be no more. And then, the bad economic recovery and then every change in the administration. Nobody predicted that, and yet, we reacted in a relatively healthy way in the federal government. There are other things besides the looming election in two weeks that are maybe more important and more long-lasting. Sure, it’ll be dramatic, depending on what happens, but I think that the future we need to be preparing for is more independent of the political swings. Being a careful optimist, I’m hopeful that this incredible divide in the political life of the country will start melting away a little bit, maybe when people my age get out of politics.”

“I LIKE THE WORDS ‘agile’ and ‘adaptive.’ That’s inherent in how one approaches a future. But it doesn’t mean it’s not disruptive and not disconcerting. And I think some of the themes we heard earlier today about how can we just be civil and nice, how can we just be good people? Which feels like a low bar, but it seems to be a higher bar than we should be. How do you set those models is a really interesting question.”

Recruiting Talent

“I THINK THE FEDERAL government in particular is really being very slow to adapt to remote work. They are losing out on good talent and it’s hard enough to attract and retain good talent in the government because invariably it’s not going to pay as much as comparable jobs in the private sector. So, flexibility is so important. I am sure that there are so many positions in my agency, if they were opened up nationally and not limited to D.C. or even within the specific districts they’re in, the strength of the talent would be so much greater.”

"I'M SURPRISED TO HEAR you say that the federal government is slow to adapt because I would have said the reverse, that the federal government really jumped in [to embrace remote and hybrid work arrangements]. It has been very slow to go back to some other version of on-site work. So obviously it's different, depending on the agency you're in, but certainly where I work, the vast majority of people are in some form of remote or hybrid position."

Skills Training

"THERE'S AN EMERGING OR existing issue around the onus of responsibility for skills training. The way we often think about it is, for you to be career resilient, you've got to always be upgrading your skills. Should that onus always be on the individual? What's the responsibility of the employer? What's the responsibility of the public education system? And then there's the lag, the community colleges, the public workforce system really don't keep up that well with changes in technology and the just-in-time changes in training that would need to be done to be a real resource in keeping workers current. As well as flexibility for micro-credentials and very specific skill sets that people need."

Workplaces

"HOW DO WE MAKE these assets desirable? And how do we use them in a more effective way? And we will need many fewer of them in the future, too. So we probably have too many of those assets. And I think that's true for all kinds of corporations."

"HOW DO WE WORK in this new world? How do we repurpose buildings so that they're more attractive? How do we make the buildings something that people want to go into? How do we afford the environmental impact and the cost impact of travel for people who are remote but also who need to get together periodically?"

Productivity

"MY PERSPECTIVE IS THAT the problems we're having with the number of Zoom calls and the difficulty and everything else are very similar to the problems we had with meetings before the pandemic. People don't do agendas properly in advance. They don't prepare for the meeting and they don't have breaks between meetings. The biggest complaint that people have is not that there are too many meetings, it's that they are back-to-back. That's something that an organization can fix. You can set policies, you can enforce them, and say we're not going to have hour-long meetings. We're gonna have 50-minute meetings. Everybody needs 10 minutes between the meetings. We used to get 10 minutes because we had to walk from one to the other and everybody knew that. But now we don't have to walk from one place to the other, and everybody expects you to turn off one meeting and go on to the other. The brain needs a little bit of walk in between meetings, too. So I think it's absolutely not possible to go backwards in this world. Our job, I think, is to figure out how to move forward."



Worker Expectations ■

"TO MOVE AWAY FROM work being a place that you go to or just things that you do, to us getting somewhere together so we can do it better. So I know what your strengths are, you know what my strengths are, I know that you do XYZ better than I do. So when we get together as a team, instead of saying, 'Well, you guys have the same job description, so you should do the same job,' we can say, 'Look, I'll make the phone call, if you keep the spreadsheet,' or 'I'll do the spreadsheet and you make the phone calls,' because we have strengths where we feel more comfortable, or where we actually are better at something."

"THERE'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO be competitively advantaged because you were designing a better work experience, and that used to not even be a consideration. But the best employers put that at the top of their list."

"ONE OF THE CONSIDERATIONS of people searching for jobs is whether it's a credible job. There are so many remote job postings online, but there's no real way to see what is legit and what isn't. So there needs to be a clearinghouse for remote jobs, where remote jobs or employers have these standards of taking care of their employees as well."

"ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO CLARIFY expectations. For example, we're going to have an all-hands meeting and everyone's expected to come in for that meeting, and, 'I'm giving you notice, it's one month away, I need you to be there and that means rearranging everything in your life, except an emergency.' There's some give and take that needs to happen on both sides of that equation, and the rules right now are an absolute Wild West. And so, we need Emily Post or whoever to come in and start to give us some etiquette around how we make this new workplace effective."

Managers Play a Key Role ●

"ONE OF THE PRIMARY ways that we're preparing for the future is by trying to scale leadership development for managers because managers have the biggest influence on how people experience their career well-being."

"WHAT DO MANAGERS, SUPERVISORS, frontline folks who are creating the space for better, healthier work, what do they need? What are the skills that these folks need? We're developing a Total Worker Health curriculum. We're trying to fund research directionally in those areas, whether it be technology or health disparities or equity as it relates to chronic disease, outcomes related to work differences in mental health outcomes related to industry and occupation."

AI ■

“IF WE LOOK AT AI performing some of the more rote tasks that people have in their jobs, in theory, that’s going to liberate people for jobs that require greater initiative. Problem-solving may be inherently more satisfying. In terms of the impact of AI on the state’s workforce, we have to train them, and we have to create work cultures that foster the kind of innovation, initiative, and problem-solving that could be unleashed, but that’s not always easy – especially in civil service environments. And I think the attention to the work culture there is going to be important.”

“LOOKING AT SOME OF these issues through a health equity lens is really going to be critical because the benefits will accrue to a certain population at a far faster rate than they will to other populations of workers.”



Participants' Takeaways

WORK AS PILLAR OF WELL-BEING

- Work is not just a determinant of health, but it is also the most important determinant of so many of the pillars of well-being. Work is an outsized mega determinant of health. We need to help our legislatures and our policymakers understand that.
- Employee career well-being does have a positive impact on the bottom line for those managers who may not care about people first.
- The way work is designed matters for health equity.

ISSUES ARE COMPLEX

- We need someone to clearly articulate the pluses and minuses and help us get to a place that is supportive of differences and diversity, rather than pointing to a one-answer solution.
- We need to learn more, and we need more research that can help look at the multiple intersections among worker health, remote work, occupation, demographics, and productivity. We just really need to drill down to multiple levels.
- Who will get to participate in these kinds of future economies? Who will get to work remotely or not? Where can these people do it? What's the responsibility of the employer to provide training and mental health support? What's the responsibility of Congress to ensure that the employer is supporting these modern workforce transitions?

INTERVENTIONS

- This whole concept that one size, one set of interventions is going to serve everybody equally, is untrue. The more we understand the effect of interventions across different populations, different workplace sizes, different workplace arrangements, race, demographics, wages, all those things, will help us customize the best public policy approaches to solving these issues.
- Different solutions are needed by different-sized industries; small, medium enterprises need far different approaches than larger ones. It is the most direct evidence we have that the way work is organized and designed matters.
- There's a lot of uncertainty and unease, and I really do wonder how different the conversation would be if this had happened three months ago or in a month.
- Unique context of what it means to be a federal employee/participant in our larger national discussion.
- Right now is not a great time to talk about the future.
- I do think it could sound different if this were a month ahead or six months ago or something. It's hard to separate what's happening right now and what's looming in our lives.
- This is a reflection of this point in time when, to the point of civility in my office, we have a sign that now says, 'Please be nice to everyone, including yourself.' It came out of a statement somebody made about having somebody come back at the team with a bite that felt kind of particularly prickly. We were like, 'All right, we're going to be nice to everybody recognizing that we're all in this kind of uncertainty about our future.'

OVERWHELMED

- Thinking about the future and how to improve people's lives, especially how to improve people's work lives, it's really overwhelming, especially when you think about all the different people, programs, services, organizations.
- How can I pass on some motivation and energy for which I don't feel? And that just feels overwhelming. But it's given me a lot to think about, and especially as I said, I have two daughters in college, who are on the precipice of entering the real world and possibly making a difference.

UNSETTLED

- We're really still very unsettled about what the future of work is actually going to be, and how people are going to behave, and how people are going to work. And that sense of being unsettled is difficult because people don't like that. It's like being unsettled is that queasy feeling when the roller coaster is going up and up and you don't know what it's going to be like, but you're not at the top yet and it's getting scarier.

OPTIMISM

- I was surprised about the lack of optimism in our group, generally speaking. I'm an optimist by nature. So it surprised me a little bit. A lot of the people I work with in the federal government I don't think are as pessimistic or as doubtful about the future. I think they're more confident in where things are. Even though we haven't figured out where people need to be, everybody recognizes that the technological improvements and meeting technology and Zoom and everything else has actually improved the way we work together.
- Being able to be flexible and adapt and even in this environment of uncertainty as far as the planning and preparation for the future, as far as what can we do, but also have enough perspective that this is a point in time. This too shall pass is what I'm thinking.

NEXT GENERATION

- How to support and encourage young workers? Who are the next people who are going to keep making workplaces better and what can we be doing on micro and macro levels to encourage young people to go into public service? To pass the baton and keep the ball rolling? How do we motivate them? How do we encourage them? Especially when we see so much that we're unhappy with, as we've talked about the trends over the past 40 years in the government that have not been helpful or positive. How do you motivate?

TECHNOLOGY AND NEW NORMAL

- Even though we're not forming friendships and relationships in the same way, we're figuring out how to do it with the new technology. And the new technology has been remarkably effective. I think where we are is we're in a very unsettled realm, we really don't understand what the future is going to be other than it's not going to be the past.
- I'm also hopeful because shortly after the pandemic, people started using the term 'new normal' and then everybody said, 'No, no, no, there's not going to be a new normal.' There will be, of course, but maybe it won't be a new normal. Maybe there'll be so many multiples of new normals that it doesn't look normal at all anymore. And I think that would be a good future.

Part 2 Sandboxes 10–16

FEBRUARY–AUGUST 2025

**SANDBOX 10. TECHNOLOGY EXPERTS:
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE,
SOFTWARE**

**SANDBOX 11. TECHNOLOGY EXPERTS:
SENSORS, DEVICES, ROBOTICS**

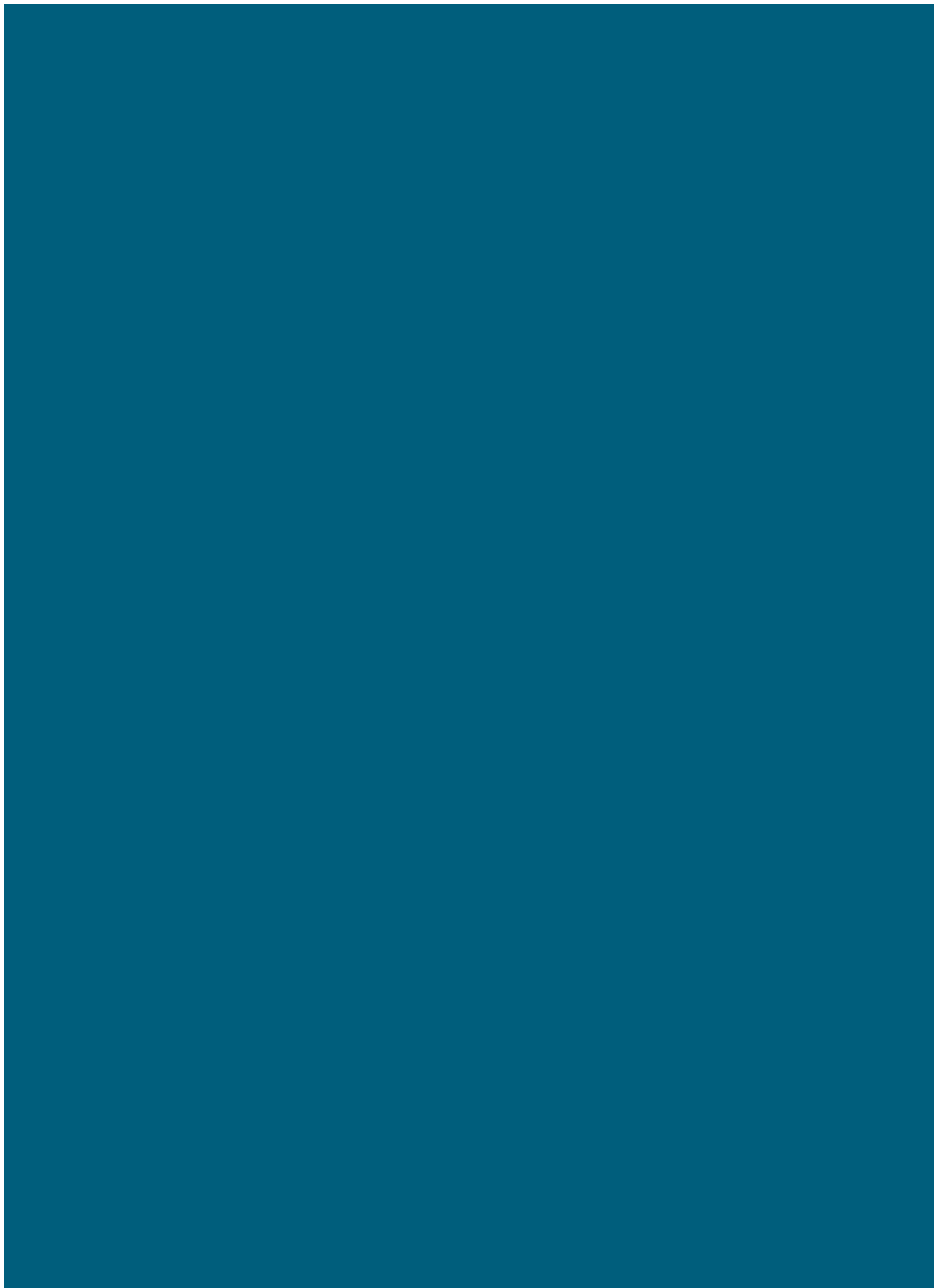
SANDBOX 12. ARTISTS, WRITERS, MUSICIANS

SANDBOX 13. YOUTH LEADERS

SANDBOX 14. UNION LEADERS

SANDBOX 15. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

**SANDBOX 16. BUSINESS EXECUTIVES,
INVESTORS**



Technology Experts: Artificial Intelligence, Software

TECHNOLOGY EXPERTS in the context of this Sandbox refer to professionals whose job is to study, create, disseminate, and evaluate the application of types of technology in specific contexts. They are not programmers or coders, but rather professionals who create business applications using technology as a foundation. Technology is used to solve complex problems, manage technical systems, and provide guidance or support to humans. The technology experts in this Sandbox primarily represent the application of artificial intelligence frameworks and software.

SANDBOX 10 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 Education, Development & Training	 In-Person & Remote Work	 Collaboration & Organizational Design	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning
 Technology & AI	 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors

PARTICIPANTS

PETER BRANDINGER

Managing Director, North America,
Configura

TOM BRADBURY

Founder/CEO, Broad-Gauge

TROY CARLSON

Co-Founder & Senior Vice President,
Voxel

NANCY COOKE

Professor, Human Systems
Engineering and
Senior Scientific Advisor,
Arizona State University

TOMASZ CHUDAK

Digital Workplace Adoption Lead,
ISS A/S

MARK GILBREATH

Founder/CEO, LiquidSpace

ALEX GRACE

Chief Commercial Officer,
Clockworks Analytics

EMILY MA

Head, Special Projects,
Real Estate and Workplace Services,
Google

ENNIS OLSON

Global Lead Insights,
Digital & Solution Development Lead,
Workplace & User Experience,
Google

FRED OSWALD

Professor, Department of
Psychological Sciences,
Rice University

BETSY RIVES

Workplace Experience Strategist,
Google

ROBERT SEAMANS

Professor, New York University

BEN SHNEIDERMAN

Distinguished Professor,
University of Maryland

JAMES WADDELL

President/Chief Revenue Officer,
Cognitive Corp

MITCHELL WICKLAND

President, REsurgency

MICHAEL ZUCCHERO

Founder/Chief Executive Officer,
Synergy FM Advisors

The Current State

SUMMARY: Technology experts face a rapidly evolving landscape defined by artificial intelligence, automation, and the ethical dilemmas these technologies create. The pace of innovation has outstripped governance, leaving uncertainty about how to integrate AI responsibly into work and society. While AI tools enhance productivity and augment human decision-making, they also threaten to displace jobs, blur professional boundaries, and embed bias in systems that learn from human behavior. The rise of AI agents adds new complexity, as these “non-biological workers” increasingly replicate human knowledge and judgment. Participants express both optimism about AI’s potential to eliminate dangerous or repetitive work and concern about its effect on skills, equity, and workforce identity. The tension between technological acceleration and human adaptation is growing, compounded by unclear ethical standards, declining trust, and uneven access to opportunity. Across industries, leaders agree that the greatest challenge is not technological capability, but aligning innovation with human purpose and values.

INSIGHTS
10

AI ■

“THERE’S CERTAINLY PLENTY OF evidence that AI can help people move more quickly up the learning curve for a new profession or a new task. So that’s really exciting. And that’s an opportunity there.”



"THERE'S A LOT OF focus on AI. It's something that everybody has on their mind, and I think worries them. But I work for a software company and of course we use AI and I agree with you, it's not really AI, but that's the word we're using. We don't really know when we will have the real deal and what that's going to look like. And I don't think we can spend too much time trying to figure out what it's going to be like, because it's going to be impossible."

"I ACTUALLY BELIEVE THAT we are well into the first wave of actual functioning AI applications as tools augmenting decision-making, not replacing bodies. We are deeply into AI, providing robust productivity-enhancing manipulation of data assessment or data guidance."

AI Agents ■

"IMAGINE YOU'RE AT WORK and you're responsible for deploying agentic processes, so we would say, 'Hey, go to your business units, ask the people within your business units what is the most redundant thing that you don't like doing that you absolutely have to do?' You can think about CRM entry or PowerPoint creation or something in an Excel spreadsheet. Depending on what business unit it is, there's something that has to be done that doesn't take a lot of brain power or creativity. You just have to do it as part of your job. So AI agents can support the people who are responsible for that larger process by doing that work."

"IT COULD BE SYNTHESIZING a number of reports into another report, which could be 10 spreadsheets across 20 different systems I've got to pull data from, and I bring all this together and create this really cool dashboard once a week. It's amazing what you find when an agentic process can do that."

"WE CALL AI PROCESSES or agents 'non-biological remote workers.' They can own a work process, and they can own a deliverable from that work process. But we, as a company, always say that it must be associated with a human. It's in support of a human. That work result will be sent to a human for final validation review and approval before it gets sent forward."

"AN AI AGENT CAN look at most processes, define and come up with the work result, and send it to it's human that it's supporting. The human can then validate that and then do something with it, sending it forward, and working in collaboration with it. That whole agentic process thing is relatively new to the world. It really became large in Q1 of this year. Those in research and development have been using the agentic process or agents in that way for a little while."

“WE PURPOSELY BUILD BIAS into the AI agents. So if you think about architects and engineers, if you ask them the exact same question, you’ll get two factual answers, but in very different ways. So by shaping the personality, the persona, the historical learning of the agent, you can create bias in a good way. You want a biased answer. You want it to have personality around it. Just like when you ask a person, it’s going to be a biased answer, and I don’t mean to say that we shouldn’t have biased AI doing AI things. There’s a distinction between AI and an agentic process. So I would say, one of the ways to solve that is by using an agentic process, developing a persona with a personality, and making sure that biased output is the right biased output for what you’re seeking.”

Ethical AI ■

“WHAT ABOUT THE ETHICAL aspect of AI? Because this is something that companies tend to forget. We are concentrating on adopting and creating different Proof of Concepts of AI. But the basics are not done yet. Both the code of ethics in general, and some guidelines for the employees on how AI should be used. What is safe AI use in the workplace? Another thing is the quality of the data that you are using for AI. Those are, from my perspective, issues that should be addressed beforehand.”

“ULTIMATELY, WHEN I LOOK at AI, it’s less about the tech. I have no doubt that we can build the technology. I have no doubt that AGI will show up in two years max. I do worry about our ethics. I do worry about asking the hard question of, ‘Who do we want to be in the United States?’”

AI Councils ■

“WE GET TO SEE a lot of these AI councils emerging, and lots of people are just trying to understand, ‘How do we introduce this? We see the value, but I don’t know how to talk about it.’”

Technology Is More than AI ■

“CALLING EVERYTHING AI IS too much of a generalization. The industry has done a rebranding of prop tech to GenAI of late. And there are certainly some very relevant technology trends that are not GenAI.”



Increased Productivity ■

“WHEN WE USE OUR experimental models on ourselves, we have cut down projects that would five years ago have normally taken three months and ten data scientists, down to a half day.”

“THIS IS PUBLIC INFORMATION. 25% of all of Google’s code is now written automatically by AI. We are literally replacing ourselves. So a company with a hundred thousand software engineers of the highest caliber is replacing them right now.”

Robots and AI Doing Dangerous Work ■

“THERE’S A LOT OF systematic research showing what happens when a workforce is exposed to robotics. It could be robots entering into a factory and you’re tracking people in that factory. Or it could be that there are more robots in this master service agreement [MSA] in construction, and now we’re tracking construction workers in this MSA. There’s a lot of evidence that various markers of physical health improve. And that’s not a surprise. Robots, the story is they do the 3 Ds – dirty, dangerous, and dull.”

“WHEN ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGE THEIR frontline workers as they implement these technologies, or they think about how to communicate this broadly to their entire workforce, we tend to see very positive uptake and great results. The morale is, ‘Hey, we saw risk go down, let’s celebrate’. Instead of, ‘Hey, we saw risk go up, you’re in trouble.’ So the firms in our customer base who are engaged in that sort of team sport manner tend to see better results versus the ones who just want more sticks.”

Trades ■

“A CHALLENGE THAT’S BEEN around for a while, and will continue especially with the current political climate, is trade talent availability. There’s only so much you could do with technology enablement to make things more efficient and easier and safer. At the end of the day, there are certain functions that we do in our society and in our workplace that require two hands and a brain. The availability of trades talent has been rapidly diminishing and aging for quite some time.”

“ONE OF THE MASSIVE demographic and labor challenges of the skilled trades is getting enough people to do the work that needs to be done in buildings. There’s a need therefore for those people’s time and efforts to be efficient, effective, and prioritized. And that’s where the analytics piece comes in.”

“WHAT ARE THE FACTORS that are limiting that normal supply and demand from happening in a market? What do we need to encourage people to enter the trades? How do we make smart buildings sexier and more attractive than simply being a field technician? But again, the thing that really drives people into an industry is wages.”

“AS MY THREE KIDS were getting ready to go into college, we were talking to them about the kinds of things that they and their friends wanted to do. Not a single person ever mentioned, ‘I want to be an electrician or I want to be a plumber.’ It really points to the challenge that we have in caring for the four walls and roof that some of us work in.”

“IF YOU THINK ABOUT the current administration’s approach to immigration and the potential loss of capable talent in the trades, not to mention some of the other professions, it’s not going to be long before we’re importing that talent and that presents a whole other host of challenges.”

Labor Shortage

“THERE’S A TRADE AND labor shortage. People don’t want to do this stuff. People are getting seriously injured. They’re dying. It’s very expensive for the company to direct payouts. And then there’s like second, third-order effects of lost time and morale hits. They just can’t sustain a lot of these things.”

Differences Between US and Europe

“YOU’RE SEEING THIS DISCREPANCY between the US and Germany, where in Germany we’re not seeing the mental health decline because the Europeans have really strong employee-oriented laws in place, like the CEO cannot make more than 30 times what the lowest paid worker in their company makes. So there’s this sense of, ‘Hey, we’re in it together.’ Whereas the US is like very market-based economics, where you reward the people at the top, you reward the corporate shareholders, and that has an impact.”

Research

“IF RESEARCH HAPPENS IN a university setting, or a public setting, like in a public research lab, then presumably many organizations and people can benefit from it. Whereas when innovation happens within a private company, the private company, of course, wants to keep that within the walls of the company so that they can benefit. That makes sense. That’s not a criticism. But it just means that it takes longer for that innovation to spread more broadly and benefit others.”



"IF THIS RESEARCH FUNDING isn't resolved, there probably won't be much hiring at universities over the next couple of fiscal years. There's this pipeline of people getting their PhDs. They're anticipating being hired, now they're not going to be hired."

"THE CENSUS BUREAU ALLOWS access to its data for researchers, and this is data not just on individuals, but also on firms. So the Census Bureau has this relationship with the IRS that allows researchers that have what's called 'Special Sworn Status,' and we've been checked by the FBI to access certain data. In my case, I look at the effect of robots on employment in firms. This happens at what's called a Federal Research Data Center, and there's 30 of these throughout the US. There have been administrative orders telling researchers that they have to stop research on any of those projects in those Data Centers that are focused on anything to do with gender or race. These are projects that people have been working on for years. It takes about a year to get access to this, and then about a year to clean your data. And especially for junior researchers, that's two years into a five year tenure clock. And they're told they just have to stop that work."

"AT THE NIH AND NSF there's been a directive to change the way funding works such that the 35% or so overhead has been reduced to 15%. This has huge funding implications for universities. So typically when I write a grant proposal to NSF, it covers the work that I narrowly do, and it doesn't cover turning the lights on, the janitor who comes and cleans at night, the elevator, it doesn't include all this other stuff that university provides. And the university, instead, puts overhead on top of these grants. This happens for every researcher. This is one big way that universities fund what they can do. That overnight has basically been halved and universities are struggling in terms of how to handle this. There are court cases on this."

Skills of People ●

"IT'S RATHER REMARKABLE THE skills that people have. We are in a time where we've diminished human performance so as to elevate AI, and make it seem like it's more effective. I, for one, still celebrate the remarkable skills that people have and the way they can be creative and the way they can be kind, compassionate, and empathic. There's a hundred ways that people are very special, that machines can potentially simulate, but it's not the real thing. We all know the real thing when we see it. When we have a friend, a partner, a lover, a family member who we trust and work with. Those are deeply felt values that I think we have to restore in an age when there's a war on expertise.

Dangerous Work ●

“EVERY TWO HOURS SOMEONE in the United States dies due to a workplace incident, and that number is ticking up. It dropped in 2020 during the pandemic, but it's ticking back up again. So we sell technology into environments where our customers are, these very physical industries where there's still significant amounts of manual labor, like warehousing, distribution, manufacturing, heavy industry where people are exposed to insane risk. And robotics and automation and technology hasn't solved all of those problems yet and people are put into those environments.”

“WE TAKE THE LEADING indicators of injuries and accidents and try to understand, ‘What is the root cause and how do we model their operations?’ The things that, if you do this enough times, eventually there will be an accident, eventually someone will get hurt. We try to help them engineer out those problems in their work environment and keep people as far away from those risks as possible. We find that it reduces direct exposure. It's the moral thing to do. So the technology that we're building is shedding light on things that have been problems for a long time and risks – operational risks and safety risks – in these industrial environments that they just didn't know.”

“I SPEND A LOT of my time talking to frontline supervisors who have to move the guacamole that just came over the border in Laredo, Texas. They've got to distribute that to the rest of the country for Super Bowl Sunday. Someone is literally carrying these crates of guacamole across the floor and those people's backs are getting thrown out and they're having back surgery. Guacamole comes at the expense of a lot of people's health and well-being. A lot of that stuff is insanely inefficient today because no one's shining a light on it.”

“WE NOW HAVE A way to understand what is going to our trash bins. And it's not even knowing what's in there. If it's more than 35 pounds, we have to take that bag of trash out because if it's 50 pounds, somebody will more likely hurt their back. So that's not really AI. That's just culturally, how do we want to care for our staff? Does leadership want to run an organization to the ground and just squeeze out profits in the next quarter? Are we building something to last for the next 10 years?”

“THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS in which the technology gets rolled out and adopted matters a lot. How workers perceive that the technology is being used and the extent to which the workforce is engaged and consulted with in terms of how to use the new technology. It seems like that matters a lot.”

Insights
10



"THERE'S A SIGNAL FROM the current presidential administration that they want to gut OSHA and let companies do what they think what's best. There's a little bit of uncertainty in some companies that continue to abide by all these OSHA rules, 'cause there's some altruistic thread in there somewhere. At the same time, for some companies, if they don't have to give people a break, or they don't have to pay attention to the temperature inside of their non-air conditioned, Southern Mississippi warehouse, they're not going to do it. If OSHA's not going to come knocking and enforce any standards, then the company is sure as hell not going to do that. Not all companies, but many think that way. There's certainly a regression in employee protections. And politics is the driver. Small government means people literally getting cooked inside of a warehouse. It's not on the ballot as the top ticket item, but the reduction in regulation and enforcement is friendly to corporations."

Psychological Safety ●

"I CAN TELL YOU what I think is happening to decrease the psychological safety of workers. In recent years, given layoffs, given the changes to the real estate, like when your office just disappears and you have to go remote, maybe not by choice, or the physical space that you inhabit changes, there's a loss in a lot of psychological safety. With both people being hybrid and the global political climate, I think, we're backing away from some hard conversations that a previous version of the company would embrace. And that also negatively impacts psychological safety."

"I DO SEE THE layoffs that are happening now at companies and at the federal government as a concern. It's a real disturbing factor in people's lives that is unpredictable. Psychological safety resides, in part, in being predictable and having control of your world. When you lose control, it undermines psychological safety, being and willingness to work."

"HOW DOES AI CONTRIBUTE to psychological safety? It's being used in the wrong way because it contributes to people's fears that they'll be replaced by AI. At the same time, an AI company will suggest that their AI tool is becoming your partner, friend, teammate, and so on. Adoption of AI undermines our sense of individual dignity and our willingness and commitment to work for an organization."

"I QUESTION THE CONCEPT of psychological safety. Because from my point of view, there's no such thing these days as psychological safety. Maybe companies should learn how to manage psychological insecurity. Because I live in Poland and we are living in a constant state of insecurity. The insecurity that we are feeling, not only in terms of the workplace, but also the geopolitical situation. This is our background from one day to another. In terms of AI, I don't think that this is AI, actually. To me, AI is intelligent, smart. How to create content well and how to write emails for us. But we are not yet in the moment in which we will be substituted by AI because it's not AI yet, from my point of view. But I definitely agree that people are afraid of AI and it contributes a lot to psychological insecurity because they think that their job will be taken over by AI one day."

Real Estate Footprint

"I WORK IN WORKPLACE experience at [a large technology company] and the current state is focused in a couple of areas. One is reducing the physical real estate footprint because of the moves to hybrid and remote and the implications that might have on different communities in different areas. We've built campuses in different parts of the world that are not quite company towns, but they're not far from it. And opposing that is AI. How do we provide the workplace for the folks who are creating AI? How are we using AI to evolve our workforce? And our workforce is evolving its use of AI."

"ONE OF THE BIGGEST challenges as people do more remote work is recognizing, 'What is the right real estate strategy for the physical office?' Clearly we will have excess capacity as more people go remote and there's a cost component, so we want to both reduce as much of that cost as we can in terms of the physical building. Because we have flexibility baked in so people can choose which days they work hybrid, we end up introducing more variability into the office. You never really know exactly how many people are going to show up. You certainly expect Wednesday to be a peak day, and in most cases it is, and Mondays and Fridays are the lowest. You get a nice bell curve. But what is the purpose and role of office in a mostly hybrid world? I think we saw some of these signals pre-COVID. I think COVID just accelerated where we were headed. The office is more of a hub and spoke destination for specific times for coming together. It becomes more a place for bringing teams together as needed versus a place you go and do work individually."

"AS AN ENTERPRISE MARKETPLACE platform, we're actually working closely with very large enterprises on implementing a hybrid workplace as we define it, a rebalancing of the traditional portfolio that most enterprises had pre-pandemic, in particular, downsizing in some significant measure the leased portion and introducing an appropriate amount of flexible office, on-demand space, literally bookable by the hour, by the day in whatever location and in whatever form the task requires, whether that's a day of focus work for an employee or coming together for a collaborative meeting. On-demand, bespoke activity interwoven in, and then dedicated hubs which also are being delivered in a more flexible context, turnkey, ready to use, but not on 10 or 15 year lease agreements. The byproduct of that type of shift, which is not theoretical, it's well underway with corporate clients, is proving to be twofold. The ROI of this is very substantial cost reductions on the overall workplace portfolio. A couple corporate clients have declared or published 80 % cost reductions. But it's also delivering a pretty substantial shift in the experiential side for employees. A corporate client, as an example, went from five leased offices in L.A. to over 150 locations distributed across the Southland, tapped into when and where needed. So, the convenience of distributed workplaces is enormous, and the economics of only paying for what you need, whether it's a Wednesday or a Friday, is also proving to be quite profound."



"MANY OF OUR SMALLER-SIZED clients are still really struggling and taking a wait-and-see approach. 'What are the right values that we really put to our workplace design, our workplace strategy, our culture, all of those things?' It just feels like there's still so much in flux. Many clients are just like, 'Tell me what to do.' They have not figured it out."

Built Environment ●

"OUR CORE FOCUS IS bringing technology innovation to the built environment for workplace optimization. Clearly, AI has a big impact on that. Space design has a big impact on psychological safety, neurodiversity, which are big things you have to think about in terms of how work gets done now and in the future. I don't know that the industry, architects, engineers, construction contractors, and those that manage and operate the buildings have quite got their hands around what all that means yet."

"I'M REALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT helping facilities organizations change their perception from a cost center to a center of value creation within the real estate portfolio. Not just a line item cost to be squeezed, but the core way that facilities organizations can create value by creating healthy, efficient spaces for work to be done."

Workplace as Provider ●

"I THINK WE'VE OFTEN seen the workplace as the be all and end all, we can provide community, we can provide money for people to live, we can provide all of this. But now, it doesn't matter if we have a great building, if a climate catastrophe hits and schools are closed and people don't have power and their social connections are dissolved because they have communication challenges. So, what's the infrastructure around the workplace? How can we bolster that so that the workplace itself doesn't have to provide as much as we currently are asking it to provide?"

Return to Office ●

"I'D SAY ACCELERATING OVER the last 12 months, there's been an increase in media coverage of RTO mandates. It's probably healthy to discuss whether that's reflective of the true majority. I think it's not. But certainly there's a preoccupation with a very vocal minority of leaders that are making strong RTO mandates."

"WHAT'S NOT WORKING WOULD be the notion of a HQ-centric or an HQ-exclusive workplace. And by contrast, what I'd submit is a philosophy of return to many offices and a distributed workplace that aligns with the nature of work where the workers are located, not a binary remote versus office."

"I AM STRUGGLING TO get our people to want to come back to the office. We can make policies and decide we're going to be X number of hours per week in the office and remote. We have a hybrid situation, but people need to come to a place where they feel this makes them more productive. 'This helps me to get my job done better. And I grow in skills and competence and enjoy being together.' I read an article many years ago that said that people don't really care what they do. They care about who they do it with. We are social creatures, we need each other and we need to be together. But it's so easy when you're in your home and you're in your comfort zone. And if you can do stuff from home, it's easy to get stuck there. But I don't think that benefits anyone in the long run."

"I THINK THE TERM 'remote' is an extreme position. It's also quite triggering. Remote generally implies, 'I don't live close enough to any office or other workers to be able to gather even if I wanted to.' Whereas 'distributed work,' or 'hybrid work,' or 'workspace on demand,' or 'hub and spoke' says, 'Hey, gathering is super important. We want that to happen. We want to encourage that.' Because it's vital to a myriad of things, development, training, collaboration and joie de vivre, etc. But we want to be progressive in terms of how we think about matching workplace investment to when and where gathering happens."

"I THINK A LOT of tension on hybrid is whether it is prescribed. You want to make sure people are together or are you giving everyone a choice?"

"ONE OF THE LARGE insurance corporations found as they were considering their go forward workplace strategy in the very early stages of the pandemic that 83% of the team members of foundational level teams, working-group level teams were already geographically distributed, not as an effect of the pandemic. Not every team member on a given project is in the same place. So they said it's impractical or ill-founded to mandate that they all come to an office location for the purpose of explicit collaboration, if not everyone's going to be there."

Who Effectively Works Remotely? ●

"I'M REALLY CURIOUS AS we go to more hybrid work and maybe even more fully remote work. On the one hand, it's providing a lot of support, especially for supporting neurodivergent people's different ways of working. But, I am still really curious how it's going to have a long-term impact on productivity and work relationships with people being remote and not in-person and the ability to remain productive, particularly if you think about career stages. It makes sense at certain stages of a career, especially after years of experience that you have enough competency and work and can work remotely because of that competency. But early in your career, especially without relationships in a company and new to maybe starting that career, I'm not really sure how effectively you build those relationships and remain productive if you're always remote from Teams."

"I LOVE GOING TO the office to work. I love talking to people. But it's completely different with the Millennials and Gen Z. They prefer to work remotely 100%. On many occasions, we need to collaborate with them. That makes it complicated across generations because I would like to meet in-person to discuss one topic for instance, not do everything via Teams. From my professional point of view, maybe it's silly because I'm a technology-adoption person, but still this is another aspect of the workplace that is constantly changing."

Social Capital ■

"I HAVE A THESIS. I can't really prove the thesis as of yet, but here's my thesis. The older workers have political capital. They've been around for a while. They know people and because of their social relationships, they have political capital. If it becomes necessary in their job to overcome an objection, or to get buy-in in terms of collaboration, they're able to spend that political capital and they're able to do that. For a relatively new employee who is working remotely, how do you build that political capital? Usually it's through social interactions in informal settings. If your job role doesn't require getting significant buy-in or overcoming objections, then it probably makes sense to work remotely. You are producing. But then I would make the argument, I'm not sure about the longevity of that. Because a non-biological remote worker could do that. If your work requires overcoming objections and the political capital to do that, then it certainly makes sense to have some sort of physical workplace to be able to do that. That way you can read the non-verbal cues as you collaborate."

"SOME FOLKS BROUGHT UP building social capital in your career and how hard that is to do when you're remote or hybrid. And we find that. How can we incentivize folks in younger generations to build social capital outside of their career when some of those traditional communities where people had social connections are less than they used to be?"

Purpose of Work ■

"TO ME, WORK IS still about people coming together and solving problems, adding value. I think as a company, you should ask yourself, is the world better off with us in it or not? Are we adding any value? Are we doing anything that makes the world a better place?"

Inequality ■

"THE TRAGEDY OF THE US has been the descent into high levels of inequality, which really corrupted some major features of the economy."

Different Types of Businesses

“FOR STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS ABOUT work, it would be helpful to distinguish types of businesses and their workforce. For example, a large global distributed company operating in 55 countries with 180,000 employees and another 75,000 contractors has things that they need to accomplish. It’s a globally distributed business. But the majority of businesses in the US are actually more small moms and pops, less than 150 employees. Those are more typically local businesses, geographically. Fully remote is less needed, perhaps. At the same time, offering fully hybrid and remote platforms like Zoom and Google Video Chat and all these things exist and proliferate now with all of the cloud-based productivity tools like Google Docs or Microsoft Teams. This means that some of these local businesses now can actually scale their workforce beyond their local geography. A small company of 100 employees doing accounting in Kansas City can now actually compete in a different way because they can hire people from all over the US. And I think you have to separate out the geographic distribution, the size of company, to say, ‘What do they actually need from a hybrid and remote workforce, and how does that actually help them or hurt them?’”

INSIGHTS
10



Labor Markets

“IF YOU LOOK OVER the past 50 years, the labor market trends are worrying. There’s lots of evidence of friction in the labor market. Labor participation rates, for example, for both men and for women have fallen over time. Moving from one state to another has fallen over time. Moving from one employer to another has fallen over time, same for moving from one occupation to another, as well moving from one industry to another. All of it might suggest that there are lots of frictions in the labor market.”



The Future State

SUMMARY: Looking ahead, technology experts anticipate an era of transformation that will test the limits of both human and machine potential. They envision AI reducing administrative burdens and creating new possibilities for learning, creativity, and entrepreneurship, while cautioning that without ethical design, technology could deepen inequality and devalue human contribution. Success will depend on developing adaptive systems that integrate ethics, empathy, and resilience into the fabric of work. Education and lifelong learning will become essential as technical and social skills converge, redefining how talent is cultivated and recognized. As automation reshapes industries and the trades gain renewed importance, the focus may shift from efficiency to meaning—ensuring that technological progress enhances rather than replaces what makes work distinctly human.

Preparing for the Future ●

“CAN WE REDEFINE WORK for the betterment of humanity? I hope to remove the drudgery and administration out of my life. I spent so much time replying to emails, filling out spreadsheets, and calendaring. I believe one day all of those administrative functions can go away so I can be sitting with a colleague dreaming up the future.”

“WE HAVE TO STOP skating to where the puck is right now, and we have to skate towards where the puck will be. There are certain things that I am like, ‘We are not working on this project now, as an engineering team, because in six months from now, it will take us literally 100 times less effort!’”

“I’M NOT SO CLEAR on what the future state of work is. I think we’re at an adolescent stage at best coming out of the pandemic. No one’s going to commit to what they want to be when they grow up when they are just 15 or 16.”

Experimenting with New Technologies ■

"I'M TRYING TO USE as many of these new applications as possible that are leveraging AI. For example, Andreessen Horowitz, the renowned VC firm, puts out lists of some of their most highly recommended or notable AI applications or businesses. So I try to spend time learning which one is a fit for some of the things I'm trying to do and learn how to do it. I'm finding that it is very nourishing. I'm actually saving money and doing some cool things that I've never done before, being more productive in ways I've never been productive. When we're talking about AI or seeing on the news about what AI is or what it can be, it just helps you understand. It helps me understand my clients better and some of the things that they have to be thinking about, and the tensions around where you put your information and where you don't."

10

AI ■

"JUST SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS on AI. What you need to do with your hands probably won't change. There are ways to optimize that. You can use technology like AI to help program/project management or assist with communications or scheduling. I think skilled trades probably will have minimal impact from an AI perspective. If anything, it'll increase their productivity and potentially increase their pay rates because they're increased productivity."



"THIS BRIGHT FUTURE THAT everybody's painting is not going to happen without principled innovation of AI – human-centered AI. It's also not going to happen without principled design of work. Let me tell you what I'm afraid of. I had the opportunity last year to tour a distribution center [of a large online store] where they have lots of robots working alongside people. The apocalyptic thing was that a person was made to pick items and put them on a robot shelf, and do this repetitively. They were timed by AI to see how fast they did this. The reason that the robot wasn't doing it is because robots that have that kind of manual dexterity are too expensive for [the company] to buy. So they were actually turning I think we've been talking about. It's the opposite. So without deliberate work and design of AI, we will maybe go into this apocalyptic place where many of us, not all of us, are made to be robots and are controlled by the AI. So just a warning."

AI Robots ■

"IF I'M A FACTORY worker and I know that someone has bought the robot to replace me, I will look at it with skepticism and fear, and be despondent. Whereas it's different if I knew that they brought in a robot to remove the worst part of the task. Here is a real example. I don't like building boxes, but I love filling the boxes with food, then delivering to the community. That's incredible, the robot just took away the worst part of the set of tasks and has made me more efficient."



Implications of AI ■

"I DON'T SEE WIDESPREAD unemployment coming from AI. There's great enthusiasm about AI. AI's startlingly impressive, but it's also alarmingly flawed. We'll have to navigate carefully as people learn to use it in ways and companies develop it and integrate it into existing and familiar and widely used tools."

"THIS IS GOING TO happen so fast in small leaps and all businesses are going to have to be thinking two or three steps ahead all the time. IT departments at some point had to hire someone to focus on security. And then it became so prevalent that security in most many places had to be in a different silo to have that healthy tension with IT. AI is going to have to be thought about in the same way, where someone's going to have to be thinking in a full context about what this is going to mean next."

"WE'VE SEEN PEOPLE DEPLOY AI and they use it as a stick. Technology is introduced and your quota goes up. Maybe your productivity increases 10%, but your quota goes up 20%. Now you're like, 'There's more pressure.' So you have better tools, but the expectations are escalating and all the value is going to your corporate shareholders and not the people who are making minimum wage and putting their lives at risk."

"AI IS CHANGING THE nature of jobs, so students' interests in jobs should change accordingly. What a welder did in the past may be different from what a welder does now. That changes interest in welding. That could mean different types of people are interested in different jobs. It changes how education works. The job that fits your skills may not be available. So how does the labor market influence or disrupt the school-to-work pipeline?"

"I DON'T KNOW IF large tech companies are going to be hiring as many college students as before. We don't need people to do the rote tasks. We need people who have seen a lot, who can apply their thinking. We're not replacing thinking. A lot of people are like, 'I'll just let the AI do it for me.' No, you need to go in there and actually vet it. You need to be doing the thinking and you need to make sure that it is on track. And you need to contextualize the work. Whether it is robotics, whether it is writing code. But then we take away the opportunity for young people to actually learn by doing the small tasks along the way."

Implications of AI Agents ■

"AI AGENTS HAVE HUGE implications for work. Some of it's a little scary, some of it's pretty cool. Do I need to hire 10 more people when I have 100 in my work group? If I can just give them one agentic process to help support them and take away all that busy work, does that free them up to be able to do more complicated work?"

“WE’RE FASCINATED BY REPLICATING ourselves, making humanoid robots, making AI that can do the exact same things that we can do. However, what we really need to be doing is figuring out how to make AI and robots complementary to what we do. So give them the tasks and the skills that we don’t have. I look at the example of Centaur chess, where you put a pretty good chess player with a pretty good chess program together, they’re going to beat Kasparov. Together, they’re going to beat the best. Why? Because they are both playing chess, but in complementary ways. Cognitively, once the program is looking far ahead, more than a human could do, the human is remembering specific instances of the chess game.”

“SO HOW DO YOU bring AI agents into the conversation about what technology you need as a person? Setting in this new space. And is this the right space? And how do you go about doing your work? All of that is in chaos at the moment. Because not everyone understands what’s happening, what could be happening. We’re just trying to bring some clarity to all of that.”

“YOU WANT TO COMPARE the AI systems to traditional models. How do you know when your AI systems are better than traditional methods, adding something to it? Or how does it usefully supplement; it doesn’t have to supplant it. Those deserve some careful consideration.”

“THE AI EMPLOYMENT TESTS for job applicants are faster, they’re more engaging, you can take the tests anywhere. They’re free of bias. What they don’t say is whether the test is measuring job-relevant characteristics. The tests are predictive of organizational outcomes – job performance, turnover, teamwork. They may say things like, ‘We’ll select the best employee,’ but the devil is really in the details.”

“I FEEL LIKE SOMETIMES AI vendors are setting fires and then selling the fire extinguishers. What they’re doing is they’re saying, ‘We’ll use AI to bring you thousands and thousands of applicants and then we’ll give you an AI tool to winnow down all those applicants to the ones that you need.’ So many of these are not serious applicants, even the ones the AI technologies brought to the table.”

Implications of Technological Advance ■

“HISTORICALLY, TECHNOLOGY HAS CREATED new jobs and that’s great, but as technology approaches human-cognitive capabilities, does that continue to hold?”

“I HOPE THAT WE find a way to lean into the psychology of this rapidly evolving change, because I think psychology and culture and leadership is going to be more and more critical. It’s less so the technical aspects. It’s really how we help the transformation and evolution of our culture and our way of being.”



"TO WHAT EXTENT IS society going to shift toward less work? Are we headed toward a four-day work week, or a three-day work week, or a two-day work week?"

"I ACTUALLY THINK WE'RE entering a golden age of entrepreneurship. I really do. I think that there is gonna be an explosion of productivity. The inequality associated with that is a real concern. And we should do everything we can to have as many people as possible."

Work in the Future ■

"WHAT THE FUTURE WORKPLACE is going to be depends on what your company does, but predicting the future has historically been very hard for humans to do. There is no doubt that technology is going to play a big role."

"AS A WHITE-COLLAR WORKER, I spend a significant amount of time putting together outputs like slide decks, dashboards, and spreadsheets. I actually believe that in five years, agents will be so good that I don't have to do any of that. I will communicate with the agent. Here's my thinking. My goal is to be the architect behind the scenes, providing the inputs. And I might provide it through a document. I might just speak it. I might provide it in the form of a sketch on a whiteboard. And the agents will then help me synthesize in collaboration and produce the output in whatever format is needed for whatever audience it needs to speak to. So the type of work that we will be rewarded for will be very different in five years."

"I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT if we don't find a way to make people want to be together and collaborate, companies will miss out on innovation and companies will die because of it. Employees love the convenience of working from home. And I definitely think that's here to stay, but I definitely think there needs to be a mix."

"EMPLOYEES DON'T KNOW WHAT their own best interests are long-term, and they don't think about what their company's best interests are long-term. Innovation happens incrementally day-by-day and when we're not together, we're missing out piece by piece. We're moving into a new office here later this year. How are we going to make that a superior place where people will find themselves more productive and be able to do the things that they and the company benefit from doing together? There are other things they can do from home, using technology, work on their own, and it's going to be fine. So some sort of balance between that."

"IT'S JUST HARDER FOR earlier stage career folks. Tech companies are not hiring as many new grads. They need people with experience to coordinate the very sophisticated tools that are being built and make sure that the agents are doing the right thing. What does that career trajectory look like? Some people will still get good opportunities, maybe there are just fewer paths up to that. The professional path where you become the person who can coordinate the technology, the window is shrinking for people to get those opportunities. There's just not as many jobs in that space."

"MY ELDEST DAUGHTER JUST graduated from university last spring. She just landed a job two weeks ago. Company in New York that claims to be an AI company. She was an English major. I feel like, 'Whew, she dodged the bullet.' She's now in a role where she's going to get exposed to, trained on, and expected to be able to drive AI-based systems. I think maybe it was optional to be adept at a myriad of tech applications for the last 20 years, since the internet changed the world. I think it's urgent for this current generation of new workers to get familiar with, play with, and be able to use these new tools. Technology curiosity needs to be something that we nurture into everyone who we're raising, whether it's our children or staff in our firms, because I think without it, you're in jeopardy."

"I'VE GOT TWO KIDS in the workforce now. One's a teacher, one's a nurse. It used to be that in those two professions, one could have a good lifestyle. I am very concerned that's not gonna be the case for them."

"I THINK IF WE play our cards right with AI and technology in general, we could make people super productive at work so that they could have a shorter work week. A lot of things have to happen in order to enable that, but maybe they could have a shorter work week and take on another job without having lost quality of life."

"ONE OF THE THINGS that is happening right now in the startup world is that you're seeing people being able to create companies as a 'solopreneur.' Or with two or three people. What would've taken 20 or 30 or hundreds of people 10, 20 years ago. There's an opportunity for an explosion of entrepreneurialism in our society. You're simply able to accomplish so much more than was ever possible, and therefore, is there a potential for democratizing entrepreneurship even more? Because you no longer need to have the connections to raise venture capital from a select group of Ivy League-backed networks."



Skills Needed in the Age of AI ■

"I THINK MUCH MORE important than specific skills is how to learn and having a constant passion for learning and for exploration and experimentation."

"REGARDLESS OF WHAT AI technology and economic disruption appears, the ability to communicate effectively and to influence others is always going to matter."

Purpose of Work ■

"THERE IS GOING TO be a reckoning and I think there's a higher-level question of what is the purpose of work. Before we try to build the future of the workplace, what is the purpose of work?"

"WHAT IS THE MEANING of work? How do we show up and how do we develop people coming out of college? How do we develop people and upskill them? AI helps us reskill ourselves. I see the reskilling aspect of it being incredibly critical."

Education Resources Online ■

"IF YOU COMPARE TECHNOLOGY access today to any point in history, it's probably more accessible than it's ever been. For \$20 or for \$0, what you can get now online from an education perspective, we couldn't have imagined even 20 years ago."

"IF YOU CAN GO online, education is essentially free now. The amount of knowledge one can learn by just having a conversation with GPT, much less the MOOCs, the large free educational programs that are out there from different universities. You can spend a lifetime on YouTube learning things. That's really positive and going to really be very interesting. It's a massive shift in our society. It's a massive shift in our economy that has fewer traditional paths to success. And maybe a counterbalance to that is that there's this incredible access to knowledge and information and training that did not exist in the past. If one is able to take the bull by the horns and really go into that, then there is an opportunity to really create value and create products and companies and things that people find useful at a level that's probably never even close to being seen before."

Skilled Trades

“THE TRADES ARE GONNA continue to be more valued in society. That’s something that’s very positive. So it’s no longer that we have to have the same path to success. If you are skilled in HVAC or building automation, the demand for your talent is so high. That there’s a lot of potential to revalue the blue-collar workforce and to have more paths to economic success that don’t need a college education.”

Insights
10

Political and Global Challenges

“WE TALK A LOT about health and wellness and psychological safety in response to political and global activity. But longer term, we’re looking at how that affects migration, climate migration and immigration policies. The workforce will actually be younger.”

“I THINK EVERYBODY WAS focused on AI and technology and how we can use this to change the way that we teach. But like the last two months, that’s like small potatoes. It’s, ‘Will we survive as an institution?’ I’m putting it dramatically, but it’s a big issue that’s affecting universities.”

“WE SEE A LOT of companies that want to exist for the next 30 years. Political preferences and policies flip-flop all the time, so we can’t just blow with the wind because some of our customers have hundreds of millions of square feet of facilities all over the world and we can’t just pivot that quickly. From a regulation and operations standpoint, change is very slow and takes time. So they probably couldn’t even roll out a large enterprise-wide change to policy in one presidential term. They’re often thinking on a longer time horizon. But at the same time, if they could save money, that’s always gonna get some airtime. So we see people optimizing for longer time horizons... You know not to obsess with the headlines because right now, they’re particularly choppy and things change all the time and you don’t know what’s theater and what’s real intent. So we tend to see people staying the course and doing what’s right. But smaller companies can pivot and they can exploit the laissez-faire nature of regulation. And then if it comes back, then they just pivot back to the more strict policies and they save a little cash in the meantime. Bigger companies tend to stay the course. Smaller companies seem to be a lot more open to, ‘Hey, get rid of lunch breaks.’ None of our customers have said that, but that’s the extreme illustration of the types of things that they might consider.”



"I GOT A CALL from a high ranking GSA official several weeks ago. Somebody in the public building service workplace realm. My opening question to him was, 'Hey, how are you handling the chaos?' He goes, 'Oh, I like the chaos. It's creating the opportunity for us to do some crazy things that we've wanted to do for a long time that we've not been able to.' Last night they published a solicitation for a digital marketplace to turn the entire federal workplace into Airbnb for office use, which is a really smart thing to do from an efficiency and an experiential standpoint. I do think there's ample opportunity for the government to be more efficient and work better. It'd be nice if it was done with a measure of humanity and care because you can break things and you can break people. People are being broken."

Philosophical Schools of Thought ●

"WESTERN MEDICINE BASICALLY GIVES me a pill and solves my problem. It's your responsibility to solve my problem. Whereas in Eastern medicine, it's very much I am trying to solve my own problem by healing with myself. I think we need to have a similar relationship to work. Right now, it's very much I show up at work and my employer tells me what to do. And if it's wrong, and I argue with them. But now, I have agency at work to design my own experience. And we don't necessarily talk about that very much in the workplace."

"I'M KEEN ON PRESENTISM. From that philosophical point of view, we have only today. From this point of view, the most important feature is to be kind. I know that it may sound really strange these days, but kindness is something that helps me survive from one day to another. That's a pity that many people don't follow this path."

Ethics Classes ●

"I DON'T THINK AN ethics class will solve for bad actors. But I do know that a lot of times when people don't feel like they have resilience, or the only way out is to make a bad decision, then we want to catch those. We can create the circumstances in which we can allow for the principled ethical decisions to happen versus people feeling so pinched that they do the wrong thing, because that's the only choice they have."

Navigating Uncertainty ●

"SO I WORK AT a university and up until November the focus was 100% on AI and how AI might change what's happening at universities. That's now probably 10% of what people think about, and 90% on the actions of this new administration. It doesn't have to be political, we might agree or disagree with the actions, but how are the actions of this administration affecting what we do as a university? In terms of how it might affect research, in terms of how we pitch research, in terms of what research topics we focus on. That's probably true of pretty much anybody at any university in the US right now."

"I'M PREPARING BY BASICALLY increasing my own resilience. How do I constantly evolve and adapt and navigate ambiguity? Because the change is so fast. We're looking at geopolitical change, we're looking at climate change, we're looking at technology change in our workplaces, in our day to day, and how we live. Really developing resiliency has become just the priority at this point."

"WHAT DO I EXPECT to have in the future? I think there's going to be a lot of strife and a lot of challenges before it gets better. I love reading science fiction, and I love reading fiction in general, because if somebody has thought about it, it means that there is a possibility that it might become true. The book I keep going back to is by Kim Stanley Robinson, it's called The Ministry of the Future. I believe that it will get worse before it gets better, but I still believe in humanity's ability to go through hard times and figure out a way through."

Inequality ■

"WHEN TECHNOLOGY CAN DO the work, are we going to address income and wealth inequality?"

"THERE'S UNEQUAL ACCESS TO technology, even to the internet, and until that is resolved, the education problems are going to be exacerbated. We also need to give people the skills they need to understand the technology at a pretty high-level. Not to actually program, but to understand the strengths and limitations of the technology, how they could best use it, and how to use ChatGPT in a useful way."

Skill Set for Managers ●

"IN REGARD TO AI, what is the skill set that managers and others need in the future that's very different from the skill set that they used to have? Because if a lot of the allocating work and proving things can be done by tech tools, how do we build a different soft skill set for managers and for employees so that they are more supportive of one another and people want to work with them to accomplish whatever task?"

10



Participants' Takeaways

BE OPEN-MINDED

- Don't worry about today's answer, because it's changing too fast.
- We need to maintain an open mind and be respectful and appreciative of the experience of others and wisdom of others.
- To thrive in this future state, we and the people coming after us have to learn how to learn in this very fast environment and have a passion for learning and experimentation.
- No one I've heard so far has a clear vision for the future of the workplace. But AI is on everyone's mind. So I actually wrote that to ChatGPT and it agrees with me. It says, "You are spot on. The future of work feels like a giant question mark, but AI is the one thing everyone agrees will play a role. The challenge is that no one really knows how it will reshape work, automation, augmentation, new job categories, fewer jobs, better jobs, it's all speculation."

EMBRACING OUR HUMANITY

- We are trying to define what AI is, but maybe we need to come back and define what it is to be human. Why we feel empathy, why we are emotional and so on. This is a huge value and we forget about it nowadays.
- We live in a time of complete chaos. How do we navigate that chaos? It's with kindness. How do we show up with kindness and be kind?

FEAR VS OPPORTUNITY

- A hundred years ago or even 50 years ago, there were people getting bit by sharks all over the planet. It's just that today we're hearing about them in real time. So it can freak you out and you might not want to go in the water because you just heard about all the shark bites that are going on. It used to just trickle in via a newspaper or some other way. So there's so much information coming at us, but at the same time there's so much opportunity.

PURPOSE

- The why is way more important than the how. The how's getting solved very rapidly. So then it's, "What do you want to do?" Do you want to maximize shareholder value and allow corporations to increase their stock price? Okay, you can do that very efficiently now, but is that what we all want to do?

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKFORCE

- Lots of the technological changes in the workforce are getting rid of some of those simpler, easier jobs, which I think are taking some opportunities off the table for early career folks.
- We're sort of in chaos today, but is the chaos going to prevent the next generation from getting started in their careers? Or is technology going to get them started even faster? It's unclear. I could see technology amplifying, getting everyone up to speed faster than ever or it could shut them out and not give them an opportunity to participate or learn or get that experience. What does that trajectory look like for folks who haven't entered the workforce quite yet?

- It's not the technology that matters. It's actually the broader framing of how an employer thinks about its employees. Without that being very clear and intentional, we can add whatever to the mix. The implications are not the technology. The implications are how we actually implement the technology. That was probably the most important learning for me, whether it's a blue collar workplace or a white collar workplace.

RETURN TO OFFICE

- What I'm reading is that more and more companies are returning to office. People need to work together, be closer together, collaborate to stimulate innovation and creativity and all those things, but there is a balance. We're not going to have the Monday through Friday, nine to five or eight to five standard that we have today. The future is different, that's for sure.

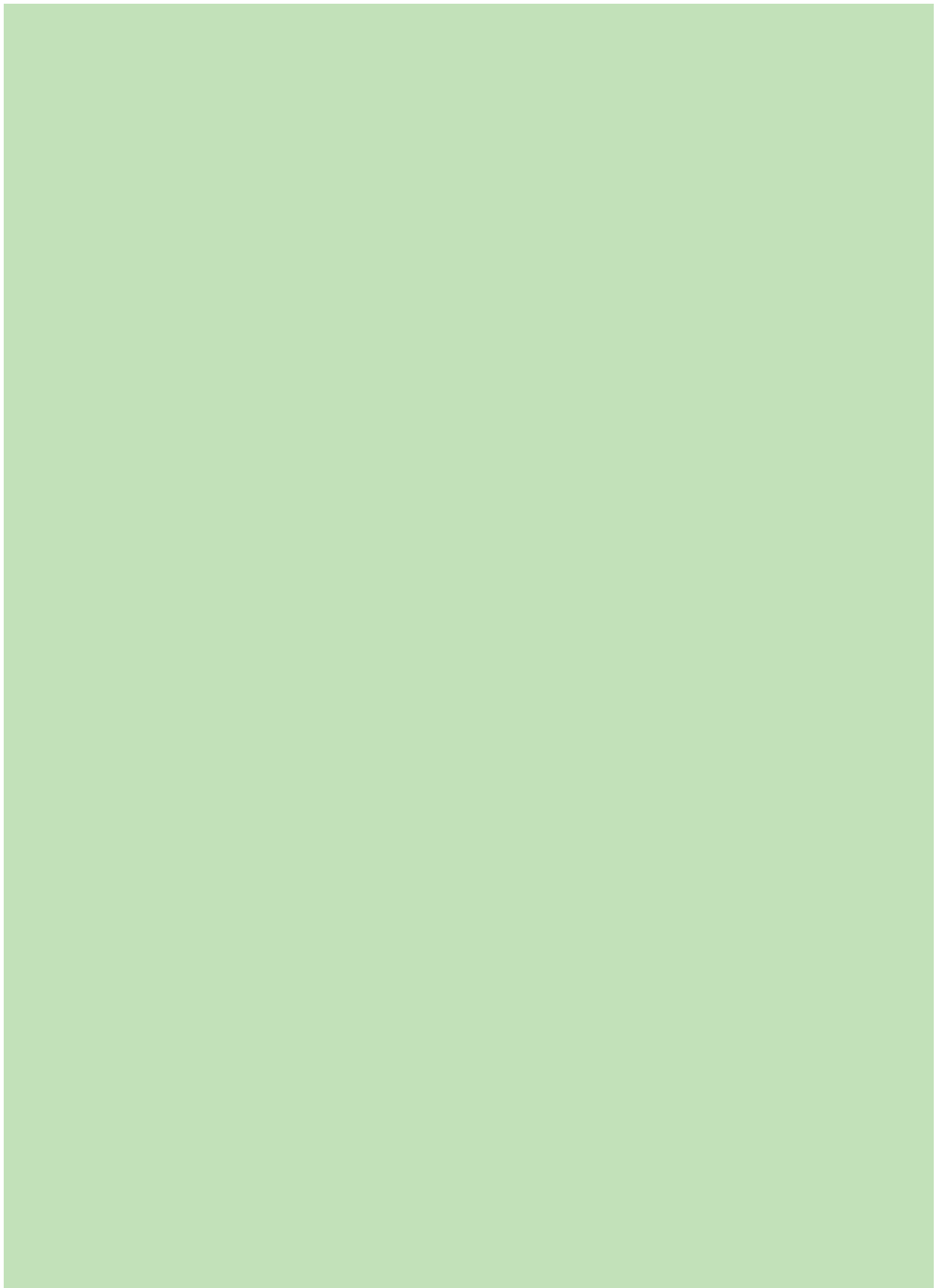
SKILLED TRADES

- Just thinking about the trades and the supply and demand that is happening within our blue-collar workforce and how much of a greater need there is for professionals to be able to fix problems in buildings and that problem is going to get worse demographically. That also means there will be a lot of opportunities to tip the scales a bit towards the value of that work and the value of those professionals in the coming decade.

IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN

- I think there are negative and positive aspects potentially to the future of work. But, I think we could get the positive aspects if we're mindful of how we design jobs, how we design workplaces, how we design the technology, how we develop and educate the workforce. Without this kind of mindful thinking, it could all go wrong. We'll be in a bad place.

SANDBOX
10



Technology Experts: Medical Devices and Robotics Technologists

SANDBOX
11

DEVICE AND ROBOTICS TECHNOLOGISTS perform their jobs using equipment that operates through new technology. These technologists use this equipment to augment their performance by deploying devices, robotics, and other physical equipment in tasks that have the potential to increase reliability, accuracy, and personal safety, and reduce repetitive motion injury. In addition to performing tasks, this use of technology can provide data through sensors which inform control systems to optimize efficiency and effectiveness.

SANDBOX 11 THEMES



PARTICIPANTS

HASAN AYAZ

Associate Professor,
Drexel University

PAUL BRANDT-RAUF

Distinguished Professor,
Dean School of
Biomedical Engineering,
Science and Health Systems,
Drexel University

JOSHUA DOLOFF

Assistant Professor, Department
of Biomedical Engineering,
Material Science Engineering,
and Oncology,
Johns Hopkins University

SANJANA MENDU

Postdoctoral Researcher,
Department of Surgery,
Harvard Medical School

AARON OKKEMA

Global Head of Commercial Interiors,
North America Sales Leader,
Configura

VAIBHAV UNHELKAR

Assistant Professor,
Computer Science Lead,
Ken Kennedy Institute,
Rice University

The Current State

SUMMARY: Leaders describe a workforce pulled apart by political polarization, digital overload, and widening economic pressure. Remote and hybrid work expand flexibility but dilute trust, mentorship, and social capital; deep collaboration still relies on in-person time, yet calendars fill with back-to-back video calls that crowd out actual work. Teams assemble and reassemble like a gig economy raising stress as cohesion and tacit coordination erode. Employee expectations for autonomy and belonging are rising while loyalty wanes, streaming and social media displace community, and costs of living outpace salaries, fueling churn. Inequality, monopolistic dynamics, and profit-maximization norms sap morale; public institutions face politicization, opaque metrics, and job insecurity that demoralize even seasoned professionals. A split between remote white-collar roles and in-person blue-collar work hardens social bubbles. Across sectors, aging pipelines, undervalued trades, and thin incentives for mentorship threaten capability just as mental health strains grow.

CHAPTER
11

Political Polarization ■

“THERE’S POLARIZATION WITH SOCIAL media. I’ve been retreating from family and friends who don’t agree with me. I’m gonna unfriend them. I’m just gonna disconnect and not have any discourse anymore. I view that as incredibly unhealthy. I have friends who are former military members who joke about liberal democrats, but they have friends who got injured on the frontlines, and they believe in stem cell research. They believe in medicinal therapies and cures for themselves and their friends. It’s not black and white. There’s a large amount of gradation in between. You have to relate. You can’t fake relating on the surface – [you have to] understand the situation. If you legitimately build a relationship with somebody, it takes time. If everyone did that, then we’d be in a different place as a country right now. With the skewing of the country, who owns guns and who doesn’t own guns, who’s afraid to speak up versus not afraid to speak up?”

Building Culture While Working Remotely ■

“DO YOU NEED FACE-TO-FACE physical presence to cultivate workplace culture? I think that’s an open question. It seems to depend on the workplace, the people in the workplace, and their level of connection. How important is connection to the work that you do?”

“DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC, we had an app to de-densify the lab space so that only so many people per square footage could be there to reduce the risk of potential transmission and spread of a disease. Because of that, it was highly encouraged culturally to say, ‘if you could work from home and give up your spot to somebody else, ‘cause you’re doing digital data analysis or something, then by all means that’s okay.’ But therein lies the rub, though, of what we do. There’s also a social dynamic to it. If things don’t work well, people build you up. They help you troubleshoot. They help you find reagents. They help you laugh when you need to laugh, or maybe they help you think of things you would never have thought of alone.”

“I’VE HAD TO LEAD remote teams for most of my career, and it’s never as good as seeing them in the office and grabbing a cup of coffee and having a social connection. We create these annual or biannual sales meetings so people can get together and actually get to know each other for real instead of just on these remote Teams calls. That’s why I say this workspace needs to be elevated.”

“I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT we have a Paleolithic genome in a postmodern society. We’ve been for the last 10,000 years, sitting around the campfire at night, in person, telling stories to each other. That’s what we did. There was no TV. There were no smartphones back then, believe it or not. I think it’s baked into our DNA that we have to be face-to-face with people, near people, to really get the most out of an interaction.”

“I FIND THAT SOCIAL interaction after a formal meeting is very valuable. We can’t really do that on Zoom.”

Using Technology to Connect ■

“PEOPLE ARE FINDING NEW ways in these digital platforms to connect. You could liken it to the relationships where some people sustain their entire relationship just by sending each other random memes on the internet. That has become a new form of engagement that I don’t think was possible or replicated in previous social structures. It’s a new form of connection that maybe we weren’t able to have before. It’s really cool that people can connect and create new forms of discourse, but when it comes to deeply connecting and understanding people, physical presence plays an important role.

“THE NEW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES and social media certainly have their place, and they certainly do help push out content and connect with certain things that you like or make your network large. That’s all a new dynamic. It’s been around for a little while now, of course, but new-ish. But that doesn’t really give you that deep connection, so you can really argue and debate and have healthy discord. It’s so much easier to throw a barb out there on social media. No big deal. Nobody can really get to me. But if you’re in person, you have to engage with everybody there. It’s a different experience. Not that one’s better than the other, but there are pros and cons to both.”

“THESE VIDEO CALL TECHNOLOGIES can be used to connect people. It should be to help us do the right things faster or better, not just replace how we did work in the past. I was on 10 Teams calls back-to-back today. So you’re really busy and really productive as a result. But what are you really doing in those calls? You don’t have any time to do the actual work that the calls create because you have back-to-back calls.”

Integrating Teams ■

“HOW TO INTEGRATE TEAMS in workplace settings? One of the major challenges in our work in the operating room is that clinicians are expected to deliver the same standard of care even when they’re working with very different people. So, for example, you can think of the operating room as working more in a shift or gig setting than people expect. The same surgeon can be working with a completely different anesthesiologist, a completely different scrub nurse, a completely different set of teams, with different ranges of experience, and still be expected to deliver the same outcomes. I know that’s a point of great stress, especially for the attending surgeons who are usually responsible for these outcomes. And in terms of integration and how some of these people and pieces are plugging together. I definitely think that there’s a lack of understanding of how complex the moving pieces behind the scenes are. All most people see is the final product, but they don’t know what goes into it, and how complex those interpersonal aspects are, as some of the underlying factors that might impact the outcome are maybe overlooked.”



"THE SURGEON WALKING INTO a room of people that he or she doesn't know, where's the trust? Where's the understanding that you know what's gonna happen next? You can't anticipate things if you don't know the team well. So there's this whole layer of social interactions that I think we've seen a big shift away from."

"HOW DO WE CREATE places for people to interact so that they can develop relationships, so they can develop trust, so that they can be more efficient and effective together? This whole gig economy thing is okay from a certain aspect, but it's only really measuring the widgets, and you don't have enough social capital to really kinda leapfrog past the widget and get new innovation, new ways of doing things."

"LACKING THE ENVIRONMENT TO create social capital and trust, I think, really kneecaps the ability to grow as a team and to grow as a company."

Employee Expectations ■

"THERE'S THIS TREND OF increasing employee expectations. They want more autonomy, and they want to have a sense of belonging and see that companies actually value the workers."

"WITH THE SWITCH FROM the pension system, there's less of a sense of team. It makes employees think about themselves and to fend for themselves. Then they need to switch workplaces. There's more of a temporary kind of interaction as opposed to a lifelong devotion."

Streaming ■

"I LOVE STREAMING AS much as the next person, watching movies and TV as a fun escape from the very intellectual, healthcare-driven world that I'm from. It is also incredibly damaging to humanity and socialization, and people having meaningfully deep relationships and tying ourselves together. We just go home, become comatose, and sit in front of a tube now, and we retract. We're no longer part of the human condition the way we used to be."

Community ■

"IF YOU COUNT THE number of individuals that you are really close to and could trust with any of your personal life details, how many would that be? Would it be max three to five? But then, remove the people you're related to by blood. And that number becomes almost zero for most people. Whereas yesteryear, after World War II, you had bowling leagues, dance halls, other social outings, and pursuits. Not to say that doesn't happen anymore in some regard, but it's very limited."

"NOT ONLY ARE WE bowling alone, but we're bowling alone on a virtual bowling alley, on a screen."

"I DON'T THINK IT'S the fault of the current generation to be born into the world, inheriting the problems that came before, to then make this hard-line decision of, 'I don't want children, or I don't wanna have a family,' because of society and the environment and damaging the earth, and so on."



Economic Concerns

"I LOVE WHAT I do, thankfully, and I've worked very hard to get the job that I have [as a professor]. I don't wanna just give that up easily. It's a dream that I was looking at for a long time, so it's definitely a weird place to be in – to have what you worked on for so long and so hard to all of a sudden, someone who doesn't have any training in that area of expertise whatsoever, just come along and completely undercut it and devalue it with conspiracy theories and a whole bunch of crap."

"YOU DON'T CRACK DOWN on monopolies, you don't crack down on the billionaires lined up like ducks in a row on inauguration day, stepping in line with current political agendas. Clearly, the agenda promised [during the presidential campaign] is not being delivered. It's actually being driven and pushed by one percenters. So then people in the workforce get depressed. How can I speak up for myself? Who's even fighting for me anymore? What can be done?"



"IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT you have these massive political shifts in agenda and nationalistic tendencies in countries all through Europe and the United States. Not just xenophobic isolationists. People are trying to protect what they have. They see that what they have is becoming ever smaller with inflation eating that up. And no additional concessions are being given by the 1%. They're not paying their fair share of taxes. I think everybody always looks back at Reaganomics. Everybody generally agreed that trickle-down theory was a nice idea in principle. But you think about it from a numbers perspective. No one individual can spend that many dollars in that many places all by themselves. They don't have enough time in the day. So how can you really trickle down that much money through the economy? It doesn't make sense. You have to protect your middle class. You have to protect the people who are making the ship go. You think if they just stop and quiet quit that the rest of the country's going to sustain itself? It's not gonna happen."

Effects of Globalization

"THE PROBLEM WITH GLOBALIZATION is that we wanna take pride in the companies that we associate with our home countries, just like your favorite athlete in the ring, fighting it out with other entities. Boeing versus Airbus as an example. But you have massive management issues. Companies are beholden to maximizing profits for their shareholders. They don't have to. It used to be the case that you had lifelong loyalty to a company because you were part of a family. Now you bounce around. You try to maximize your bottom line, too. You have to look out for yourself instead of the thing that you're trying to be a part of."



Profit Maximizing ◆

“PART OF THE PROBLEM in both healthcare and the rest of society is that the driving force seems to be maximizing profits. Certainly, you have to make a profit, but do you have to see a patient every five minutes? Is that the best thing for the physician or the best thing for the patient?”

“IN THE HEALTHCARE SETTING, how many people are you operating on in a given week, versus how good are the five and 10-year follow-ups for that? How many high-risk cases are you doing? How well are you prioritizing care, and how well are you managing postoperative and preoperative outcomes? But you get the most money for putting people under anesthesia. So as long as that's the bottom line, I think we're gonna have a difficult time progressing.”

Salaries and Cost of Living ◆

“THERE'S THE COST OF living challenge. People are leaving high-cost areas. In San Francisco, it is almost impossible to get people to come to the office because commutes are so bad, so why bother? So offices are empty there.”

“I HAVE A TWIN brother who lives in California and makes a little more money. But there's a cost-of-living adjustment. It never really makes up for the difference. He still stresses he won't ever be able to buy a home. One of the most expensive cities is Irvine, California, just south of LA. It's one of the most expensive areas you can probably live in Orange County. And he's an in-house patent attorney for a big company. It's not like he's not making a good living. It's just insane.”

“THERE'S A KNOWN STATISTIC that every department, whether it's in a hospital or on a university campus, deals with approximately 30 to 40% attrition in the administrative ranks. They bounce around a lot. They try to find better positions, better work-life balance, better salary, all these different things. We had an admin who was with us for 10 years, and then it came down to a difference of, 'Can you raise my salary by only \$15,000?' She got another offer with a \$15 or \$20,000 raise. She said, 'Oh, I love it here. If you raise it just 15K more, I'll stay.' So it wasn't just about money, but the people who make those decisions said, 'No, we can't do that.' So we unfortunately lost this individual. So it's just really tough. When individuals leave under those circumstances, I usually like to ask, 'Was it us, or was it just an offer you couldn't refuse?' And usually it's the latter. It's just something they couldn't turn down 'cause it was best for them and their family. Why wouldn't you look out for yourself and your family?”

“I'VE SEEN FIRSHTHAND SOME postdocs that I'm trying to hire, for example, receiving salaries that are multiples higher than those from industry. There's brain drain as the market gets better, industry gets better. They hire more and more experts to make technological advancements. Then suddenly, the market goes down, and they don't hire anymore. Or we see mass layoffs, and there's this rush to universities at that time. These things go in cycles.”

Remote vs In-person Work ●

"WE SPLIT THE WORKFORCE into the white-collar remote workers who can sit in their home and ignore, to some degree, the rest of the world, and the blue-collar workers who have to be present in the workforce, out in hot climates doing things that none of us would want to do. That will reinforce the political cycle that we're going through, I'm afraid. There are a lot of things forcing us into our own bubbles, and now the workforce trends are forcing us in our own bubbles and cutting us off from everybody else.

"INFRASTRUCTURE. IF WE DIDN'T have this robust internet, all the tools, we wouldn't even have this discussion about remote work."

"FLEXIBLE WORK OR REMOTE work or working off-site often times is only measured by how many meetings you have in your day. Is your calendar full? Are you on a Zoom call all day long? That is not healthy, for so many reasons. There's no time in between. No actual social capital is being created. How do we actually support people in a healthy way?"

"TO NEGOTIATE A PEACE agreement for various conflicts around the world, they're not doing it by Zoom. They're flying to Saudi Arabia to meet in person. There's a reason for that. There's something they're capturing there that they wouldn't capture on Zoom."

"THE VALUE OF FACE-TO-FACE connection is the perceived effort and intentionality of it. It takes a lot more time and effort to show up physically in a place to be with someone than it does to call them. That may or may not shape the effect of the quality of time that you've spent with someone."

"THERE'S NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL POLICY. There has to be some change depending on the sector. In healthcare, remote work obviously has to be considered. There is telemedicine. But there are also certain services that have to be done in person. So that brings up a lot of challenges in organizing."

Pros and Cons of Remote Work ●

"I'M A PROFESSOR, AND my graduate student has asked for remote work. Is this good for them or not? Because they're missing out on learning from others. Just being in the same room helps so much. How do you deal with that?"



"THERE ARE ALWAYS TRADE-OFFS in everything. Being in person, present, has all these benefits, like spontaneous connection. You're getting some coffee, and you meet someone, and you discuss some ideas that might come out of that. But there's also the benefit of remote work, especially for families. I have two children. I want to be there for them. With my wife, we need to balance after-school pickups and activities. That becomes a challenge. We need some flexibility. So maybe in grad school or earlier in career, maybe there's more capability to be present in person, and there are more benefits. But a little later on, maybe mid-career, you're seeing that families and other factors come in. Then there is some expectation to have some flexibility instead of the nine-to-five schedule."

"WE EXPECT THAT REMOTE and hybrid work will be here to stay and become the norm. I think fewer companies will ask for just full-time in-person arrangements 'cause of family life balance. They want to see their children and devote some time to their family as well. But going forward, one challenge will be maintaining organizational culture. If everyone is loosely connected, what does it mean to be a unit? How do you create team cohesion? I think that requires stronger and innovative team leadership and management style to be able to connect people because a lot of people are remote."

"CEOS HAVE SKYSCRAPERS IN New York City that are 50% unoccupied. They're paying high rents for the space, and their first major course of action in a post-Covid world was to densify the workplace, completely disregarding whether it's better for the individual employees. They argue that the work can't be maximally achieved working remotely, [that they can't] have the culture they want, and be the productive team that they want. They attribute the drop in productivity to the fact that people are working remotely rather than a whole bunch of other issues, including mental health."

"IN TERMS OF TELEWORK versus in-person, the question is, 'What are we trying to achieve?' A lot of the literature is about productivity. It is divided, but in general, it seems that people can be more productive with telework because they're not wasting time commuting, and they're able to do other things that they can't do in their life. But are the workers themselves better off that way? There is some literature growing now saying that in some cases, the mental health of remote workers is actually worse than in person. Do you want more widgets, or do you want happier widget makers?"

Desired Work Arrangements ●

"YOU'VE GOT TO CREATE this space that's the best place to work. Make it a magnet. Make it a place where people have to come to the office to do their best work. Flip this remote thing on its head and go from, 'You could work from wherever you wanna work,' to 'If you wanna do your best work, and if you wanna get the best done, this is the space to do it. You've got the people here, you've got the tools here, you've got whatever it is that you need to do your job here.'"

“WHAT DO PEOPLE NEED emotionally, physically, socially? Do these spaces support that? We've got employees in the office, and now we know how to manage them because we can see them in the office, so they must be working well. That's obviously not true. It's incumbent upon leaders and managers to know how to manage people, lead people. Those are two different things, by the way. Lead people well, but then also make sure that they're doing their work. That doesn't necessarily mean you're in the office or you're not.”



“WHAT ARE THE BEST practices to make this work effectively? I'm asking all the researchers on my team to be in person as much as possible, especially for technical meetings, so that we can go through these brainstorming discussions. I see that that is more effective. But there are cases where it's not possible, like for meetings with our colleagues across different sites. It's not possible to have that. So we need to go through Zoom meetings even for those technical discussions. So it's about the point that we can tolerate, from both sides.”



Need for Breaks Between Meetings ●

“DURING COVID, WE HAD meetings that all of a sudden turned into virtual meetings, and then they got scheduled back-to-back. There's no time for a break. When do we eat lunch? When do I use the facilities? Now that we're back in person, I really had to make a concerted effort to leave an extra 10, 15 minutes to get to some of these other buildings on campus because I can't just immediately pour myself into another phone call.”

Healthcare Workforce ●

“FOR THE HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE to take care of the rest of the workforce, it is not as prepared as it should be. In fact, it's shrinking. There may not be enough of us to do a good job.”



“OUR [HOSPITAL] IS ALSO a teaching hospital. There are a number of hoops you have to jump through before you're doing the job that you are actually trained to do. There are many more administrative hoops. Obviously, training is important, but the question is, is the training that we are putting people through really empowering them to be better clinicians, or are we exploiting people for cheap labor so we can keep our hospitals running and our records and notes being ordered? In terms of how we're training the next generation of the workforce, are we incentivizing the things that matter? Are we putting in programs to actually help people?”

"HOSPITAL RESIDENTS ARE EXPECTED to work 12-hour days, six to six, and so they receive meal vouchers for the cafeteria. The cafeteria is not a great source of high nutritional food. There's an effort to supplement it and ensure that they have a high quality of life in the workplace, to the extent that's possible. But a lot of people don't use them. Vouchers pile up, and there are many lying around because, of course, the residents are not gonna go get a sad breakfast sandwich. They could make something a little bit more suitable for their lifestyle. It seems to me a systemic issue because it's easier and cheaper not to prioritize and spend on these things. If it doesn't break anything and nothing horrible happens, no deaths involved, we often put off problems until there's something catastrophic that happens. We only have to clean up the mess after it happens."

Mental Health in the Workplace ●

"I'M AN OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE physician. When you look at productivity, I think one of the biggest drags now is mental health issues."

Political Climate 🔒

"IN THE LAST TWO months, we've seen major changes that could mean downsizing of government workforces, suppression of diversity efforts in the workplace, and isolationist economies that will change the global marketplace. I don't think this is a short-term trend. This is something that will continue along with the rise of anti-democratic, autocratic, and nationalistic regimes around the world."

"THERE'S SO MUCH PRESSURE for someone to cave to the president's agenda 'cause they're probably worried about their family, themselves, their livelihood, and safety in certain circumstances. So it's not surprising, but unfortunate and sad. I'm ashamed. I never thought I'd say this, but recently, with [instances of undermining democracy], I'm very much ashamed to be associated with this nation. Unfortunately."

"LOOK AT OUR ELECTED officials. I just saw an article a day or two ago talking about when Republicans go back home from Congress. They're caving to larger political pressures. But then, when they hold town halls, they get completely chewed up, spit out, and yelled at by their own constituency. They give these very safe, blase, PC answers. The article was making the point that it's no longer necessary to go home and hold town halls. If you go, hide. Hide out at home. Don't make yourself visible or prone to be attacked."

Uncertainty and Instability for Federal Employees

"I WORK IN THE VA system. Even my supervisor, who's been a cardiac surgeon for 30-plus years, is being asked to report to his supervisor with a five-bullet point list of what he did last week, which doesn't seem like a productive way to measure someone's value in a workplace. So I definitely feel a little bit discouraged by the devaluation of high-value work. How are you supposed to communicate in five bullet points that you saved several people's lives and are doing high-impact research and work? I don't think that there's really an effective way to do that, but people are being shoehorned into that."

"IN THE GOVERNMENT SETTING, there is a lack of transparency from higher-ups. People were unsure what implications their responses to these emails would have. For example, when the first email came out, some people were on leave. Some people were away from their computers, and they thought, 'If I don't respond to this email by Monday, am I going to be terminated?' If you're not in a position of power and you're put into these situations and forced to check a bunch of boxes that have nothing to do with your work output or productivity in the larger organization, it has definitely led to a demoralization of the larger workplace. A six-month voluntary severance package was offered to government employees. People were wondering, 'Is this a better option than waiting and seeing if I get terminated anyway?' So there's just a lot of uncertainty. Even if you have years of experience and you've been doing good work in your organization, you can be doing everything right and still not have job security if you're a government healthcare worker right now, which is a little bit scary."

Workforce

"FOR THE PAST FEW decades, we've been pushing the idea that, if we're gonna succeed as a society, everyone has to go to university. I always thought that was wrong, and I still think that's wrong. There are other models, Germany's perhaps the outstanding one, everybody holds up. They provide different levels of education, mostly high school educational opportunities, so they can join the workforce. We in the US just leave the non-university population adrift. We don't have trade schools. And we don't value those things either. Maybe people wouldn't be interested 'cause we look down on that, but that's not the way it works in other countries."

"HOW WE MEASURE WORK effort is a constant discussion in many universities now. What are faculty doing that is productive? It's not just someone standing in the classroom or standing in the laboratory – it's everything else they do during the day. It's not appreciated. It's not measured, it's not taken into account. So it's not rewarded. We're trying to fix it. What is it that makes for a good outcome? And what is the outcome we really wanna measure?"

CHAPTER
11



Mentorship

“AS AN ACADEMIC, ONE of the things that I consider success is when my mentees become successful. That is also rewarded in my department and more broadly in academia. You are known not just by your papers or the money you raised, but also by who you have trained to some extent. That’s not so much the case in most other fields. Look at K-12 schools, the teacher isn’t rewarded for student success. Typically, there are performance-based incentives, but they’re not typically based on how happy students are with them. It may be based on some standardized score, which is a very poor proxy of the overall learning or learning outcomes.”

“YOU HAVE TO INCENTIVIZE mentorship. One of the issues we’ve had is how productivity, as a service, is measured. For example, in cardiac surgery, there are a lot of other hours that go into providing service, not just operating. So there are consults, there are decisions that are made. They’re looking at the cath lab and working with cardiologists to determine whether or not a patient’s eligible for surgery. There’s a lot of external work that goes into getting someone into the OR. Making sure that time is adequately measured and accounted for, in addition to all of the mentorship that the clinicians are doing, both inside and outside of the OR, with residents and fellows that come through our service. They had a meeting last month where they said, ‘Oh, your clinic utilization hours are not meeting our targets. They’re below what they’re supposed to be.’ We were sitting there wondering, ‘Okay, how can that be boosted?’ It’s not that they’re not seeing patients. They are, but how do you put it in the right bucket to be counted as work by the organization that is assessing your productivity? So coming back to the mentorship piece, either you have people who are championing that and really care about mentorship and are willing to take on unpaid extra labor to push that forward or you give people credit for taking on extra mentorship, maybe on a one-to-group model, like giving them credit for that so that they can allocate the necessary time, energy, and effort into that.”

“I’VE HEARD FROM NURSES, especially those coming out of the school, they really appreciate [the buddy mentorship programs] because just like any other job, once you go from school to the real workplace, a lot of learning has to happen on the go, on the job. Having that buddy really helps them. But I can see the other side too. For someone who already knows these things, maybe the mentorship is redundant.”

Age Driving Change

“IN HEALTHCARE, SPECIFICALLY NURSING, age is driving a lot of change. It’s difficult to recruit some professionals. The demographics of nurses are trending towards older ages. When it comes to the type of patients or diseases that they treat, that is also being skewed by age.”

“I WAS RECENTLY TALKING to a company that operates equipment to do recycling, landfills, and so on. They coincidentally shared that their workforce is predominantly 45-plus and they have a tough time recruiting the next generation, partly because it’s a domain where maybe people have a second thought to enter, but also because the age is skewing further up.”

“MILLENNIALS ARE NOW THE largest fraction of the workforce, and population-wise are quite large by comparison to the boomer generation. If you look at actual workforce participation, however, those numbers are down a little bit, but they’re still reasonably high. You juxtapose that with stagnant salaries over the past 50 years, going back to the 1980s, 1970s. What type of incentive is there for individuals to want to participate in a workforce when they’re not being rewarded for their efforts?”



The Future State

SUMMARY: Leaders anticipate a future that rewards preparedness, adaptability, and principled use of technology amid political, economic, and environmental volatility. They expect research priorities and funding to shift unpredictably, pressing universities to protect training pipelines, scaffold mentoring with tools like auto-grading and AI tutors, and measure mentorship outcomes. Even as global health and biomedicine remain essential, cuts to grants and public programs threaten long-term capacity, creating gaps in expertise and fewer PhDs entering critical fields. Environmental risk raises practical demands for hybrid travel norms and resilience planning, while civic uncertainty prompts a choice between leaving or staying to strengthen institutions. Across domains, AI is seen less as a replacement than as an amplifier, provided incentives are realigned to value human connection, one-to-one teaching, and the steady work of building resilient communities.



Preparing for the Future

"DO WE LIVE TO work or work to live?"

"IN THE EARLY STAGES of an academic career, it is an interesting time to try to make predictions about the future. Do you know what research is going to be valued?"

"IF YOU FEEL CONFIDENT and certain in the country you're living in and the way that leaders are leading the country, then you feel good, and think, 'I can let go of some of that planning about the future.' If you don't, then I feel like you've gotta all of a sudden start asking yourself a lot more questions like, 'Am I really individually prepared for who knows what could happen?'"

"I'M OLDER, SO I'VE seen a lot, I've lived a lot of history. In terms of the bigger trends like the political or economic stuff, I think they will come and go as they have in the past. The details will probably be different, but the history will rhyme with history, not be identical to history."

"I AM LOOKING AT collaborations. We are looking into how we can scaffold education with tools and frameworks that allow for more one-to-one time. It's not a one-size-fits-all solution. Obviously, it depends on the domain. For example, in courses with a lot of similar types of assignments, we are trying to incorporate auto-grading so the TA has more time to spend with students rather than grading assignments. In my research on medical training and training the medical workforce, we are looking at similar opportunities like nursing compliance, which is a very big challenge for hospitals today. Because of staffing shortages, it's very difficult to onboard new nurses to teach them the unwritten rules sometimes. In some of the hospitals where I work, they have something called a buddy system, which is like mentoring between a novice and an expert. How can we facilitate the communication between the novice and their buddy, who is their mentor, using technology?"

"PEOPLE RIGHT NOW ARE saying, 'I wanna leave the country. Can't you apply to jobs?' My wife was saying, 'Can you apply to jobs in Ireland, England, or somewhere else?' I don't know. But I said, 'You have to stay and fight for what you believe in. You shouldn't just jettison things and systems, just give them away and just let people destroy them even further.'"

Implications of Funding Cuts

"IN UNIVERSITIES RIGHT NOW, there's a lot of uncertainty. University administrations are on hold. PhD student recruitments are frozen right now. We cannot bring in new researchers. Schools are announcing that they rescind their offers."

"ATTACKS ON 'WOKE LIBERAL agenda universities,' notwithstanding decimation of funding sources for research, getting grants to fund and to support individual academic development. Where do you think PhDs and industry come from? Most companies want to hit the ground running. They want someone who comes in and does something really well. They don't necessarily want to spend money on that. There are some collaborative programs that can co-mentor someone between industry and academia. It does happen. There are sometimes really nice collaborative agreements. There are industry postdocs, but generally speaking, no company wants to sit down with someone who's so green on a task and has to literally babysit them and train them from scratch. To destroy the pathway that gets them up to a level of proficiency, it's gonna be damaging, counterproductive."



"MY WIFE WORKS AT a school of public health. They laid off 2,000 employees globally this morning. It's the number one public health school in the country. But because they get 80% of their funding from the federal government, \$800 million from USAID was cut and gone. They were doing a timeshare model where if someone had extra money, and if you had 30% effort that you could give them, they could pay you 30% of your salary. They tried to do the best they could to keep as many people employed as possible. But there were a lot of people who were unfortunately let go. It's damaging not just locally for health, but also globally, not just in terms of outreach and the relationships that we've built, but also to keep ourselves protected at home, from Ebola, from all these other diseases, all these different things in a globalized world with air traffic that can in a day or two can get here very quickly."



"THERE'S A KNOWN STATISTIC that says that every dollar NIH invests, makes back \$2.46. It always makes the money back."

"BIOMEDICINE AND HEALTH ALWAYS weather recessions really well. It protects our economy not just by driving innovation, but also because health is ever present. It is always needed regardless of the status of the economy. So right now, with the reduction and retraction of grants, schools being penalized for this, that, or whatever, we're gonna be recruiting in fewer students. There are gonna be fewer PhDs coming out of these pipelines. I don't know what effects that's gonna have. I saw this interesting infographic this week that said we, as a country, are already lagging behind other countries in biology. But in engineering and biotechnology, we're still leading the way in many respects. But this type of damage is not gonna be just budget shortfalls, but long, long term implications even beyond the current administration. Having gaps in knowledge, some people are graduating earlier to accommodate not having the funds to support them. Others are weathering the storm by not recruiting actively – they're purposely not taking new students. So now you have more intermittent gaps of knowledge in your student base."



Environmental Concerns

“AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST, I really take the threat to the planet very seriously. Whatever you’re doing in your regular life, you have to be an advocate for saving the planet. The planet will be fine. It’s gonna be our civilization and our species.”

“I WORKED WITH ORGANIZATIONS that fly people all around the world in jets to save the world. Some people fly around the world in jets. How does that make sense? So I say to them, ‘Okay, let’s have one meeting a year in person, but maybe the other three we can do remotely, and that’s fine.’ Actually, they listen to me now, so that’s good.”

“WHEN I BOUGHT A house in Philadelphia, one of the things I looked at was elevation above sea level. I was serious about it. If we have serious flooding occurring, I don’t wanna be part of it.”

AI

“WHAT WOULD BE GREAT is if technology could automate the things that are taking up time and prevent people from engaging in the more meaningful and enriching things that technology can’t do face-to-face or one-on-one mentorship. It’d be great if technology could clear up some of the time and effort from other things that are more mundane, time-consuming so that people have that effort. But what I feel like ends up happening is that they’re like, ‘Oh, we can do these mundane things that are rewarded by the profit model faster. Let’s do more of those things and shove all of the other stuff to the side. I didn’t realize we could make it even more efficient.’ So it ultimately comes down to the incentive structures. Explicitly carving out time and saying that this is a priority and that you will be rewarded for it. Not that you will be rewarded for the time you spend developing one-on-one mentorships, but that your outcomes of mentorships will be measured and assessed. Potentially, you get penalized for putting that to the side and not actively participating in that.”

“I DON’T THINK THAT you can just say doctors are gonna be replaced, but maybe they can do a lot more in a day because they leverage AI, and it’s an empowerment thing, it’s a facilitator, or it enables you to be more productive. But not necessarily taking over.”

“THERE’S THE IDEA OF using AI as a tutor or a mentor. An AI tutor in a class can be one-on-one. It can be personalized to the student’s needs. That’s an example where AI is going to actually help with education.”

Participants' Takeaways

THE FUTURE

- There will be positives, but there'll be negatives, just like with everything right now. There will be disruptions. Some people will do their jobs, and other people will get new jobs. The future will be different, but in many ways it will be the same.

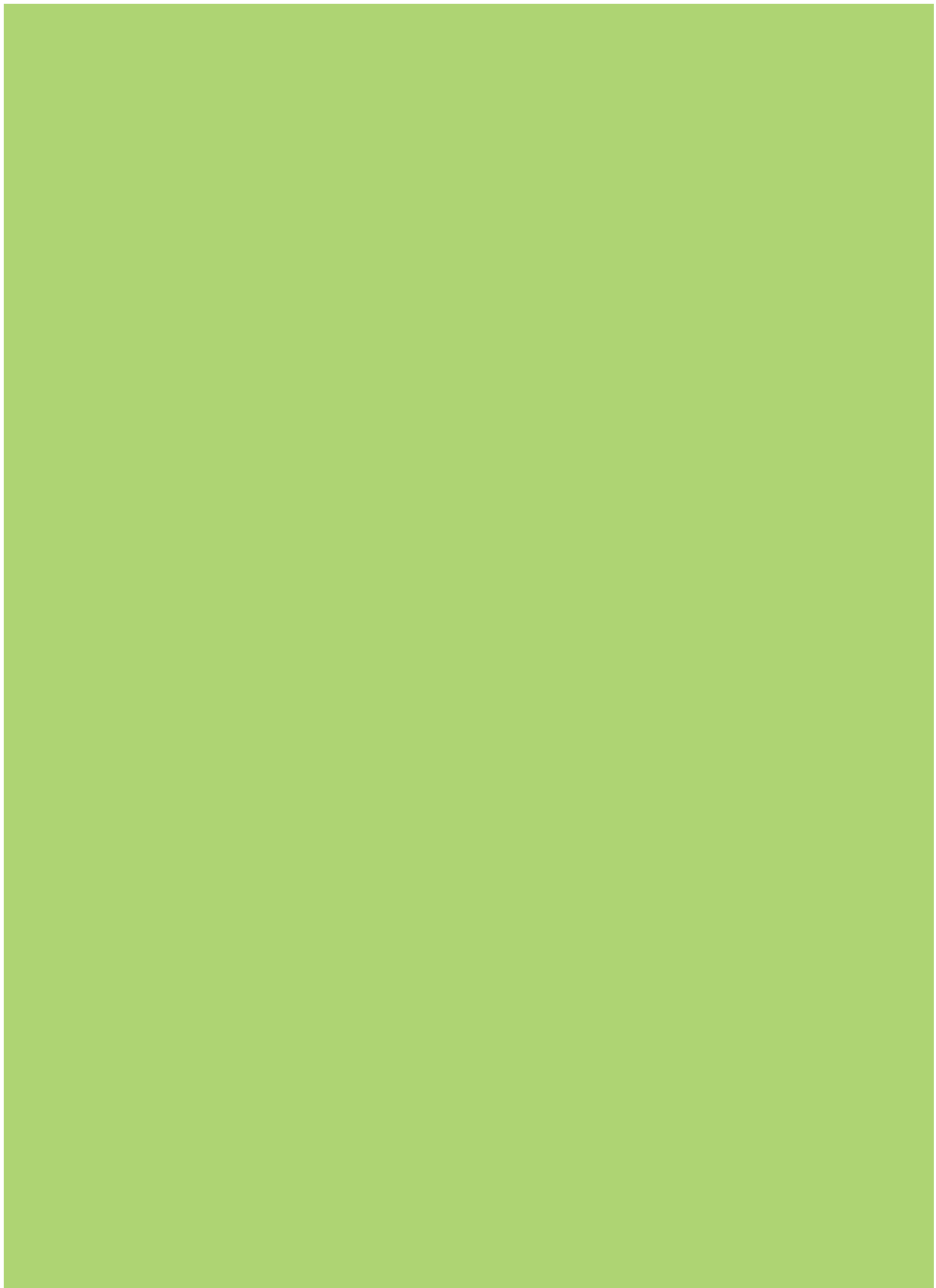
CURRENT POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

- Across different career stages and intergenerational qualities, all of us are equally taken aback by the current political landscape.
- We are so busy with grant writing and focusing on the details of what we're doing. It is intellectually and time-wise already so draining, we just don't have much bandwidth remaining to advocate at the higher level.

STRESS

- If there are things that are in people's lives that are causing them stress, then they're gonna be stressed when they are at work or when they are with their family or whatever it might be.





Artists, Writers, and Musicians

ARTISTS, WRITERS, ACTORS, AND MUSICIANS who participated in this Sandbox represent workers in the Arts & Humanities who, typically, have no employer and are self-employed as independent contractors or gig workers. These workers create their own products through their own effort to sell to any number and kinds of buyers, ranging from small and large businesses to community groups, festivals, large conglomerates and personal acquaintances. They often create their product without remuneration, and they most often have no secure source of financial support. They often live their career project to project, with little financial security and no legal protection or guaranteed source of retirement support.

SANDBOX 12 THEMES

 <p>Culture, Belonging & Social Connection</p>	 <p>Change, Adaptability & Agility</p>	 <p>Education, Development & Training</p>
 <p>Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning</p>	 <p>Technology & AI</p>	 <p>Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues</p>
 <p>Economic Factors</p>		

PARTICIPANTS

COLIN BROOKS
Singer-Songwriter

FLASH
Musician, High Desert Groove

KEVIN LEE
President/CEO, Astria Studios

RYAN MCABERY
Artist/Owner, Modern Terrain

PETER MULVEY
Songwriter

CELINE PARREÑAS SHIMIZU
Dean and Distinguished Professor,
Arts Division, Film and Digital Media,
University of California, Santa Cruz

OLIVER STECK
Entertainer

The Current State

SUMMARY: Artists describe a relentless, self-directed hustle shaped by gig work, stagnant pay, and the collapse of traditional revenue models. Streaming has gutted royalties, live performance income is volatile, and benefits like healthcare or union protections are rare; survival depends on relentless touring, extreme cost control, and piecemeal jobs across weddings, clubs, teaching, and small commissions. Community is both a safety net and a distribution channel. Inequities persist: first-gen and BIPOC artists face limited access to galleries and funding, while U.S. culture often devalues art relative to other countries. Film and media markets are in flux, with mid-budget work squeezed and institutions experimenting with alternative hiring and credentials. Amid rising costs and burnout – including among arts students steered toward STEM – artists remain committed to craft and connection, but see the “middle class” of the arts hollowed out and increasingly hard to sustain.

Current State of Artists

“WE’RE ALL SELF-PROPELLED HUMAN beings. Nobody is garnering a paycheck for us. I travel for art shows, which have changed before and after the pandemic. I have a summertime job where I’m outside in Park City and Sun Valley. If there’s a fire, or smoke, or it’s too hot, or people are feeling lazy, I don’t necessarily have a built-in audience. I’m always chasing the next opportunity. We have no other choice. I am so unemployable, I’ll do anything I can to not have to sit at a desk from nine to five every day and sell my soul to somebody else’s concepts. I want to run my own business, hold my own vision, sleep till 10, and work on Sundays. I’m sure everyone here can attest that they can put in a hundred-hour week and not even feel it because they’re so attracted to what they do. They’ll do anything to keep it going.”



"THERE ARE TIMES I'M playing, 3, 4, 5 shows a day. I love it. We love this job that we have, and we do it at this low level until a health problem comes, like a lot of our friends, and we get really sick or incapacitated, or die. That's not a great model."

"IT'S LIKE A LOW-YIELD bond. We're not really affected by what's going on, but our rate of return is not going to change that much.... We do what we have to keep this low level of living. The key to it is that we love it. If you don't like what you're doing in the arts, you won't be there very long because it's not gonna pay you. You'll find anything that will be more stable and pay you more."

"NOBODY BUYS MUSIC ANYMORE. It is all streamed, and musicians don't receive any compensation that makes any difference in our lives."

"I MADE MY ENTIRE career on the road. When I was a sophomore in college, I did a semester in Ireland. I started playing with the street musicians there. This would've been in 1989. And I was ruined for ordinary work at that point. I loved playing music for human beings. I came back and finished my degree in theater arts. I guess I'll always have that to fall back on. I was playing in bars every night during college. Then I moved out to Boston because all the cities out east looked close together on a map. I started getting gigs in Boston, New York, Philly, DC, and Vermont. I got an agent and a record label and entered the tail end of whatever the music industry supposedly was with record labels and promoters and radio."

"ALL I EVER CARED about was the small gig, the folk coffee house, the little rock club, the Unitarian church, the small arts center. I've done a hundred gigs a year for 30 years now. I functionally wound up like one of the little mammals running around after the asteroid. You can't fire me."

"THE ROAD HAS CHEWED up any number of my friends."

"I HIRE PROFESSIONAL FILMMAKERS as well as students. All of them are unified by the need, the burning desire, more than anything in the world, to work in the arts. And so many of them are indeed working in the gig economy."

"MOST [WORK TRENDS] AREN'T applicable to this group. We all work for ourselves. I don't have a union. I'd love a union. I'd love healthcare. But that's not something we should expect. Our workplace injuries are because we were being reckless with the stuff that we're making."

"MOST OF OUR STUDENTS at my university are students of color, 70%. 40% are first-generation. These students don't want to leave their families once they graduate. They want to be accountable to their communities. They want to work as advisors. They want to work as college counselors. They don't wanna be by themselves. They don't wanna cross over into a new class and leave people behind."

“CHICANO OR LATINO MURALISTS and painters, for example, are really unable to break into galleries or agents. So they’re finding new ways of distributing their work. Jose Ramirez in Los Angeles has been a K-12 teacher for the past 30 years and holds open studios at his house on a quarterly basis, advertised through social media. So it’s the people who own his art. This offers a new pathway for art distribution, but then also recommends a certain way of life that doesn’t leave your community behind, and creates a new economy.”

Making a Living

“PRIMARILY, I DO GET some royalties from some songs that I’ve written and recorded. Music that’s getting played continues to make a little bit of money for me. But mostly it’s live performances and recordings.”

“MY PLAN IS JUST the same as it’s always been. There’s a lot of hustle. Last year I played 347 shows. Luckily, I enjoy what I do, and that’s a big key. At least a third of those were 50 bucks or less. But the point is it’s the same plan – I move, I diversify, I play a lot of different stuff. I’m playing kid shows. I’m playing adult shows. I’m playing in bars, I’m dancing. I’m playing weddings, bar mitzvahs, and funerals. I’m singing telegrams, whatever. I guess that’s been a creative approach for me. While I don’t believe I will ever be written up in any journal about my technical abilities or make any large splash in the world, I’ve found a way to enjoy what I do and push it to a lot of different places creatively.”

“HOW DO WE GET healthcare for musicians? How to change the mentality of many club owners that, unless it’s a big act, you’re making the same thing that you made quite a number of years ago. It’s not just how much you’re getting per gig, it’s all the gigs together. If you got \$5 one night, \$200 another night, \$75 the other night, how much do you drive? What’s your overhead? The only way is if you could keep your overhead down.”

“THE KEY IS STAYING busy and focused, and trying to take on projects that you really like and resonate with you. Projects that can be a little different and getting out of the comfort zone really helps to keep your mind going.”

“THE ONLY REASON I can scratch out a living at all is because Passe [in city] itself is a community, and the Old Town School of Folk music in Chicago is a community, and the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley is a community. I’m lonely, but in a way, I’m not lonely because I’m going from home to home.”

“ONE OF MY FAMOUS artist friends did a really gracious thing the other day. She’s a gracious person. She was on social media, she said, ‘I’m down here with my band in Australia, and we’re touring and we’re playing to 3 or 400 people. And I feel like we all should celebrate that we’re going out and sharing our art, but I can only do this ‘cause I can afford a nanny for my two kids because I have passive income from a bolt of lightning.’”



"THE STATE OF PAY has been absolutely stagnant for years. That's not going to change for artists unless there's a drastic change in this country. Most of us live a very low level of existence, except for some people who get fame and success. For a lot of us, it's just getting these creative ways to say, 'How do I play in this venue? How do I play this music? How do I entertain these people?' Whether you're playing for kids, weddings, clubs, dances, stadiums, whatever, Congratulations."

"I DON'T THINK THAT the capitalist marketplace, as it exists now, is doing a lot of favors to art. I really don't. How many Mozarts are currently laboring?"

"ELON MUSK AND JEFF Bezos have both said that we need 20 billion humans on this earth because then there would be more Mozarts. To me, the obvious question is, 'How many Mozarts are currently working in an Amazon fulfillment factory picking things put on trucks?' Teaching students to make themselves suitable for the work. But then the work itself doesn't pay anything. That's the part that I find really challenging and is about to be, I think, even more challenging."

Making a Living During the Pandemic ◆

"MY INCOME WENT DOWN about 30 or 40% during that year and a quarter [during the pandemic], but my overhead went all the way to zero – so my net income went up. The lesson I take from that is if I talked to a first-year business major and I said, 'I write songs.' The business major would say, 'Oh, intellectual property, great. What's your business model?' I would say, 'I get on an airplane and I fly to Portland on a Wednesday, and I play a gig in Portland to about 60 people. Then, in my rental car, I drive to Eugene and play for them. Drive down to Ashland, and then I haul ass all day to get to Seattle for the Saturday gig. Then on Sunday, I am in Bellingham. And then I wake up at two in the morning and fly back or drive back to the Portland airport so I can fly home.' The business major would say, 'What, why that's crazy.' I would just counter with, 'People need this. I need this, so I'll do it.' Also, there's nothing else available to me. You used to be able to get signed to a label, and they could make you a star, but I never wanted to chase that in the first place. I wanted to chase the room full of people. Whatever the middle class of the music scene is has been immensely hollowed out by the technological changes in the marketplace."

Changing Economics ◆

"THE ENTIRE FILM INDUSTRY is in flux right now. We just went through strikes with the unions, and the studios have pulled back 50, 60% on what they're financing. They ended a lot of contracts that they had previously in place. I see a lot of people who are struggling, extremely struggling."

"AS AN INDEPENDENT FILM studio, we work in a different space than the studios do. Obviously, we don't have billions of dollars like Disney does. We're producing \$10 to \$20 million films."

"OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL revenue stream comes through three different ways. One, it's the projects we develop ourselves, so that's our own intellectual property, which we hold on to, from a library standpoint. The more a film or TV show gets viewed, the more times we sell it, and the more money we can make. It's a residual type of thing. There are also the films we acquire, which are similar to those we are financing, we're using our investors, and then we have residuals. And then the third one is for people that just come in and they use our financing mechanism, which we charge a fee for, so that's more of a point of sale type of thing that we do."

"THE WAY THAT WE have our company structured right now, there's an overall parent company, an umbrella. So I can take funds from one company, move up, and then diversify that either through real estate holdings or a company investment, and move it to places I need to. Then, individually, it falls along those same lines. We are holding onto a lot of our capital right now because real estate looks shaky. Most of us on the real estate side are expecting a downturn, but no one's really pushing too much. A lot of people not going back to work or working remotely has made a lot of this class A space not very valuable anymore."

"I HAD A FRIEND who was with the Utah Shakespeare company, performing Cymbeline, and he is making 50 bucks a week, and of course, lodging. Of course, his resume read, 'Actor at the Utah Shakespeare Company.' This was in the nineties, and then he got a gig in a Kleenex commercial. He wasn't the guy who sneezed, and he wasn't the guy who handed the Kleenex to the girl who sneezed. He was the guy standing next to the guy who handed the Kleenex to the girl who sneezed, and he got \$9,000 for this. But that is gone. They don't pay like that anymore."

"IT'S ASTONISHING HOW MANY ordinary people who just do an ordinary, anonymous thing like Patreon actually have enough disposable income to give me \$6 an hour or \$6 a month. There are about 400 people doing that, and it has become the backstop that got me through the pandemic, and it allows me to have and to raise a kid. My wife is the other half of that backstop. She's an events director at a university."

"IF WE'RE GONNA PUT on this event, there needs to be a pretty direct correlation to how people are going to be making money."



"WE'RE CHANGING THE WAY institutions work from the perspective of artists. As dean, I hire artists to become professors at my university, which is the best public system in the entire world. The starting salary I offer junior faculty is \$104,000–\$110,000 a year. We give them \$75,000–\$90,000 in research funds and a down payment of up to \$100,000, so they can buy a house. But of course, California's real estate market is just so expensive. People can't really buy a house with that amount for a down payment. But the arts are really evolving. Like with video games and art storytelling, for example. There are no degrees yet that show you're an expert in that. So we're bending the rules and saying that if you have produced a certain number of games or have worked professionally in the industry, that can bypass the advanced degree requirements. We acknowledge the exclusion of people of color from higher ed, like Native People, African Americans, et cetera. So when we recruited for an Indigenous media person, we said, in lieu of a PhD or an MFA, if you have seven to 10 years of experience working in an indigenous media or other kind of media organization, that can bypass the degree."

Struggling Artists ◆

"I PLAYED WITH A drummer the day before yesterday. He's got an amazing feel for what he does. He's my favorite drummer. He can't live in Austin anymore. He lives out in Lockhart with another three people, on the side in a shack. He's depressed at this point 'cause he doesn't know how it's gonna work. He's got health issues. Some other folks and I just said, 'Go to the dentist. Here's the person. We've got this.' But he doesn't know how to make it work. So it makes me wonder if there's a way to find more people who aren't successful, who are struggling."

Impact of the Arts ■

"IT REALLY IS TRUE that artists can't not do art, otherwise it's death. Artists are more needed than ever in this society. I grew up in the Philippines, where I saw the dictatorship topple because of cinema. People finally understood what it meant to be decolonized, what it meant to be anti-racist, because it was explained through emotion, the language of cinema and theater. And so the dictatorship was toppled precisely because of artists. That's what I'm holding on to now."

"I'M THINKING ABOUT THE role of nonprofits in taking care of artists. I was on the board of Crowded Fire Theater in San Francisco, a woman-run nonprofit theater focused on BIPOC theater work. What's amazing is that during the pandemic, they really rethought what it meant to be a board. Time, treasure, talent. How do you support the arts? A document called *We See You White Theater* came out because the number of works produced by non-whites is so small in this country. Stories are undervalued. So they rethought their model entirely, and they got rid of the hierarchical system. No more managing director or artistic director. They split up the organization eight different ways with eight different co-leaders equally who were paid equally. They also have an artist residency program, and they raise funds to give them grants to get started. If you're going to be a scenic or lighting designer, you can apply to buy a truck so that you can get your business going. So it's amazing the way institutions are

Value of Art in Different Countries ■

"ART IS MORE VALUED in other countries. I don't think the United States understands the value of visual art, audio art. Now that you have Spotify, musicians aren't getting paid the way they used to."

"AS I WAS WORKING in Mexico, I was astounded. I was blindsided by the appreciation for the arts. I could look at people and mutter to them, 'I'm a horn player,' and they'll say, 'Oh, that's amazing.' You have work and a talent that the United States seems set on devaluing. I don't know if that's beyond the arts. Within the arts, it's, 'Oh, you're a musician. Where do you wait tables?' Which isn't nearly as bad as being in visual arts or actors, who get even more of an assumption."

"THE EDUCATION ON WHAT an artist brings, regardless of modality, to the global community and all the way down to the micro community is something that is no longer focused on. Education is cut, and interest in the arts is down. It's so commercially available in every aspect, it no longer feels extraordinary, like, 'Whoa, what is that? I need to know more about that.' Or, 'What is that song? Who is that? How do I support them?' That is something, I don't know if it was ever cultivated in the United States. But I can tell you that I went to Italy for the first time three years ago, and my mind was blown. I couldn't believe that as an artist, I'd never been there. The entire country is based on the foundation of art, and we don't have anything like that here. Funding for the arts has been cut. Funding for grant programs has been cut, or they're nonexistent if you're not Canadian. So there's a lot of lack of curiosity and then a lack of community support. I don't know that you can re-educate the American population to get it, but you should try. I just don't have any ideas on how to do that."

"MY FRIEND IN IRELAND said something really perceptive, which is, 'You don't roll out of bed in Ireland and think, all right, we're the 49th most powerful country on Earth.' If we apply it to the US, I feel like America is addicted to work, addicted to stature. Right now, I have a three-year-old, and we are paying the daycare that he goes to four days a week way more than we can afford and way less than they deserve. As an artist, I see the giant scooping out of the middle class, but it's just America. If you fix something, build something, make something, give someone a massage, teach someone, cure someone, then you've been treading water backwards rapidly for 50 years, and if you have money that sloshes around and makes other money, you've been accelerating forward, without having to barely dog paddle for 50 years."

"THE GENERAL FEELING IS that art isn't valued. I honestly think work isn't valued. Nurturing isn't valued. Values aren't valued. This is the most money-focused country I've ever been to. Money's the root of all evil."

Exposing Children to Music ■

"TEXAS HAS THESE DANCE halls where people go with their families on the weekends. Those kids grow up knowing that humans make music, and they know humans who have written some of their favorite songs. It's not on a screen somewhere, or it's not a nickname that they don't recognize. A human that they can talk to wrote their favorite song. So they can be inspired to write songs or just have a personal connection with that music. Whether they participate as dancers or just as listeners, it's part of the culture and that is disappearing everywhere else that I go. And it's getting thinner and thinner here, too. It's being a little bit watered down by all the people coming in. We don't necessarily know that this is a very special thing here. There are a few places where I see some of the new techie people going. The White Horse on the east side has a pretty cool two-stepping scene where people are very much involved. They go there to connect with other humans, and they do that via music. But that's not a lot of original music. It's some really cool old honky tonk music. But that's the only place really where I see some of the new people participating."

"I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS quite a bit because there's a tradition of it. I see children at shows at some of the dance halls. I've put some pressure on some of the clubs where we play at night to let underage people in. It seems like there's been a movement because obviously alcohol is being sold, and alcohol really is the grease that seems to keep the music business that I participate in going. But we have an ongoing discussion about letting underage people in because that is our future. If people don't fall in love with music before they're adults, they probably never will."

Universal Healthcare

"IF YOU HAD UNIVERSAL healthcare, people could move businesses, people could move out of jobs from one place to another. The flexibility and fluidity of transfer of all this employment, which seems so much better, because most people are hanging onto a job just for their health insurance. Universal healthcare just frees up workers."

STANDARD
12

Political Climate

"WHATEVER THE ADVERSITY IS in this country that we complain about sometimes, it also seems to be fertile ground to create art."

"I'M NO HISTORY BUFF, but I have read a bit of history. Things look very grim for the artistic community right now, especially those involved with political songs. There are some well-written ones from the past and present. But who wants to book a band that's very liberal politically? They may be getting some great gigs and everything, but they risk getting themselves doxxed and putting their family in jeopardy. You look back at when Mao had his Red Book, and they were going into universities. How many universities are caving in now? I'm so mad about what's going on. I know people in high places who are not speaking up publicly when they would do so in private, maybe among their friends. But I just see a grim future for the arts. I think a lot of people are still gonna be holding up a mirror to what's going on, which artists have always done, be they novelists or sculptors, or painters. But I think we're in for some grim times. It was never easy to get dough to do things and to get grants to people who perform in libraries and do stuff. I still want to be optimistic, but it's hard."



"MY KID IS NOT white, and my wife is from what you'd call a 'marginalized community.' I'm one of those people who speaks up online, and my wife recently was like, 'I think you need to chill out.' I agree. Yet, at the same time, if we all chill out and retreat, then they will walk into that space. They've shown that they'll walk into any inch of space that you give them. And frankly, they're gonna be arresting Stephen Colbert quite a long time before they're arresting me."

"I THINK IT WAS Upton Sinclair who said to get Americans' attention, you gotta shoot them or tax them. They've taxed a bunch of white Americans, and boy, they're waking up."

"THE ONION ALWAYS NAILS this stuff. During the Ebola outbreak 12 years ago, they said the Ebola outbreak was about six or seven white deaths away from becoming a genuine concern."



Young Artists

"I ENCOURAGE YOUNG MUSICIANS all the time. Sometimes I teach them. Sometimes I just get excited about their work and introduce them to my friends. This is a community that is very much built on personal relationships, and so opportunities come with personal relationships."

"IT'S INHERENT TO OUR field of work that lots of people are paying attention. You get these kids who want to come up to do it. You play with them when you're on shows. There are jams. There are still kids taking music lessons because they wanna be a part of the arts. It's like theater. There's a stage, and you're attracted to that. I don't think there's any shortage of people saying, 'I wanna be a part of it.' You see the gloss and the glimmer, but there's this other side to it. When reality hits, when you're in it, do you want to put up with that? It's an interesting selection process where a lot of times, it's no longer about who's the most qualified to go. Who is going to endure sitting in a closed van for 13 hours with a guy who brought a bottle of Ether in the middle of winter? My wife was a wonderful singer-songwriter, won multiple awards in the Austin Chronicle, and got tired of cokeheads and sleaze balls telling her how to dress. She got a real job, it was stable with an income, and she was like, 'This is fantastic.'"

"AS WE ARE BEING attacked, the most marginalized people are being attacked. The way we think as artists really has to be nurtured. That's one thing that we're taking care of right now. There are so many things that young people don't know that it's shocking sometimes. We're teaching our students many things. You gotta thank people when they do something for you. This is how you write a resume. But more importantly, this is how you become an independent contractor. This is how you avoid being exploited. This is how you charge for your work. This is how you file taxes. We teach one course and think, 'Oh, we need so much more.' We can't just do this in an ad hoc way."

Arts Students

"I THINK THE MENTAL health issues for our students [who are arts students at a university], who are being told to pursue STEM, is a kind of death in life for them. What is my place in the world?"

The Arts Leaving Big Cities

"I HIRE CREATIVES FOR my studio. I was in Spain and Ireland a couple of weeks ago, looking at places to film. A lot of it comes down to the financial incentive over there. The talent that's there. We're looking at places like Oklahoma. Where I go is really dependent upon the financial incentives because ultimately, on a film, we're slaves to the budget of it."

"I USED TO DO a lot of filming in Los Angeles. I'm in New York right now, in the process of leaving New York because it's not very friendly to productions. We're now moving our production from here to another place."

"SO MANY MUSICIANS ARE leaving Austin. Why? Because they can't afford it anymore, which is fine. That happens all over. I love Austin."

RANDOLF

12

AI ■

"THERE ARE SOME PODCASTS that I listen to that have a different AI theme song every week, and it's good. I'm like, 'What the fuck?' They're getting it essentially for free. Production, what I'm hearing, would take several days in the studio or at least a solid day with a bunch of high-quality musicians. And I do it too. I use digital drums a lot. I can't remember the last time I mic'd up a real piano. So I always joke that humans are the original AI in a way. We have this experience, all of life is an experience."

The Future State

SUMMARY: Artists and creative professionals envision a future defined by adaptability, collaboration, and purpose. Many are diversifying their skills and income to weather economic uncertainty, building community-based models that value creativity and shared support over consumption. AI is seen as both a tool and a threat. As large studios prioritize high-budget franchises, smaller creators are carving out space through flexible, niche-focused business models. Educators are adapting too, emphasizing short-form, low-cost production and global opportunities. The creative future, they suggest, will favor those who combine innovation with community, resilience, and meaning.



Preparing for the Future ●

"I'M MAKING MY LIFE, my overhead is really cheap. I built my own house. I did end up selling it. I've been living in a tiny little RV for the last three years just to learn to play the pedal steel guitar, a whole new instrument for me, and very complicated. I'm building a shop where I can build cabinets and doors and apply my other skills, and remodeling another Airstream to rent to low-income musicians and build our community here. We have a huge garden. So yeah, I'm preparing, but at a basic level, so that I can weather storms."

"I'M HIGHLY RETAIL-FOCUSED. I need people to buy what I make in order to survive. Physical art and visual art are probably the least important things people feel they need to spend their money on when they're worried about grocery bills and bigger issues. I'm actually looking at diversifying, and I have a choice to make. I can either bring my prices down and try to meet the lowering economic availability, or I can raise my prices and aim really high and only shoot for the tiny opportunities to hit the really wealthy pockets that spend money on art because they just have more money than they need. So it's a big question, and I haven't made a decision yet. I'm in my off-season, so I'll know more over the summertime as to whether or not we're being really impacted economically, or if it's just that we're all a little nervous right now, learning how it's gonna be moving forward. But I am planning to see what else I can do, how I can diversify, and what I need to do to change either what I do as an artist or as a self-employed person."

"THERE'S THIS SENSE OF reinvigoration of the community. I have a really strong community of artists that I connect with, but I'm also trying to branch out and connect with new communities. We need each other so much, and we can balance each other out. A friend and I were speculating about the future of the economy, and things looked grim. He said the only thing he wanted to leave to his children is a really strong and beautiful community, 'cause you can build around that. You can grow the garden. You can play music for the people who are raising the kids. You can make the place beautiful if you have to design aesthetically. The other route is transitioning away from it, needing to be so consumer-based and capitalist. We all either chase the high of being a performer or chase the money, right? There's a mix of those. I get to be a rock star in my booth when I'm selling things to hundreds of people every weekend, and that's fantastic. And then if I have money in my pocket, that's fantastic as well. But when I'm home and I'm not on the road, it's a sense of what can build up around me. So I think a big piece of the future is intentional communities where people buy houses and land and build them together so they can retire and grow old together. That seems like a really unique way to choose who you die with and who's gonna be there to take care of you at the end. Creative thinkers are looking outside of what the general structure is and what we can do to earn an income, but also to foster a space where we're supporting our people and they're supporting us as well."

Predictions About the Future ●

"I HAD A CONVERSATION with a guy I played with for a long time, probably in 2004 or early 2005. It was also the beginning of YouTube, and Netflix and the plethora of entertainment that seems to keep people at home. He said, 'I think it's just gonna make people want human interaction even more. It's just gonna drive people to go out more, they're gonna come out more.' And that has not played out."

"WE MAKE BEAUTIFUL THINGS because it makes us feel good. We know we feel good, and we share it, and we share those feelings with our other mammal humans. And, god damn. It's a wildly beautiful thing that has arisen naturally in the universe. No human thought this up. It's just the nature of life to be creative. And as much as I might bitch about some of these changes that have happened very rapidly in the span of my adulthood, I think it's quite exciting. Who the fuck knows what's gonna happen? The nature of life seems to appreciate beauty and the complexity of experience. Maybe if I were a poop scooper on the streets in 1890, I'd be pissed off about the combustion engine and rubber tires and forward motors, I would find another way to participate in this beautiful experience."

AI ■

"RICK CARTER, THE GREAT production designer for Steven Spielberg, was in conversation with Kevin Nolting, the legendary editor at Pixar, and they each represented different parts of film engaging with AI. Rick is all about embracing it and really playing with it every day, all the different platforms, trying to figure out world making. And Kevin says that it really sacrifices collaboration, and wants nothing to do with it. So here at [my university], this institution was really built on experimentation and play and progress. We're trying to figure out our own way through it, but AI's coming and we have to discipline it according to our needs."

"AI IS A BIG problem. A lot of the people I talk to are very scared about saying, 'Hey, AI's gonna take our jobs.' As a musician, you can use Sora or another platform and make a jingle in 30 seconds of typing, and that kind of takes away a lot of jobs from musicians or artists. We use AI to do pitch decks and concept art, but once we get over into the actual IP, then we switch over to something else. We have to use it as a tool, whereas I think most people are looking at it as the endpoint. Back in the 1990s, when they started doing a lot of visual effects, you had all these people saying that it's gonna take creativity out of it. Then, too many people relied on computer graphics, and then it became awful, and then now there's less reliance on the technology. I think AI's gonna be the same thing. The tendency for a lot of people is, 'Oh, I'm gonna use AI to fix everything.' And that doesn't work."

CHAPTER
12



"THE INDUSTRY RIGHT NOW is very much in upheaval. They don't know what to do to protect themselves from copyright or intellectual property issues with AI. Studios are going heavy into AI, but they're still trying to protect IP. The unions are adamantly against AI."

"WHEN WE DO CONTRACTS with our talent and creatives, there is a provision in there saying that AI will not be used in the creation of any of this, and that's signed and attested to. So there's still some protections there in the industry, but AI is a giant question mark for everyone in the industry right now."

"I USED AI RECENTLY 'cause I was interested in grizzly bears. I've got a big tour coming up, going out west and into grizzly bear country. So I had a bunch of questions about grizzlies, 'cause some of the time I'm gonna be camping. It was like talking to an old friend, an old smart friend. I appreciate the concern. I think AI and the arts can get a little iffy and weird unless you're using it in some creative fashion and giving credit to the part that AI helped with. But try putting toothpaste back in the tube. AI's here. How do you co-exist with it? Even before AI, how do you monetize your art? Everybody gets your stuff for free if you make music. After it's released, it's all up on YouTube."

Successful Business Models ■

"BECAUSE OF THE STRIKES and everything else that has happened, the studios have pulled back 50, 60%. Now the studios are going to fund the \$100, \$200 million films, like the Marvel stuff or the Star Wars stuff, because they have templates on how to make those work. But what they're not funding anymore are the \$10, \$20, \$30 million projects. So that leaves me in the position of being able to come in and pick that up because the studios still need content. They still need stuff like that. It can't all be the \$200 million template. If I can work it out from a financing standpoint, then we have a project. The relationships that I have in the industry allow me to go out there and do that. I can walk into Warner and say, 'Hey, this is what I wanna do.' And they said, 'Yeah, we're good for four films. We'll pick 'em up.' That's great, but not a lot of the studios could do that. The unique thing for me is that we focused on the model as opposed to the product. To translate that over to other artists, if I can create that pipeline, then something can be produced. I don't really care about the genre of the music. I don't really care about the notes that are being played as much. Who's going to buy it when I pick it up? Our market's been carving out our own little niche. We're not a threat to anyone in the industry. They look at us as an asset. So that puts us in a good position. But it's not something that's very easy for a lot of filmmakers or anyone to do, because most filmmakers and most creators are focused on one thing at a time. The one film, the one project, and then they want to get that done, and then they have to find out where they're gonna put it next. Whereas we start from the beginning, saying, 'Okay, this is the destination.' Then we almost reverse engineer it, and then find the projects or develop projects that fit that. Then we have our investor pool already built up to where they're satisfied on their return based upon a tax structure versus an investment in it. I've put a lot of different pieces together to create this ecosystem to make it a little bit recession-proof."

Teaching the Arts

"I'M REALLY THINKING ABOUT the way in which film distribution and production is changing because gone are the days when you are spending so much money on these longer form works. People nowadays are really on their phones and looking at 60-second movie series. So I'm thinking about different ways that our students can make work that's 60 seconds long that costs \$300 versus half hour productions that cost \$30,000. Of course, it's significantly more in the industry. But here, on campus, we're trying to figure out new ways of consumption, new ways of engaging, and a different relationship to time. Should we make things much quicker? Take three days to make something versus 10 weeks? Also, it's much more global. I'm thinking about the way we teach theater, for example. We're acting as if people will get jobs on Broadway when that's as hard as becoming an Olympian. 90% of acting jobs are either in film or television or other kinds of media, but we're training them like they're gonna be on stage. And more globally, can we teach students to act in telenovelas? Can we teach students to act in K dramas? Media is just being distributed in different ways. So we're actively figuring it out and also trying to figure out ways so that people don't graduate with a ton of debt making art."

RANDOLF
12



Participants' Takeaways

ARTS ARE INDISPENSABLE

- I like to tell people to imagine a bookstore without art. What would it look like if all the fonts were identical and the whole visualscape of it was one monotone color? It could have a very beautiful, minimalistic look, but there'd be so much lost on book covers if they just tried to explain what was inside the book with just the simple words. So that's another thought about how important and relevant design is to the culture and the world around us.
- We have a trade that is indispensable in its own way. Unless you really are entertained by going to Chuck E. Cheese and seeing the mechanical band, it's not a substitute.

ENERGIZED

- I feel pretty activated and affirmed right now because I'm thinking a lot about how to prepare our students for a world that, yes, undervalues art, but at the same time, I really want to make sure I build their confidence and fearlessness in their voice, which to me is really to provide a safe space to be free.

THE ARTS THROUGH HUMAN HISTORY

- Something that I've thought about a fair bit is that humans didn't, for most of our evolution, get paid to play music. We just sat around a campfire and sang and played drums. The recording medium seemed to be a great innovation that allowed some experts to propagate in a large way and get paid a lot. Now there are lots of people putting out music on YouTube and SoundCloud, or other streaming services. Just a constant outflow of music. We separate ourselves as the experts, and certainly, there are some humans who seem to have a great talent that everyone wants to come see and pay money for, but there are lots of young kids just putting it out there. They're not trying to necessarily make money. I wonder if we're actually moving back towards a culture where everyone makes music and everyone makes art, and maybe that's really good for us as a species or as a human experience, but that may obviate our being rock stars or movie stars.

SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS

- You can support the artist in whatever capacity they can create for the people. If we're under-supported and we're working as waiters or Uber drivers, there is no space for that creative process to take place. It's finding the balance so that we get our needs met so that we can achieve the things that we can give back to the world, and then the world actually reciprocates and says, 'Hey, we want this to happen. Go eat.'

- There is definitely a curse around exploring art. To become an art major is the path to poverty that parents fear is guaranteed when their kids pursue their voice and their craft. So one thing that I tell the students as soon as they turn toward me and away from their parents is this is the place to give you the confidence to really believe that what you're walking towards is abundance, a richer life, encouraging them to explore and express their art every day. Try to figure out what those new voices are, the new forms of art that don't yet exist, that you can make here, and that you have the right to represent. But there's a lot of work to be done to prepare them to have real skills so that they're smart about getting paid.
- Our students say the arts need money. They need resources, like how to write, how to be able to analyze and know history, so they can walk into rooms and explain what they're doing so that people can support them. But they outright tell me the arts need money repeatedly.
- Portable healthcare could create stability in any job market so that people could move, change jobs with greater ease. 'Cause it seems that people get stuck in what they do based on the health insurance that they want to have for the security of their family.
- Like any other worker, if you have the basic needs met, a lot of the inspiration just comes out. It allows room for that inspiration. It allows room for, dare I say it, love and community. In a more academic way, we want a great society. Of course, there's the humanity that we live with, greed, fear, anxiety, and all that. How do we create, amidst all this humanity that we live with? How do we create the divine?

REPRESENTATION

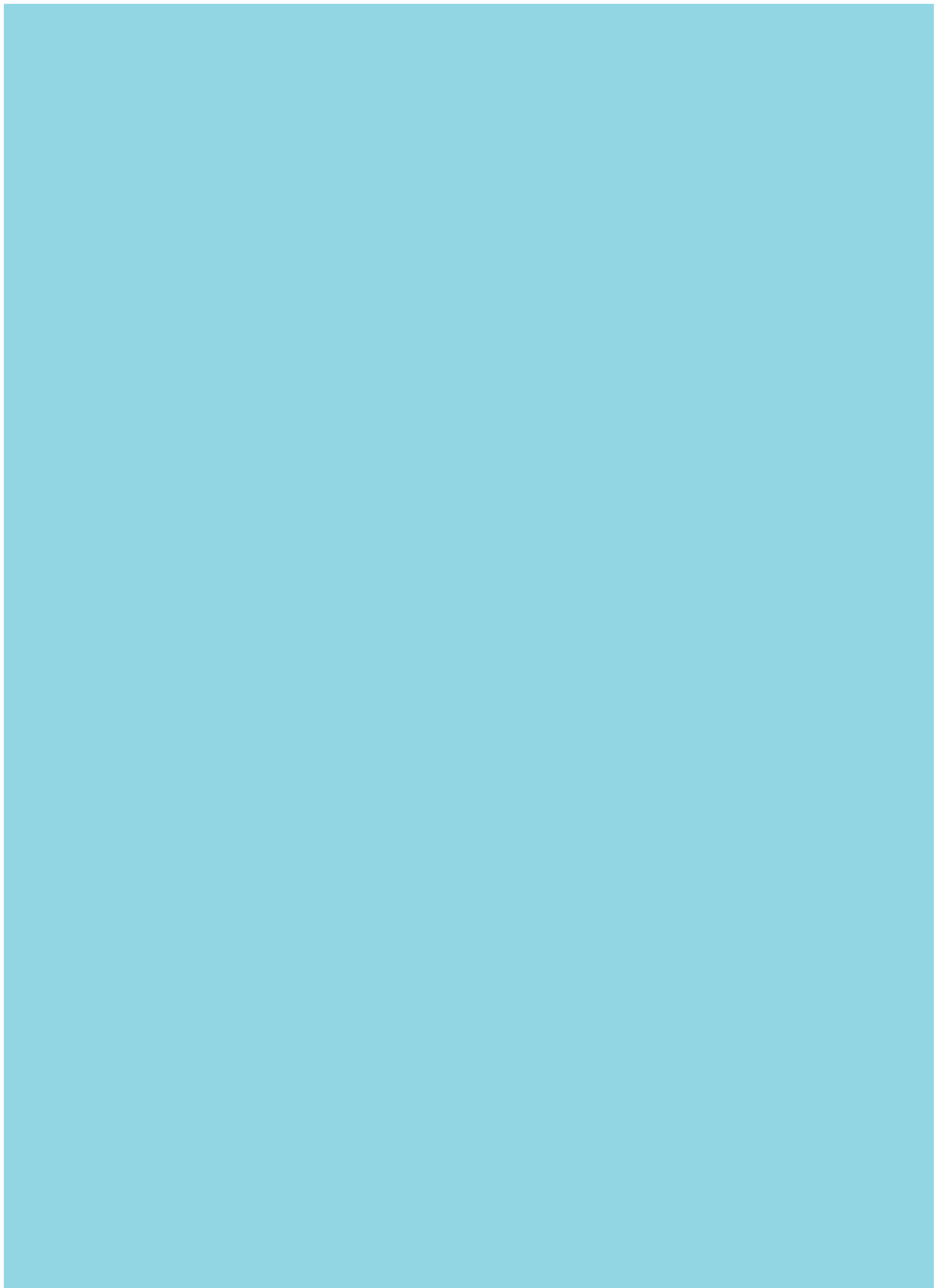
- When I look at our students, most of them are underrepresented. 45% of the population of California is Latino, but less than 4% of speaking parts in movies are Latino. Staggering, isn't it? We don't yet know what cinema could look like if it served all the people.

CAPITALISM

- The existential push of capitalism to understand how to control a market and to harness things is constant. They find ways to take revenue out of things.
- I am proud of how confused capitalism seems to be about what we do. I'm just happy that capitalism appears to have no damn idea where we fit.

AI

- The low-level arts aren't doing well, but they won't do much worse. AI doesn't affect live performance, but it affects film, video, and non-live entertainment. And that's gonna be huge.



Youth Leaders

YOUTH LEADERS constitute an important voice for the youngest members of the US workforce. The Youth leaders who participated in this Sandbox are elected or appointed leaders of their respective universities, colleges, community colleges, and vocational schools. They were identified from rosters of undergraduate and graduate leaders listed in official higher education websites. They held significant decision-making roles within their institutions involving fiscal spending, program development, policy formulation, and representation of the student body in higher education affairs, and served on official boards and committees. They were elected by their student body or appointed by higher education officials.

SANDBOX 13 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Education, Development & Training
 In-Person & Remote Work	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	 Technology & AI	
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors	

PARTICIPANTS

ASA ASAD

Student Body President, University of Illinois Chicago

JOSIAH BEHARRY

UC Student Regent,
University of California, Merced

ANGELA CHOU

Chair of the Student Government
Assembly, New York University

NIKHIL HUNTER

Student Body President, California
State University Maritime Academy

REZWAN ISLAM RIFAT

President of the Student
Government Associated,
Illinois Institute of Technology

KYLIE JONES

External Vice President,
University of California, Irving

DANI SILVA

Associated Students President,
Mt. San Antonio College

RAE WYMER

University of California, Berkeley

The Current State

SUMMARY: Youth leaders describe a generation confronting uncertainty in education, employment, and identity. Many universities are under political and financial strain, struggling to meet the needs of students facing debt, basic-needs insecurity, and limited job prospects. Remote and hybrid work have expanded opportunity but weakened social connection and skill development. AI is reshaping how students learn and work, offering new tools, but fueling concerns about creativity, privacy, and critical thinking. Generational expectations of work are shifting as young people reject poor conditions, question loyalty to employers, and prioritize ethics, flexibility, and purpose. Across campuses, youth leaders express both frustration and resolve – seeking new models of learning, partnership, and governance that restore trust and prepare them for an uncertain future.

CAMPUS
13



Current State of Youth Leaders

“IT IS VERY BLEAK on this end of things. Sitting at the board level, it’s so interesting. What a time and a privilege to be this young and see a time in our country where higher ed institutions are having to fight, but also being under attack in such a drastic way. It’s really scary. Just the cuts, the threats every day. We’re all looking at one another. We’re looking at how Columbia University is being treated. We’re looking at Harvard to see how they’re pushing back, surprisingly. What’s our strategic plan? Do we capitulate in order to save the infrastructure of our university and sustain all of our workers, our employees?”

“MY UNIVERSITY IS SUPPOSED to be top of the line. We are doing the exact same thing. I have [undergraduate] friends with spreadsheets that are 50 rows deep, all of them rejected, a few to the second stage. These aren’t students who are not doing things. They’re involved on campus, in clubs. They have high GPAs. They’re taking their required classes.”

"THERE ARE STATISTICS THAT show 44% regret their college degree. *Higher Ed* published in 2024 that 52% of people who graduate from their undergrad are underemployed, meaning they're working jobs that don't even require a four-year degree. If I'm hearing my cousin tell me that he went to college and he graduated and it's hard for him to find a job, then the higher ed is not gonna be as important to me."

"IF THE JOB ISN'T doing what we want, we don't feel the inclination to stay."

"WITH THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION, there are a lot of things that are up in the air in terms of employment opportunities and what specific job sectors are available. There are job sectors where more jobs are available, but also other sectors with a limited scope of job availability. We've noticed that it's primarily international students who are post-graduation, and the jobs they're pursuing are of limited scope. That's absolutely our number one priority right now as these thousands of students graduate. Do we have resources and opportunities for them to actually seek employment with the evolving job market?"

"MY FIELD IS A bit of a mess. I am in public health. Prior to this year, my dream was to work at the CDC. So seeing that explode over the last few weeks has been very interesting in regard to my future aspirations."

"WHAT I SEE, IN a lot of our generation, folks who may not work for certain companies depending on the stances they take on certain things. Our generation is a lot more charged with that. Maybe it's because of social media, maybe it's because we're able to see those things more than previously. I know people who are mechanical engineers who will, even though it could mean a better-paying job, refuse to work in the defense industry because it goes against their ethical and moral standards."

"THE PAST TWO YEARS in my position, in particular, have been educational. Nothing that we're seeing is new. It may have a different faith, but it's shown up in this country so many times. It's embedded into the DNA of America, and that it's gonna take radical reflection and activism and advocacy in order to fight back, but I have optimistic hope."

Further Education as a Response to Uncertainty

"I AM STUDYING PUBLIC health right now, and I know a lot of folks who were originally planning to try and go into the workforce who are actually now trying to get their master's or trying to go into academia to get further education. It might be the situation in public health, defunding at the national level, and uncertainty about the job market. But I'm starting to see a lot of folks who are a year under me or two years under me, who were initially planning to try and just go straight into the job market after school, but are now heavily considering applying for further education because of the uncertainty that's brewing right now."

"THAT'S A GENERATIONAL THING, folks will run away from their problems and sometimes grad school is the way to do that."

"I KNEW GOING INTO my fourth year that I wanted to pursue a graduate degree, especially 'cause I wanted to supplement my undergraduate degree and get more background in statistics so I could really make sure that I feel prepared going into the workforce. But I know a lot of folks who are initially planning to go be community health educators or working in the health policy field, where you don't necessarily need that further master's, are now thinking, 'Hey, maybe I'll take a gap year and then apply for my master's. Or maybe I'll take a gap year, see if I can get into a PhD program 'cause I just don't know what our workforce is gonna look like."

CHAPTER
13

Governance in Higher Education

"I DRAFTED THE SHARED Governance Handbook with my Academic Senate and our Classified Senate and have that approved through the President's Advisory Council. This was a way to make it easier for our shared governance bodies to understand the process; some faculty were unclear on how to exercise their 10+1 rights in a shared governance space. If the faculty was confused about it, you can imagine the students and how they might not understand that there is a process, in terms of wanting to invoke change on campus."

Community Colleges

"ANOTHER INTERESTING LENS THAT should definitely be focused on is the role of community college as a technical training launch point, especially 'cause a lot of community colleges will have associate degrees and various other fields that aren't traditionally represented in the traditional four-year university experience."



Unconventional Jobs

"I DEFINITELY THINK THERE'S a greater emphasis on more unconventional job searches where individuals don't necessarily have to go to university to get a high-paying job. It's not your traditional nine-to-five working flexibility. We find more people having unconventional jobs and also more people having jobs that mainly apply soft skills over hard skills."

Internships

"I WAS LOOKING AT the way programs are shaped. My degree is considered a technical training program, so I had to complete an internship to graduate, which exposed me to various types of work. There's a bunch of options within my field that you could take."

"I REALLY LOVE HAVING an internship as a requirement for graduation, 'cause I feel like that's something that can help in so many ways. From my internship, I actually learned what I want to do in life, what I wanna pursue, what I dislike."

"WHEN YOU'RE HAVING AN undergraduate student compete with a master's student for the same entry-level internship, there's obviously a comparative advantage for the master's student. But then, to get that master's, I need the internship. It feels almost like we're stuck in these weird loops. Honestly, I think we might actually need to push it back to high school. When you were applying to colleges and universities, you'd have people who were student body presidents who already had a full-page resume by the time they were applying to universities, and they didn't know what they were gonna get because everybody has this now. There's this hyper-competition that started at such an early age in our educational systems that makes it so when we're here looking for employment or opportunities with a degree that we actually care about, and trying to get into the industries that we want, it is so oversaturated. Once again, everybody's either burnt out for their fifth time, or if they aren't, they're just exhausted. I don't know anybody who's not feeling like they're being run through the wringer at this point, honestly."

Evolving Career Paths

"THERE'S LESS OF A linear career path. There are individuals who don't get education, but they get it later. We find many more people jumping straight into work and pursuing their education later. This has been more of a top-down career method. But I definitely think it's been more accommodating for the younger generation because a lot of us are students, and it's very difficult to specifically determine what career you want to pursue at the age of 18. So we find a lot of people taking their time, exploring the fields they're actually interested in and beginning that work process right away, and then determining what future education and career fields they want to explore in the future."

Generational Differences in Career Expectations

"IN THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS, we see a lot of people who are spending maybe one or two years at a company before jumping. One really interesting discrepancy between the older and younger generation's mindsets around these work environments actually came up in a discussion with a professor of mine who often hires students for research.... One of the main things she always says that she's looking for is people with years of experience at the same place or at the same job. The two to three year of jumping, where you're working multiple jobs or in similar positions at different companies, doesn't ring through with the same sort of quality for her, as a recruiter, as somebody who has kept the same job since graduating."

Job Expectations

“THERE ARE A LOT of practices that don’t necessarily fit what the incoming, and especially the current, workforce needs. A lot of times, especially as I was growing up, my parents and the folks around me would always be like, ‘Oh, you have to just do what your job says.’ You get your job, you just do it. You can, I’m trying to think of the nice words to say it, be as upset about the conditions as you want, but that’s the conditions you get. You’re just gonna have to deal with it, and you’re just gonna have to push through it. Versus, especially post-pandemic, there is a shift in ‘Hey, we don’t need to deal with these potentially questionable workplace issues. We don’t have to deal with these conditions. We can have collective power and potentially move these conditions away.’”

Changing Work Expectations

“A LOT OF FOLKS who adhere to that previous mindset about work are trying to bring us back to where we were pre-2019, and there’s a lot of tension that comes with that, and I think it’s interesting to see where that goes. It’s a generational situation in how we view work and the workplace. But I also think it’s just adapting to the current situation and seeing what the flexibility is. I know a lot of folks, especially my age, if they don’t agree with the conditions of the workplace and the workplace isn’t willing to meet ‘em, they will just leave. I feel like a lot of folks will sometimes, especially if I adhere to those previous feelings about work. They’ll just be like, ‘Okay, it sucks, but I’m just gonna push through because this is my job and this is how I’m gonna go.’”

“HOW DO WE SEE the workforce actually evolving? We’re seeing it now, people quiet quit or just quit day one. We also don’t see loyalty from our employers. If we don’t figure out changes in this regard, it is no wonder people don’t wanna work in person. No wonder people don’t want to think for themselves. Maybe we’re just over-reliant on AI ‘cause we don’t want to do this.”

Finding Employment Post-Graduation

“I KNOW FROM MY friends who are looking for jobs – it’s been really hard. I only know two people who, after their undergraduate degree, have received full-time job offers. A lot of people are still looking, if not just taking a gap year, working in a cafe, or working somewhere else just to make ends meet until they can find a job within their field.”

“ONE OF MY MENTORS mentioned that his entire degree that he studied went down the drain when Reagan ended up taking office because he shifted his focus. So there were all these graduating students who no longer had an opportunity to work in the field that they studied.”

Political and Economic Uncertainty

"I'M AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

and I see that a lot of problems are based in the US. They keep going up and down. So I have this thing in my mind where I'm like, 'Should I stay here or should I just go to other countries, to Europe, and just find a job there or go to Asia and find a job there close to my home country where I don't have to be fearful of the economy crashing and then I lose my job all of a sudden and then I have three months to find a new job before I get deported.'"

"I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH to do an internship with our Oregon Health Authority, which is our state health department. I'm still in touch with my manager. Even she, who's been a career professional, worked at the CDC, and now is heading her department at OHA is like, 'I don't know who I'm gonna have to lay off. I don't know what our funding cuts are gonna look like. I don't know which of my counterparts at the CDC are still there. Which ones are getting laid off? I don't know what the grants are gonna look like.' So it's interesting, we just have to adapt and see where we can go."

"WE LOOK AT JUST how we got affected during the NIH cuts. That's drastically affecting our medical infrastructure."

Infrastructure and Job Creation

"INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT. I THINK one of the biggest failures of California has been not creating the high-speed railway we've all been paying for as taxpayers and have been looking forward to in the Central Valley to create more job opportunities. Talking about the infrastructure demands and lack thereof is really quintessential because that opens up the playing field for so many jobs and opportunities for people."

2024 Presidential Election

"THE REALITY IS THAT in this election, you saw people of all different backgrounds vote against their own interest because of class and economic divides in this country. I think you saw racial groups voting against their own interests. You saw young men voting against their own interests."

Social Capital ■

"I'M SEEING A LOT of struggle with getting students to want to be on campus and actually be involved in things. If we don't figure out how to fix that, it'll impact those soft skills. If these students don't learn not just to communicate with each other, but join arms or build community together, I'm afraid that will have a significant impact in the future. Especially with this increased demand for remote work, you have to remember that you're still working in a team in some way, shape, or form. If we can't do that, I wonder how productivity will be affected down the line. How can universities shift their focus to do this? It feels like, at least at my school, we shift focus to student affairs, and our department is very overwhelmed. I wonder if it's like that at other schools too. And if so, when we're adding this very large responsibility, which is essentially reshaping the way students interact with their community, how do we still support these structures, knowing that there's so much else going on at the same time?"

BARBOBY
13

Third Spaces and Innovation ■

"WE'RE THINKING ABOUT COFFEE shops. Third or collective spaces are what we need to create a more cohesive community. There have been so many studies on the loneliness epidemic in America, specifically. I wonder about innovation, where is the line? Where do we draw the line in the sand between innovation and then just erosion of our social fabric and these social networks that are necessary?"



Learning from the Past ■

"I WAS AT THIS conference recently, and somebody said something that's just been stuck in my mind. She said, 'Normally when we think of partnerships, we only think of it institution to institution, or partnering with organizations or nonprofits.' But she said, 'We have to think of partnerships with the community.' Because she said, 'Remember that communities have experienced this in the past, so we gotta ask them, how did you deal with that when X, Y, and Z happened?' I learned recently that during the Great Depression, there was also the Great Repatriation, where a lot of Mexican Americans, 60% of whom were citizens, were actually getting deported with no due process. Learning about that struck me because I thought, 'Oh wow, we literally have been here before.' We see the same laws that were used for Japanese Internment being used now. When we think of partnerships, we think of how we connect with community members and people and our ancestors who have been down this road before, and see what exactly they do and strategize with them to create new plans."



"WHEN WE THINK OF innovation and ideas, we sometimes only tap into our young people, and I see that we forget so much about our elders. We need to say to people in those older demographics, 'Hey, how did you guys make it through? And what can you suggest we do to get through it again?'"

Creating Allyship and Trust ■

"I'M A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE practitioner on campus, and I worked with our HR department to recruit additional students to be restorative justice facilitators. We use an indigenous talking-circle style.... I'm trying to create allyships on campus so that people aren't feeling isolated or powerless in moments because we obviously aren't all experiencing the same thing, but in some way, shape, or form, we are all being impacted by experience. So how can we help one another? How can we talk it through and realize that you're not alone? There are people here who wanna protect you, who will stand for you and in front of you when someone approaches you and tries to put you in harm's way or block your education. We are here, we stand together."

"ONE OF THE BIGGEST things that we've been working on at NYU is not only facilitating those conversations, or restorative practices, to see, 'Hey, what are students the most concerned about,' but actually taking those concerns and transforming it into tangible actions."

"WHEN IT COMES TO our policing, campus safety, they are people and they are stuck in odd predicaments as well. I've been trying to host events so we can see each other as people and not just as titles. We're doing 'Pancakes with the Po-po' and 'Karaoke with a Cop' and things like that so that they can understand that if somebody comes on campus holding papers and looking for students, campus safety is the one to call because they are gonna get right in front of those people and say, 'Hey, you need to come to HR. This is the protocol for being on this campus. You're not gonna walk around just looking for students.' But if the students don't know that, they feel like the police on campus might actually be there to harm them. That's absolutely not the case."

"THE BIGGEST POINT OF contention, but also room for partnership, is between general students, student leaders, and administration. We find that the student body and administration have a disconnect and there is a lot of distrust. And it's not trusting the campus safety officers. A big role for student leaders is to bridge those two groups to show that they might have big differences, but we can still come together to make a tangible difference. I found it incredibly useful to begin with the student leaders to see what their thoughts are, and then apply actual tools to the student leaders that they can then spread out to the student body and administration."

Distrust ■

"WE SEE DISTRUST BETWEEN administration and students on a higher education level, a general distrust between government and people. How is that gonna impact our workforce? For a lot of folks, public sector jobs are a big part of the workforce, and restoring that trust and seeing how that will impact folks' willingness to go into those jobs will be interesting."

Teaching About AI ■

"IT'S NOT AN END-ALL, perfect solution. You don't just plug something into ChatGPT or one of the other AI software – you get an answer, you work, you spit that out, and that's your final thing. We have to use it as a tool and we have to use it in a smart way, and we have to actually teach people how to use it in a way that's gonna be beneficial, as a step in the process."

"I WAS SPEAKING WITH a librarian at my university, and he had mentioned that when AI first started becoming more and more prevalent in educational settings, the university decided to make the librarians the experts on AI. In reality, the students actually understand these technologies and use them 10 times better than any of the professional staff because they're the ones who are gonna be working with them."

"FOR EXAMPLE, IF A student is writing a paper and they are trying to do a literature review and they're going through a chat, it should be used as maybe a jumping off point of how to structure it. Who are some key people I should look for? But then they have to go back and actually do the research and read all the literature."

Education and AI ■

"WE MIGHT HAVE TO start thinking even earlier about this launchpad of workers, especially within our younger students. For example, my youngest sister, who's 12, a sixth grader. During the pandemic, she was a kindergartner or first grader. So I've seen how this new generation of students and younger children is losing their ability to think critically. They're bombarded with different tools, especially AI, and it's not regulated in school. Our schools can ban the website, but our students aren't dumb. They know how to get around it. How can we teach students to continue to think? Because that might have implications for preferences when it comes to working."

Automation ■

"FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, IN continuing to try and maximize profits as a company, I wonder if McDonald's will turn into more of a vending machine. I wonder if laundromats will become completely automated, and these tech trends erode the ability to get work.... These are supposed to be the entry points, and they're being automated. Innovation is so important, but at the same time, how do we maintain the opportunity to enter something?"

ROBOTRY
13



Privacy ■

"A BIG TOPIC ON our campus from some students is the protection of their privacy, their intellectual property. Running their papers through something like Honorlock or an AI checker, they feel it's a violation of their rights. This is gonna be a hot topic we may need to further examine in the future to determine whether students have academic integrity. Maybe reverting to the old-school style of having conversations instead of the irony of faculty using AI to determine whether we are using AI or not."

"ABOUT THREE WEEKS AGO, NYU's official website was hacked. The hacker had previous experience hacking other universities' platforms, but they had essentially gotten information about students' GPA, SAT, and ACT scores, and information about their race and ethnicity. And of course, it caused an uproar over students' lack of privacy. That's definitely in the scope of what [my university] has been experiencing recently. Students prioritize privacy. It's a balance to advocate for students and establish personalized relationships with them without overstepping the line of privacy and confidentiality."

AI and Remote Working ■

"I'VE WORKED FOR A company in Long Beach, a small startup with a bunch of older friends who work at tech companies. They really benefit from using AI to streamline processes, and their lives revolve around Slack. It is super beneficial until it's not. Until they sit there and say, 'You know what? We need to come together in person again.' And because they're friends, it's easy to communicate, to come together in person."

Remote Work ●

"SINCE THE PANDEMIC, THERE'S been a lot more remote working opportunities, and we find that with our generation, there's a bigger preference for remote work."

"HAS THERE BEEN ANY difference in productivity with the onset of a virtual workforce?"

"I HAVE FRIENDS AND colleagues who do internships where they're fully in-person. But I also have friends who work for a wire service, and they are based in one place, and their boss is based in a totally different place. They actually don't even have a physical room they could go to. So for them, their nine-to-five is them on their couch.... Their entire understanding of how they connect is devolved down to Slack."

“THERE IS A TANGIBLE difference in the way that you can build a connection with somebody when you’re in person. But at the same time, it is so much more efficient sometimes to be remote. Right now, I think we can’t even predict what these payoffs and tradeoffs will be down the line as we’re looking at the benefits of in-person versus remote. Because we’re in the thick of it right now, we can’t really see the forest.”

“I THINK ARCHITECTURE AND design are something where the remote side of it hasn’t really caught up, at least on the student end. It was remote, with a lot of modern technology, and we are seeing the increased ease of AI. I’ve even known some people in some studios whose professors have had them use it as part of their design iteration processes—just as a tool. But with the idea of this remote connection, I haven’t seen it as much in the remote work coming in there.”

“I HAVE A MENTOR who works remotely at a firm, and he uses AI a lot in his work—just doing these very futuristic architectural modelings and designs. For him, he always says he’s gonna use it, but he wants to challenge himself to make it so that in the final version of whatever he produces, you cannot tell that AI has been used just because of how much it’s been used as a tool and as a stat in the process and something that he uses to iterate and to conceptualize.”

In-Person Schooling ●

“I THINK SCHOOL AND higher education need to be in person, where you develop who you are, your soft skills, and leadership in group dynamics.”

Inequality in Remote Work ●

“PEOPLE WHO COULD AFFORD to, would leave urban centers or more densely populated areas to do remote work. Going to places like Tahoe or even Cancun and being virtual, but then be able to continue affording these lavish trips, while your gig worker doesn’t have that sort of wealth accumulation just ‘cause of the way that our systems are structured. They couldn’t afford to escape the pandemic in the same way that wealthier Americans could.”

“A LOT OF OUR essential work is not jobs that can be done remotely. We can’t have remote teachers; we can’t have remote hospitals. Who are we not even considering in these conversations? Who are we not even thinking about as part of this remote workforce that we still need to show up every day?”

“REMOTE WORK EVEN EXPANDS the equity gaps. There are so many places across our country that don't even have broadband access, that are blackout zones. Not to go back to California's failures again, but we had this ambitious plan in 2021, Senate Bill 153, to create broadband access across the entire state. We poured billions of dollars into this, we're still far from meeting our goals, even after putting in so much money. When they started the project, they began their initial phase in places like Beverly Hills and wealthy areas rather than rural and other areas that are digital deserts. So, when we talk about remote work, we're still not thinking about the places that desperately don't have access to

Consequences of Remote Work ●

“THINGS CHANGE SO FAST. It's really unfair to employees. Right after Covid, employers were like, 'Oh, we didn't have to pay for office space. So now we just wanna keep everything remote.' But then the economy hits, and now they're like, 'Oh, there's a government mandate, or the government's giving subsidies so everyone has to come back.' So people have to adapt so fast, and that affects their mental health so much, whether they're working or staying with their families.”

Engaging Different Groups on Campus ■

“STUDENTS ARE THE ONES experiencing this firsthand – it's so important to bring them to the table as well. When we're having conversations about international students or students struggling with basic needs, it's important that we reach out to those students who are impacted, because they'll have the most insight into their struggles and needs. Really listening to students and having the combination of student and student leader perspectives, because they vary across the board.”

“WE'VE BEEN HAVING LISTENING circles and a lot of town halls lately, where we brought in some consultants to assist us in desegregating the data that is being provided by all of our affinity groups on campus. It's been really helpful having all the different students together, then separating them so that each circle represents part of the whole, so that other students can understand the overlap between them and the groups that they think they didn't have anything in common with. And also translating those needs into actual institutional planning.”

Education and Equity ■

"**I ALWAYS LOOK AT** the glass half full. Higher ed and institutions have sat in their ivory tower for too long. In higher ed, we do a disservice when all our communication is in dissertation-speak and we don't communicate the value of higher ed to the entire country and the world. Our research touches every single person's life. It's an opportunity to see that America has told us that college hasn't been serving them. We serve so many people, but there are others we do not serve. Those people that we do not serve are speaking up to us right now and saying, 'I don't feel it, and I don't feel like I could ever access it.' It's created an opportunity for self-reflection for a lot of institutions to say, 'What haven't we been doing?'"

LANDOBY
13

Gender Disparities in Higher Education ■

"**ONE OF MY RESEARCH** areas is how we're seeing a national trend in boys actually not going to college. There's been so much work, especially feminist movements, to get women into higher ed and into diverse bases, but now we're seeing this total opposite paradigm shift, where young men are dropping out of college or not attending college at such a high rate. We attribute it to the feminization of college. College isn't serving the needs of young men. Richard Reeves, one of my personal favorites, talks really deeply about this issue. So I think that there's just a lot to discuss in terms of how higher ed, and education in general, has really failed the needs of our students in developing a workforce."

Social Mobility ■

"**WITH THE GIG ECONOMY** and virtual work, we're able to see social mobility take off, but I guess that's contrasted with the fact that higher education isn't necessarily preparing the workforce as best as it can."



Financials in Higher Education ◆

"**IT WOULD BE HELPFUL** for the campus community to understand how to access board documents and the financials for the institution, because sometimes that creates ambiguity amongst the different groups that share space. For example, I know that addressing the cost of living for our faculty has been a contentious subject. We've done what we can to ensure that we're meeting those needs. The students see it as wasteful spending because they are not necessarily in alignment or have an understanding of carrying a mortgage and dealing with inflation entirely outside of their own personal needs."



“OUR CEO CAME TWO years ago, and she took a pay cut to take the position. But there was an understanding when she was hired that she would, after two years, be given the 6% she didn't take when she got hired. So now, some people are saying that's irresponsible of her to do, considering there are other needs, but it was part of her hiring package in her agreement. I just wish that people could get together and find a way to understand other perspectives so that it wouldn't create division between the different groups that have to work together to make the community safe and fruitful.”

Economic Inequality

“IN REGARDS TO WHAT work will look like, we've noticed this year that the biggest concern is first based around basic-needs insecurity. It's the idea that individuals who come from low-income backgrounds also tend to be the same ones who struggle with food insecurity and housing insecurity, and finding careers post-graduation. So, we've been doing a lot of work to determine if we can provide opportunities for those specific demographics of students to have employment opportunities after graduation.”

“WE KNOW THAT BIDEN'S infrastructure bill was gonna create a lot of jobs in sectors that benefit men and young men. Pete Buttigieg was on Joy Reed's show, and she called him out on this, she said 'Oh, what about the women. What are these jobs that are gonna go to men?' He stumbles on it, and he goes, 'I don't know what to say.' At that moment, he should have said, 'Yes, we do need these jobs for young men. We do need these jobs for our diverse men.' We see this institutional protection in the Democrat party, and we see the other side, allegedly, calling things out and going against the status quo. People feel like they relate to that more because they feel like they're talking to their needs more when we discuss this class divide.”

Investments and Funding

“ONE THING THAT I think America forgets, especially when we're decreasing funding to the Department of Education, is that America was built on innovation. We were built on the fact that we continue to bring out top-of-the-line technology to the world. Comparative advantage is something that helps us thrive.”

Skills and Change

“HOW ARE UNIVERSITIES ADJUSTING to all these changes? 'Cause the changes over the past few years have really been unpredictable. One thing I helped with at my college is trying to change the core curriculum to help people build soft skills rather than just easy credits. Right now, it's building soft skills, and employers are hiring students or employees who are better at soft skills.”

Adapting Jobs ●

“**SO WE’RE DEFINITELY SEEING** an increase in jobs adapting over time. And it’s not necessarily a one-size-fits-all structure anymore.”

Burnout ●

“**THE THING THAT STOOD** out for me is a prerequisite of burnout [in education and professional careers.]”

CARDBOX
13

The Future State

SUMMARY: Youth leaders envision a future defined by adaptability, purpose, and resilience in the face of uncertainty. Many prepare for instability by expanding their skills, pursuing advanced education, and seeking careers that allow lateral movement across industries rather than linear progression. They expect to navigate a volatile job market shaped by AI, automation, and political change, while recognizing the enduring importance of human connection, community, and service. The devaluation of degrees and the normalization of burnout have heightened anxiety about fairness and opportunity, yet optimism persists around education as a pathway to mobility and self-determination. Students see the need for stronger policy protections to manage technological disruption, equitable investment in communities, and a reevaluation of all forms of work, including trades and care roles. As inequality deepens, they believe social consciousness, civic engagement, and ethical leadership will be essential to rebuilding trust and ensuring that innovation benefits rather than excludes the next generation.



Preparing for the Future ●

"I'M PREPARING BY GETTING my degree, working on my CV, and working on myself because I know that education is a great equalizer and has the potential to just open up so many doors for you. It's one of the things that no one can take away from me, and it's why my parents gave up so much to come to this country. I'm in between fear and optimism."

"I'M TRYING TO EXPAND in my field as much as I can with my expertise. As a mechanical engineer, I can go into quality, directly mechanical, and environmental jobs. There are jobs in sustainability. That's how I see myself. 'Cause I see a lot of people follow the trends and bet on a certain thing. They're doing computer science, and then the market is really saturated, and then they end up without a job or they can't actually shift into a lot of different things."

"PREPARING THEM FOR THE future is scary to be honest, right now, because I feel like a lot of the industries that I'm passionate about are all up in the air right now. So for me, it's trying to stay on course in what I know I want to do and what I feel like I have the skills and the talent to do."

"LOOKING AT FUTURE EMPLOYMENT opportunities not as, 'Oh, I'm gonna get this job and then this job, and then this job,' following a very linear path. Instead, looking at it more as 'Okay, what are some lateral movements I might be open to that aren't necessarily what one would consider job progression.' It's using skills that I already have in a different industry or a different area in a way that I haven't considered yet."

"I'VE JUST BEEN REALLY trying to explore a space to see if it's something that I can do for an extended amount of time, or if it's more of a passion project and not necessarily something that I wanna shape my whole life around."

Funding Community Organizations 🔒

"WITH PUBLIC HEALTH WORK, resourcing out to community organizations that already exist and preserving state funding for programs that may not be done by community organizations. I think that could be an interesting thing that will potentially be looked at in the future."

Looking for Opportunity in Times of Uncertainty 🔒

"IT'S BEEN HARD BECAUSE of all the federal stuff and seeing everything deteriorate, when it comes to federal public health. But looking at local and state, seeing what I can do there, and then eventually, once we get to a state of being more stable, I'm excited to try and be a part of that change, of building it back up and building it to where it needs to be."

“AT THE END OF the day, regardless of what administration is in power, there’s still gonna be a need for disaster preparedness. There’s still gonna be a need for building resilient communities. That work is never gonna change. That’s something I see not just in my field, but the work that a lot of folks pursue, whether that’s in public health, in engineering, being an electrician, or doing any other kind of job. It’s still needed, and life is gonna go on.”

“IF CERTAIN FIELDS LIKE the public health field are being targeted, what are specific job opportunities or partnerships that we can make with the local government to actually provide job opportunities for students seeking them after graduation?”

Societal Value of Jobs

“THE INHERENT VALUE WE put on specific jobs over others would be something else to look at ‘cause folks in society deem one job better over another— especially blue-collar jobs versus different spheres of jobs. It’d be interesting to see if that changes with our generation or whether there continues to be a divide between folks trying to get blue-collar jobs and those that are not. People are gonna do what they need to do to get food on the table and pay their rent.”



Effects of Political Uncertainty

“WE’RE GONNA SEE SOME vulnerable communities be hit. I don’t know if we will see a recession, but it is definitely inching toward that. We’re gonna see a lot of small businesses and families suffer. A lot of the elderly are among the most vulnerable. We’re just gonna see a lot of pain across our country.”



New Skills

“JAMIE DIMON IS REALLY hitting on the idea that he wants employees to come into work. That created a fire of uncertainty in me. I need to move from developing soft skills or in-person leadership to more virtual leadership. How can I stay at the intersection of all these overlapping trends? I always say the intersection of business and technology for myself, but also keeping up to date with the social trends and where the workforce is going. And I think that’ll allow me to best attach.”



Devaluing Education

“SOMETHING I’M VERY CONCERNED about is that it feels like our degrees are slowly becoming more devalued over time, especially when it comes to applying to medical schools. It just doesn’t feel like students are doing enough from the expectation of the admissions committees. It feels like we’re expected to almost triple our productivity – whether that is research, volunteering, good grades, or all these other little factors. It feels like we’re expected to do everything in such a short amount of time that it’s really hard to just get anything done.... You can’t just finish your degree in business – you have to have multiple internships on top of that. Or you probably have to build something extraordinary to still be considered for top roles. This is a direction that’s being normalized. It’s burning our students out at such incredible rates. I myself am just exhausted. I’ve spent four years working my butt off, and I don’t even have the summer off to celebrate. It’s more, ‘Now I gotta jump into the application process all over again.’ It feels very similar for all of our students. If this is where we’re starting off, where the entry to education and the entry to the workforce almost includes burnout as a prerequisite to getting a job.”

AI

“WE’RE GONNA SEE THIS shift in the remote, and not just with the different types of economies and the different levels of our economy, but we’re also gonna see it in the different job sectors and in the different types of work people are expected to produce. There are gonna be some industries that seamlessly go to this hybrid format. And there are other ones that are either gonna be slower to catch up, or just can’t do it.”

Preparing for Innovation

“WHEN WE LOOK AT what could get replaced by technology, I think that we need stronger policy protections for if and when innovation does take over an industry. How can we redistribute that wealth, and retrain workers for sectors that are potent. If we can incubate that continuous cycle, I think that’s where health will come, potentially more equity, and then socioeconomic mobility too.”

Being Conscious in Times of Uncertainty

“WHAT WILL BE DRIVING the future is people becoming more conscious of their day-to-day actions. Social media’s driving a lot of those things. People are seeing the real-time repercussions of their actions. And I think for better or worse, things are gonna change.”

Economic Inequality

“SO I JUST THINK that class is gonna be really important because you have a lot of people who don't make a lot in this country, who would take whatever job you give them, regardless of who the company is, regardless of their ethics or standards. People are desperate. And now we're seeing mass layoffs or unemployment. I can't even imagine what those rates are gonna look like with tariffs, with small businesses closing.”

“WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE the socioeconomic disparities between wealth classes. I think that's key. And it's intertwined with what the future will be. Especially in supply chain management. I also did a lot of software development virtually for a startup in Long Beach. I would be remiss not to look at who the best fit is and the current precedent for virtual work. For example, I look at Fiverr, an online site, and a lot of its skilled work. But when we look at what jobs might be leaving soon that will decrease our workforce and productivity, I don't necessarily know if they are compatible with virtual work.”

CHAPTER
13



Participants' Takeaways

COMMON GROUND

- Even though we all go to different schools and are studying different things, we all suffer from the same problems. We all have similar concerns about the job market.
- Student leaders have a collective goal in mind. Any change will be for the better.
- So many generations are working together in one space, it is critical to learn from and listen to one another.

COMMUNITY

- There is a need for community, especially during times like these – not just among your peers, but with older generations, administrators, faculty, and the student body.
- How are people able to connect and foster a sense of community?
- I think in this society, we can sometimes be too quick to judge. But with community and the feeling of interconnectedness, we can acknowledge and embrace this shared mission of caring about and enabling a healthy workforce.

BURNOUT

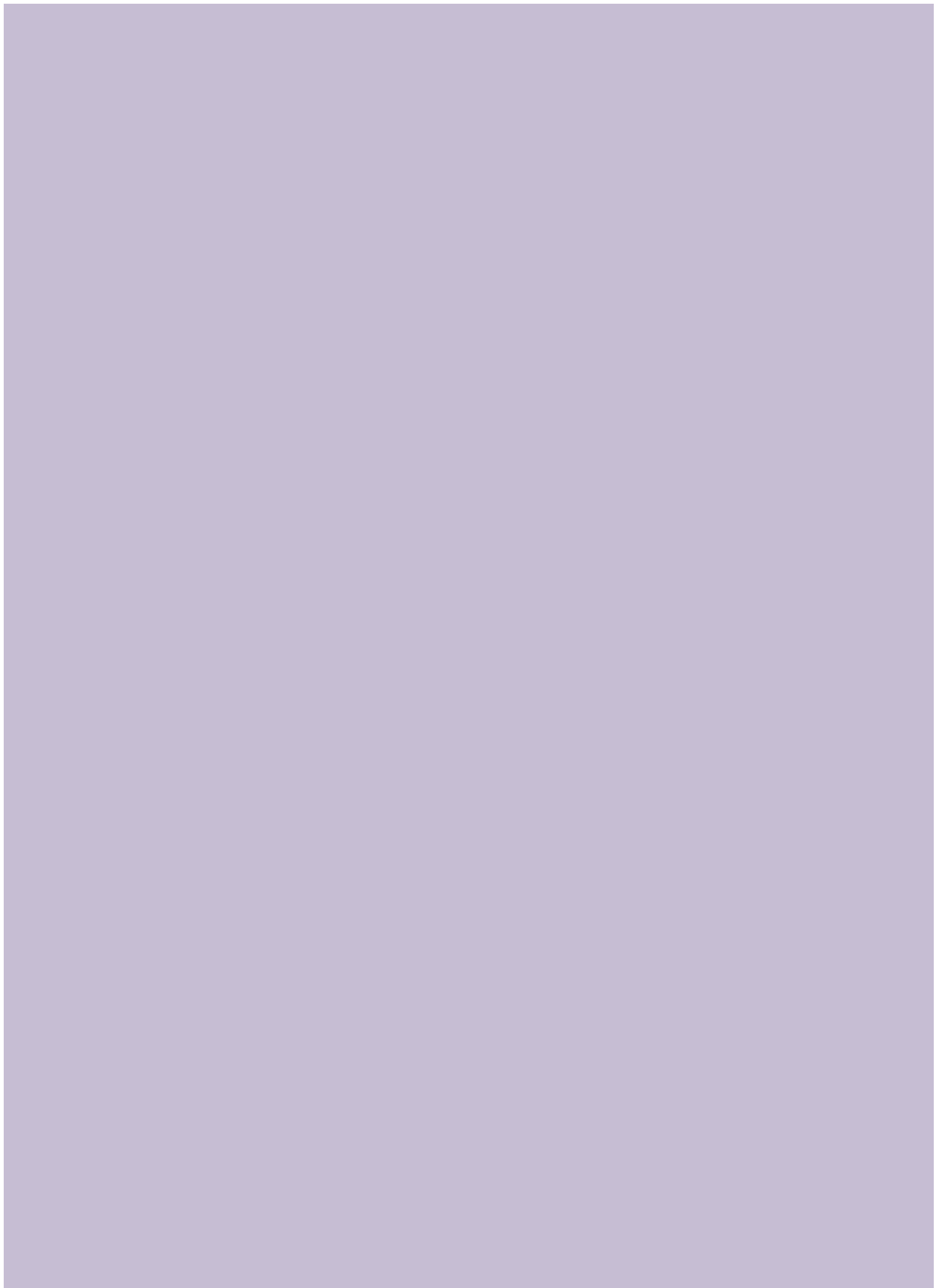
- We have been working to gear up to enter the job market with depressing results. There is a prerequisite of burnout to get a job or the next level of education.
- There is an immense pressure to go above and beyond in every aspect of life for students to achieve the next milestone.
- Why are the people fresh in the job market already exhausted?

SHIFT IN EXPECTATIONS

- We need a cultural shift from expecting so much of our young professionals. It feels like we are starting to equate them with older professionals already. You can't start off expecting your young professionals to have all the skills.

INNOVATION AND UPSKILLING

- We can't continue to innovate if we are not trying to see what the ramifications could be as well.
- Our universities need to shift to include teaching soft skills and community-building.



Union Leaders

In general, **UNION LEADERS** represent the front lines of workers by understanding their needs, concerns, challenges, and grievances, and then taking action through various means to address and resolve those aspects of worker experience as well as possible when workers are covered by a union contract. Union leaders also formulate and execute strategies for growing union membership, communicating with leadership and management effectively, negotiating better collective bargaining agreements to secure better wages, benefits and working conditions, and preparing for future economic and legal threats which may undermine union plans and activities. Both regional and local union leadership are represented.

SANDBOX 14 THEMES

 Health and Wellbeing, Safety & Human Centered Approaches	 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles
 Education, Development & Training	 In-Person & Remote Work	 Technology & AI	
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors	

PARTICIPANTS

PATRICIA CAMPOS-MEDINA

Executive Director, The Worker Institute, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University

SHEENA COLLINS

Servicing Labor Representative, United Food and Commercial Workers International Union/International Chemicals Workers Union Council

RICHARD COSSELL

Senior National Representative, Utility Workers Union

DAVID DUNN

Representative, Art Directors Guild

VALERIE KING

Senior National Representative, Women's Caucus Chair, AFL-CIO, Utility Workers Union of America

KATHLEEN MULLIGAN

Director, Labor Leadership Initiatives, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University

ED REMPEL

Representative, International Chemical Workers' Union Council

DAVID SKOLNICK

Bay Area Chapter Co-Chair Unit 18, University Council-American Federation of Teachers

ZOË WEST

Senior Researcher, The Worker Institute, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University

The Current State

SUMMARY: Union leaders operate in an increasingly fragmented and inequitable labor environment marked by stagnant wages, rising living costs, and structural shifts toward precarious, gig, and platform work. Legal and political setbacks—such as the Janus decision and ongoing anti-union campaigns—have weakened membership and bargaining power, forcing unions to defend hard-won rights while adapting to dispersed, hybrid, and heavily surveilled workplaces. Many describe a widening disconnect between federal labor protections and the realities of today's workforce, where employers exploit loopholes in classification, training, and enforcement. Despite these challenges, renewed worker interest in collective action is emerging, driven by frustration with economic insecurity, overwork, and lack of choice in employment conditions. Union leaders see cultural education, cross-union collaboration, and flexible organizing models as critical to rebuilding solidarity and ensuring that all forms of work—including care, service, and trades—are recognized as dignified and essential.

KANBOX
14

Current State of Unions

"WE HAVE SEEN AN uptick in people interested in organizing. We've been doing some organizing in right-to-work states. I've currently got a group that I represent in Georgia. I've got one in Florida that's been there for quite some time. In Tennessee, we don't have a problem maintaining membership numbers there because they realize the value in it. If they didn't have to fight for it, the history of what they went through to get the representation, they'd have done a really good job of passing it on to each generation that comes in there. So we don't have problems maintaining majorities in these places once they see that this benefits them. With Georgia, I did their first contract personally, and we averaged \$5.50 an hour across the board in pay raise, which was huge to these guys. And again, it's in a right-to-work state. They were doing natural gas work, and we're lucky if they were making 20 bucks an hour in some cases."

"IT FEELS LIKE WE are up against trends happening on a national and global level. That is where, ultimately, we would need to be addressing those regulatory gaps. It seems even an understatement to call them regulatory gaps. But in the current political context, we probably have to be focused on experimenting on a more local level with legislation for raising minimum wages or for protecting bargaining rights and things like that. All of that is gonna have to be on a more local level for a while."

"IT'S BLEAK, BUT IT was bleak 10 years ago. It was bleak before Trump and before government changes. There's a consolidation within the performing arts. We also work for entertainment, movies and television, when they're around. Those are union jobs."

"GOING BACK TO THE Janus decision, we have to actively go out and get people to sign membership cards, and that is incredibly difficult, especially because there's so much anti-union propaganda out there and a lot of misinformation. I can't tell you how many mailers I've gotten from this right-wing freedom of work organization. It's from a pretty infamous anti-tax, anti-union activist in California. It has been sending out these flyers to all lecturers at [my university], and they may be doing it to other schools as well, lying about what unions do with their dues. Basically saying, 'Why would you spend this money on unions when you could spend it on dinner at a restaurant or on a new washing machine?'"

"THERE'S EXTREMELY WIDESPREAD, WELL-FUNDED opposition to unions that is also effective in breaking union campaigns."

"IT REALLY FALLS ON unions to get out there and be like, 'Hey, a union worker made your car or you got your groceries from a union grocery store.' Creating that awareness. I've done it with my kids when McDonald's first came in with the kiosk, I was like, 'No, we don't use those kiosks. I know they're cool. I know they're flashy, but we go up to the counter and we employ that worker.' It needs to be a collective mindset of the country."

Current State of Union Workers

"IN OUR UNION LOCALLY, almost everybody is [working multiple jobs]. The reason is partially due to the fact that we're in a union; it allows the employers to lay us off as soon as a project is done. They don't have a lot of extra money. The only way people can survive is to have several jobs. But that's been the case for really over a decade here."

"WE'RE SEEING AN OVERALL climate of work which is trying to squeeze more out of people in every possible way and take less responsibility for providing the benefits of employment."

HANDBOX
14

"IN THE UTILITY SECTOR, one of the trends that we're seeing is that these younger people don't have interest in entering some of these jobs, in particular, wastewater treatment and collection. They can be very good paying jobs, but the young people don't have the interest in it or the foresight to realize that is a job that can provide for a family or a future, and it's really hard to educate them about that because quite frankly, everybody thinks they're dealing with everybody else's bodily waste and they don't want to hear that."

"ALL THE EMPLOYERS WANT to require licensing of our members for collection and treatment [work]. However, the state law doesn't necessarily mandate that somebody in management has to have the proper class of license, and everybody can work underneath their license. We're having a hard time finding schools or programs that will train them for these licenses. Part of it is job training, up to two years for each class, but there's not a whole lot of options out there. I'm working with a public sector employer right now. They've got one school available to 'em and it's an hour and a half away. A lot of places are not picking this up 'cause the demand's not there."

"WE HAVE ELECTRIC LINEMEN in this country that work over 2,300 hours a year in overtime. And it is by choice, most of it – there are people who wanna do that."

Recruitment, Membership, and Representation

"A LOT OF PEOPLE will say nobody wants to get involved. Nobody's coming to the membership meetings. You have to tap into what is of interest to people. I always try to look around the room and try to recruit people by listening to different things that they're saying and engaging them. So I'm like, 'Okay, give me that information.' I'm always trying to build relationships. Once you grab them in the beginning and you start engaging them, they'll be more apt to get more involved in the process."

"I WANT TO ADD the difficulty of turnover. That's true of low-wage jobs at the university level. There are people that cycle in and out, which again, back to Janus, makes that so hard because you're constantly having to spend huge amounts of time and money on getting people to sign up as members."



“WHAT FEELS VERY IMPORTANT at this moment is expanding access to collective representation and organizing for workers who are often outside of it. A lot of my work is with precarious workers in different industries. What I’m doing is usually the research, but trying to do research that helps us understand the conditions, the circumstances, the structures that workers are encountering so that organizations and unions can have a deeper understanding of what would be needed to organize and support and represent workers.”

Dues

“WE HAVE TO HAVE a two-tier structure when it comes to dues. If you may a structure where someone’s paying \$30 a week, or \$30 a month, and you organize another group of low-wage workers, they can’t afford to pay that. We need to have a different dues structure. We can’t just leave them out there when they want to be organized and say, ‘Because their wages are so low, we don’t know how to accommodate that structure.’ We need to start thinking ahead on how we do that. Embracing all working-class people who are looking for this opportunity.”

Contract Negotiations

“FOR THE UCAFT LECTURES Union, the dues, even if you’re not a member, are something like 0.99% of your wages. If you are a member, it’s 1.5% and it’s such a drop in the bucket compared to how much money lecturers have gotten because of the contracts we negotiated. In the last few years, lecturer pay has gone up 20%. So you compare that to the 1.5% that you’re paying, it’s an incredibly good investment. But it’s a really difficult argument to make. It doesn’t really sink in when people compare actually paying 1.5% of their salary versus knowing that 1.5% will turn into an extra 20%.”

Organizing

“IT’S NOT EASY TO organize teachers, who are in their classrooms and isolated from other workers. There is no water cooler to hang out around often at the university level. People have their own schedules, so there’s a lot of passing in the hallways, but there’s not really that same ability to be in the same space for extended periods of time with your coworkers.”

“ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS ARE AND seem to be headed in a direction where we’re gonna have more difficulty if we have remote workers. It’s going to be much harder to actually have an organizing campaign, to even develop an internal committee, to help us get the campaign off the ground.”

“WE HAVE ORGANIZERS OUT here organizing low-wage workers. Fields that are predominantly occupied by women. If they’re smaller groups, what we try to do is put them in a respective local [union] that already has a structure. We’re finding that there’s opposition in taking on these newly organized groups because those who are in male-dominated fields feel that they can’t really represent women who are in call centers or in the office. I have to negotiate contracts for male-dominated fields, and I learned by getting subject matter experts – people who are in the field to help me through those negotiations. So our male leaders need to do the same thing.”

“IT’S A REAL BALANCING act because we unions have to find the pain points and exploit those, but that risks alienating people who are not in the union, the general public, or in our case, students and parents. So that’s a very delicate line to walk.”

Collaborating Across Unions

“ONE OF THE ISSUES was a lack of coordination between unions. We’ve tried really hard to establish and strengthen our relationships with the other unions on campus because we need to support each other but because we’re all spread so thin, that’s been a difficult push. Although I will say that the people who are involved are very passionate. So it’s heartening to be working with that caliber of people. I wish we could bring more people into the fold.”

“THERE NEEDS TO BE a lot more collaboration, cooperation, and support between unions, especially in the very near future. There’s gonna have to be some general strikes, and that doesn’t happen unless there’s really good communication between unions.”

Union Voices

“FEWER MEMBERS MEAN FEWER people are making those decisions that affect you. If you are a member, then you get to be a voice and you get to influence the direction of the union and add your expertise.”

“IF WE ARE TRYING to grow unions and we’re trying to make life better for working class people, then we also need to know that they’re also going to be in occupations and fields where we may not feel comfortable or may not be equipped with all the tools to actually facilitate those discussions, but that’s when we lean on the people who have boots on the ground.”

“IN ORDER FOR US to have any kind of leverage, all unions have to have some means of coordination to do larger actions to move the needle in Washington and state capitals. That’s when politicians listen, when you have hundreds of thousands or even millions of people in the streets. That freaks ‘em out enough that they act. It scares them. When you have people shoveling cash into your campaign coffers, that has to be outweighed by something massive.”



Strikes

"THE NEW JERSEY TRANSIT rail strike only lasted three days because it impacted transportation. Sunday, I was trying to come into the city to see a play, and it literally took us almost two and a half hours to get to the city. Then we realized we should have left even earlier because there was no rail running. Everybody was taking the bus into the city or driving into the city. That's why it was short-lived. They have some other big concerts coming up, so that was the right time for them to go out on strike."

Young Workers

"A LOT OF THE younger people who are going into these chemical factories don't necessarily wanna work the hours. They don't like shift work. They don't wanna do maintenance. It's very hard to keep them around long enough, to bring them into union leadership. Not to mention sticking around at the place of employment."

"I HAVE SEEN A sense of entitlement with our younger workforce. They want everything now. They don't wanna progress. Half of 'em can't pass a drug test or pass an entrance exam test for basic skills, which is a big problem. Another problem we have is the lack of skilled building trades. We're gonna have a really big need for your mechanics, your pipe fitters, your carpenters, your iron workers, and that is a big problem in this area."

"WE'RE GONNA SEE A lot of issues with younger people coming in to fill roles. It's very erratic as to where younger people will go into those roles. Some of my more rural plants can get younger people in, but some of the plants closer to the big cities, not so much. The sense of entitlement. The younger people don't really understand or enjoy the concept of seniority."

"TO ME, THE STUDENT loan crisis, the housing affordability, the lack of care for people in retirement, wages, pension, access to money, health insurance are trends that show a violation of the broad social contract where we all understood that if we worked hard, someone would take care of us. As long as that continues, why would young workers buy into this in the first place?"

Training, Attrition, and Understaffing

“THERE'S A DIFFERENT MINDSET with this generation. Everybody wants to push buttons. That's the best way I can describe it. I've seen a couple of things, like in the high school level at low-tech courses where they're offering things like electric lineman training, but there's not enough of it out there. That's how you're gonna get this next generation interested in it. Not every kid's gonna come out there and want to go to work for the power company, but it's a start.”

“WITH THE UTILITIES GETTING rid of regulated monopolies 20-some years ago, it had an effect on the side of the business that they didn't deregulate. In particular, with electricity, the utilities changed their tree-trimming schedules. They went into an attrition phase where they got rid of people. It got to the point where so many people were starting to retire, and they actually did a little forecasting. A lot of these electric utilities went and created these schools to learn the trade of being an electric lineman or substation electrician. The problem with what they did is they emphasized in the schools so much on the climbing aspect of the job that they graduated maybe 20%.”

“THE RATE PAYERS GOTTA put more pressure on their public service commissions. One of our employers just had a rate case in the state of Tennessee. One of the things to come out through testimony from the customers and from some board members was the fact that they're understaffed, and that's why they're behind on so many aspects of their job. It's on the water side. They didn't care when they gave 'em the order for their rate case. There was nothing there to even monitor them to make sure that they were staffing the place properly to try to increase customer service.”

Direct Care Workforce

“I DO A LOT of work with direct care and also with domestic workers. In-home care is complex. You have, among different states, different possibilities of unionization for home care workers, but it's a huge workforce. Millions of workers. I spend a lot of time thinking about the care economy, and there's this narrative about how we're in a care crisis. The home care shortage is projected to continue increasing rapidly as it has been. Also in health care. There's a need for more workers and recognition that a lot of these jobs are poorly paid. They're workers who are not valued. They don't have agency and control in their jobs. They're doing difficult work with little respect and low pay, and often don't have access to benefits. I've interviewed tons of workers who are on Medicaid. They're working. This confounds the current Republican narrative about adding work requirements being this big thing because so many people are working and on Medicaid because their employer is paying low wages or they cannot afford the health care that is actually offered.”



"I'VE BEEN LOOKING AT private equity and financialization and the way that's bleeding into a lot of different research in in-home care and health care and hospitals and nursing homes. A lot of research has been done about the pretty horrific things that are happening. Like when hospitals are basically closed down after they've been taken over by private equity."

"THE CARE ECONOMY NEEDS to invest in care jobs and make care jobs living wage jobs. That impacts black women and women of color, working women, and even middle-class women who want to get back into the workforce but can't afford child care. What's the level of public investment in making child care affordable? This is a big issue in New York State, and it will be in other states as well. As the federal government divests from child care, what are states going to do? It addresses the core of the problem with our economy right now, which is how do we make something that is so essential for every industry affordable? How do we invest in child care, not just for women to be able to afford it, but for the workers who work in child care to have living wage jobs? There are efforts to invest in cooperatives. There are efforts to invest in the private sector and investment in child care. So the solution is gonna be a combination of all those, but you cannot improve the child care sector jobs without improving the wages of those workers. And if you improve the wages of those workers, who is going to pay for it, and what's the public investment in it?"

Precarious Workers

"A SEGMENT OF THE workforce got worse during the changes of the nineties and the 2000s. Even though 20% of our workforce is immigrant, only about 5% are undocumented. But you still have them located in specific areas whose workforce, the care economy, home care workers, and low-entry-level care workers, are immigrant women. In the retail industry, you have lots of black and brown workers and immigrant workers and undocumented workers. During the 1990s and 2000s, we were not able to change our labor laws. Workers still continue to have very precarious job protections under labor laws. The National Labor Relations Act, which protects workers' rights in the private sector, is ill-equipped to address the needs of workers who are highly segmented in low-wage work."

The Gig Economy

"WE NEED REFORM SO that we can actually regulate labor rights for workers in the gig economy. The International Labor Organization recently estimated an increase to about 30% of our workforce in the platform economy. We still don't have the ability to structurally change labor law so that we can provide more protections to that workforce."

"I'M CURIOUS ABOUT HOW many people are working multiple jobs and how that breaks down around age and whether they're working multiple jobs because that's their choice – to have different kinds of work or flexibility, or because they have to do that to make ends meet."

"YOU HAVE WORKERS IN a lot of industries where the traditional structures of unions might not always be the best fit in. Sectors have been less unionized. Gig workers are one example. But we're also seeing such an increase in temp workers. That allows employers to bypass both unionization rights, but also access to benefits and things like that."



"WE WERE FOLLOWING THE trends on the expansion of workers in the gig economy and precarious work, but specifically the platform workers. Now folks in different industries are taking on a job through a platform. It's not just Uber and Lyft, food delivery, but also now in-home care. You can go to an app and sign up to be a home care worker. Even high tech computer programmers. You can actually be a computer programmer or design code through an app. So the impact is technology and the algorithms determine your wages, your working conditions."

Platform Work

"WE'RE STILL THINKING ABOUT labor law as if you have a boss and you have a worker, and that you can talk and you can agree on working conditions that are not working anymore. In reality, we now have a boss and a worker. You have somebody you go work for, but you don't work for that person. You work for an app. You work for a corporation somewhere. So what is the first level of labor laws that we need to develop so that we can actually protect our workers' rights?"

Dynamics of Population Growth

"THE CITIES THAT YOU mentioned are growing, are all in right-to-work states, and all places where unionization historically has not been very powerful – except maybe Austin has been a little bit better. It's a city that is doing better inside of a state that is doing terribly for working people. It's worth noting that some of the population growth has other dynamics involved, and one of them is corporate decisions to go to those places, which drives job growth, which drives population migration."



Immigration

“AS WE MOVE INTO limiting immigration, we still have 11 million workers who have no rights. The disruption that is causing our workplaces is real, and it’s gonna get worse. But what is more worrisome for me as a labor leader and for people that I work with in the labor movement is the fact that by reducing legal immigration, by attempting to withdraw the rights of workers who are here already or are born here, you are threatening the equality of workers rights in the workplace because you’re reducing the number of people who have rights to belong as Americans or ever become citizens in the United States. So you are creating more insecurity in the workplace by limiting the ability of workers to ever become legal citizens of this country.”

Deregulation

“I WON’T CALL IT emerging because it’s been around since the nineties, but more states are looking to address deregulation around our utilities sector. Deregulation on the electric side, especially electric generation, has been devastating. The company I used to work for shut down seven power stations in the last 10 years, and it puts a strain on the infrastructure, on the grid, because they used to keep a 10% reserve capacity back there. Now, the reserve capacity in your local utility, I guarantee you, is less than five, and in some cases, less than two. This is gonna be a problem moving forward with these increased major weather events.”

“PEOPLE THINK DEREGULATION IS about getting them cheaper. It never results in cheaper. The cost of electricity, the actual generation cost, has gone up almost threefold, in some cases more. That’s something that’s going to be ongoing as they look to deregulate more utilities. Right now, it’s primarily in electric and gas, but I can see it coming in water, especially under the current administration because they wanna roll back so many of the rules that are in place.”

Health Care

“OUR PREMIUMS ARE CONSTANTLY going up for our health care plans. That by itself is stressful. We’re getting pay cuts basically. More broadly, people are terrified of losing their jobs because they’re losing their health care. The fight for universal health care should be on this list. It’s fallen out of the public eye because it’s considered unrealistic, impossible.”

“A LOT OF OUR employers don’t wanna offer post-retirement medical coverage anymore, unless they’re in the public sector. We’re looking at a way through our Taft-Hartley Fund to try to provide that benefit to workers, even if it’s self-funded.”

Attack on Medicaid

"WITH THE CURRENT ATTACKS on Medicaid, it affects not only your own union members and the broader working class, but also so many people whose income or jobs are dependent on Medicaid. If you're in health care, if you're in home care, so many jobs that are actually financed by Medicaid. That's one area where you wanna see a sort of united front able to confront attacks like that."

Public Policy

"THE LAW IS ALSO being impacted right now by what's going on with the National Labor Relations Board. So we've been told to slow down and consult with our legal department, any NLRB charges or anything that could potentially be a court case, because right now it could be disastrous for unions. No one wants to be that example that made new public policy or anything of that nature."

Federal and State Opposition

"THERE'S NO MENTION OF opposition from federal and state governments to union organizing. You have decisions like the Janus decision, which devastated unions. We're still trying to recover from that. There's a lot of unevenness in how unions are allowed to operate in each state, and it creates incentives for companies to move to states that are unfriendly to union labor. Union busting is growing as well, especially in these huge companies like Amazon."

"THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS put a very big target on the backs of unions."

Government

"WE HAD A FORUM at the NLRB. A lot of people don't understand what that means. It eliminated the ability for any worker to get anything because if they didn't have a form, they were not allowed to meet. So you could file your charge locally and go through that local process, and all an employer had to do is appeal it to the full board in DC, and you were toast 'cause it would go there and sit there and die on the vine. Some of these districts are so understaffed, I've got charges that we filed in October of last year that they're still investigating."

"I LIVE IN WISCONSIN, so I lived through Act 10 – the complete destruction of the public sector workforce, labor movement. That led to all kinds of political impacts, which are now not being reversed, but there's definitely pushback and a sense of momentum swinging in the other direction. So that gives me hope. I really felt like these are very dire times for people who care about working people, but having seen that it took 15 years of working to reframe how people think about work, it's possible."



“ONE CAN’T HELP BUT look at what has happened in the country in the last three months, and think that it doesn’t seem to bode well for working people of all stripes. The firing of various government employees was alarming. A large majority of those were union members. It is probably preceding an attack on people’s ability to organize and be members of unions nationally.”

“I HAVE A GROUP out in New Mexico I’m negotiating a contract for. Similar to what the federal government did with the veterans, they were calling them probationary employees because they had taken on certain positions. I had this city who terminated a gentleman, a 20-year union member, and they denied him union representation because he had taken a promotion, he was now a probationary employee. I argued that it was a trial period. He already completed his initial probationary period. I had to file a charge with the board and then the city attorney agreed with me and said, ‘No, that’s a trial period.’ I was like, ‘I know that and you know that, but yet this person has been terminated and he’s been outta work for a month and a half.’ So they called him back in to give him what they call a ‘predetermination hearing,’ and fortunately for him, he won the decision. They put fear in these workers out in New Mexico, telling them that it was better for him to resign than to be terminated because, if he resigned, he had a chance of coming back to the city within a year – he could reapply. But if he was terminated, he would lose 50% of his pension.”

Education About Unions

“PEOPLE AREN’T LEARNING ABOUT unions. So they come up with this idea of what a union is from outside forces instead of it being taught in our schools or any outside entity, which is also causing an issue with getting younger people in, or people from other sectors, or people in right-to-work states.”

“STAGNATION RESULTS FROM **NOT** going and educating people about unions, about the nature of the work that union members do. I’m a firm believer in grassroots just about everything. You gotta get out and talk to people for them to be able to understand what needs to happen.”

Historical Context

“IN OUR GENERATION, WE had a class called civics. And civics taught you about what patriotism was really all about. It taught you about what good government was for. It taught you about your rights under the Constitution. It even taught you about unions and what good unions did. My kids, who are in their late thirties and forties now, didn’t get that. They got ‘Andrew Carnegie was this great philanthropist!’ I’ll never forget my son coming home from school one day, and I asked him what they learned, and he told me that.”

“BACK IN THE EIGHTIES, when Reagan fired air traffic controllers, that’s when labor lost its power because they did not pull a general strike. If they had pulled a general strike over that public safety issue, things would be different today. Since then, good portions of labor have approached it more about slowing down the erosion rather than trying to build us back to what we had.”

Structural Changes to the Economy ◆

“THE STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN the economy in the United States, which began in the 1990s and 2000s with our global economy and when we were embracing the liberal economic policy and industrializing the American workforce, we created this structural change in our economy from the manufacturing economy, which was highly unionized, to a service economy due to NAFTA, and free trade. It’s a structural change that happened in our economy that led to the reduction in labor rights protections for our whole sector of our economy.”

The Middle Class ◆

“A LOT OF PEOPLE don’t know that union or organized labor brought about the middle class.”

Wages ◆

“WAGE THEFT ALONE IS an enormously widespread issue.”

“WAGES ARE STAGNANT. WHAT’S the situation with benefits? What are the racial demographics of work, and how is it broken down? And the overall structure of the economy is eliminating middle-class work. So middle-class work is being automated in gig economies, moving from tenured positions to adjunct positions—piece work in various forms. If we’re gonna talk about trends in work, we have to see the structural forces, not just the symptoms of what is happening in a larger set of structures in the economy.”

“WAGES ARE STAGNANT ACROSS the board for the most part. Especially these chemical places, with what’s going on with the economy and tariffs and everything like that, it’s making it more difficult for these companies to really put forth a lot of money because they’re not sure if they’re gonna be able to get their raw materials. If there’s gonna be demand for their product. So it’s very interesting. One contract that I negotiated in February, they got \$1.50, \$1.75 raises over the course of four years. However, they did get a \$5,000 signing bonus. And for me, that kind of shows that this company is not sure they’re gonna have the money down the road, but they have it right now and they’re gonna give it to them.”



Economic Instability ◆

"I DO WORK WITH chemical workers, and right now I keep checking in with all my locals. 'Are you guys busy? How's production going?' We're seeing a lot of slowdown because of tariffs, because people aren't ordering the chemicals that they would normally order because they don't know what's gonna happen in the economy. It's very uncertain right now. I do see some plants that very much have a family attitude – they're gonna keep everybody on. It might look a little wonky, but we have to work together and we'll keep everybody on. However, I do have one plant, two locals, one company, they're getting rid of segments of their business. They're laying off workers. And it's a cause for concern for the local members who are still there."

Economic Control ◆

"WHEN FINANCIAL ACTORS ARE controlling the decisions and the industry to the degree that is happening and increasing, it's highly anti-democratic."

Inability to Work Remotely ●

"THERE ARE SO MANY jobs that cannot be remote – teachers, hospitals, bank tellers, grocery store workers, anyone in the arts mostly, not exclusively. But it's out of step with a white-collar movement toward flexibility in terms of whether you go to a site or not. But for many workers, that's not an option for them."

"REMOTE WORK DOESN'T HIT us in the utility as hard. It affects us with some of our call center people, customer service-type people. 'Cause some of them work a hybrid/remote schedule, one day a week in, or one day every two weeks in the office."

"WE CAN'T WORK REMOTELY. We're in person. We have to be working at the theater and then the shops, building things for the theater. It has to be done in person, as soon as they can replace us with automation that's cheaper, they will. But they haven't been able to yet."

"WITH WORK FROM HOME, I'm echoing again, some people just can't work from home."

Consequences of Remote Work ●

"IN THE UNIONIZED WORKFORCE, we move from being remote to now looking at hybrid. Some of the advantages for some of the workers was child care because they didn't have to pay child care expenses. They were saving on transportation as well. But then what we found is that we had a number of members who wanted to go into the office. They didn't want to be secluded. There was depression. There was alcoholism. I had one member say, 'For me, working from home remotely – I'm closer to the liquor cabinet and I'm drinking more during the day.'"

"24/7 AVAILABILITY. WHETHER IT'S the unionized or the ununionized workforce, it seems like you are working 24/7. We're not setting boundaries for ourselves when we're working remotely."

"I'M FINDING THAT WHEN we're trying to organize groups, remote workers, it's hard to reach them because you can't organize them if they haven't ever met one another. You have places of work where everyone is all over the place across the country, and so they don't form those relationships like when you're in the office and you celebrate those milestones like marriages, childbirths, and so forth."

"YOU HAVE THOSE PEOPLE who were victims of domestic violence with remote work reporting they were 24/7 right there with their abusers."

"ARE PEOPLE ACTUALLY GETTING out and exercising and focusing on their health and wellness when they're actually remote-based workers?"

Teaching Remotely ●

"IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, I will never, ever teach remotely again unless I absolutely have no choice. For certain jobs, it degrades the quality of work immensely to not be in person. I'm constantly offered opportunities to teach online, and I don't want to do it. To me, it feels like it's cheating the students of an important part of the educational experience."

Lack of Choice ■

"ARE PEOPLE CHOOSING TO live where they wanna live, that's not close to their job, or is that all they can afford? Are women choosing flexibility because they wanna be near their families, or is it that we don't provide support for working women? I really think the presentation of how workers are engaging with the economy as choice misstates a lot of what's happening. People actually don't have choices, or they don't have good choices, so they're opting between a set of bad choices to do the best they can."



Workplace Harassment and Discrimination ■

"WE DO A GOOD amount of research on workplace harassment, and discrimination. At the moment, we are concerned that there's going to be an increase in harassment and bullying on the job given the political context. We've been wanting to work with worker groups to do training with unions and preparing how to respond to issues. Looking at the official EEOC rates of reported harassment and discrimination, you're just getting a slice of what's happening. Particularly in low wage workplaces, there's very low reporting because of a lot of reasons, including the power dynamics where people can't afford to lose work, and fear retaliation for speaking out. Among people I interview, they are likely to not report for a lot of reasons. And some of those are in industries where there are very high rates of harassment, whether that's farm work, janitorial work, or meat packing."

Child Care ■

"THERE'S A LACK OF affordable child care. When we did our recent statewide poll in New York State, pretty high percentages of people report that their care responsibilities had a negative impact on their ability to keep their jobs. This is people who are caring for both children but also adults. Child care affordability is a massive issue to access care, and this is often falling more heavily on women."

"REMOTE WORK IS AN inadequate solution if you're trying to deal with child care while you're working and doing double duty. But people who are able to work from home can go pick up their kid from daycare much more easily at any hour and spend more time with their kids in the evening rather than spending an hour commuting home from work."

Effects on Health ●

"MY PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ARE I've seen an increased number of guys who have developed heart problems because they're overworked and not sleeping enough. Our safety department is actually trying to gather data on that. They've been trying to collect it now for the last couple of years, and sometimes it's hard to get the locals to cooperate. Even in the water and gas sectors, being in the ditch and inclement weather, you're seeing increases in guys having different types of arthritis that make it impossible for them to work till even 62."

Career Longevity ●

"WHEN THEY CLOSED DOWN my station, I was 49 years old, and they offered me a job to go learn to be a lineman. I could have done that job at 25. There's no doubt in my mind I could have, but at 49, there was no way possible. I could not have gone to that school and graduated because my body was so beat up at that point, from working in the power station, crawling around in these tight spaces, doing all the things that I had to do, and all this work, I couldn't have done it."



AI ■

"A JOB COULD BE more easily taken over by AI, and that's going to cause a huge shift in the workforce. 'Cause you're not gonna need the people anymore. AI is not as big an issue, but a sub-issue of AI that's come into the news recently is artificially intelligent robots that they want to try to program to do some of these things. For your local utilities, there's gonna be a huge safety risk because you don't have the human there eyeballing things as to what is safe, what is best for the customer, the rate payer."



"STUDENTS ARE REALLY LOSING the opportunity to learn how to learn. This is way beyond the university and high schools. This is gonna be across society at every level. It's gonna negatively impact how people think and how people interact with each other. Issues of trust, issues of knowledge reliability. There's been a lot of discussion of knowledge system collapse as AI starts using its own output as its dataset, so errors will multiply."

"I'M DOING RESEARCH WITH some colleagues on the impact of AI on workers in fashion. What we saw very publicly in the entertainment industry, in Hollywood, with the strikes, where the unions were able to, by striking, implement safeguards around how AI is used so that it's not used to drive down workers' income and basically take away work, take away jobs. In fashion, we're seeing similar issues, but you also have the fact that because they're largely classified as independent contractors and they're largely precarious workers, although there are some elite models. The use of AI goes onto the gray areas of employment, and the modes of exploitation seem to accelerate them. There's research, for example, about the use of AI for surveillance of Amazon warehouse workers and things like that. Paying attention to the way that this negatively affects really broad sectors of the workforce that are quite hard to regulate. If you're in an industry that's not unionized, it's much harder."



"A LOT OF OUR faculty are worried about AI because there's something called Course Capture. Classrooms are outfitted with Course Capture technology, where all the class is recorded. People are worried about universities using that information, at some point, to replace faculty with AI avatars to teach the exact same material that faculty teach."



"[AI] WILL CONTINUE TO consolidate and continue to have fewer and fewer of these jobs. But they can't replace all of it with automation and with AI. They've tried. They'd love to if it was cheaper, but there are things that need a human to create because nobody would pay to see it if it didn't have a human quality, so it would be like surrounding yourself with virtual junk."

Surveillance Technology ■

"THERE'S INCREASING SURVEILLANCE OF employers on their employees. So you have things like Amazon warehouses, where there's no time to actually walk to the bathroom from their workstations. Even in remote work, you have all of this surveillance software that is not just tracking if you're actually on your computer, but also, 'Are you making eye contact during a Zoom meeting, or does it seem like you're doing other things?'"

Management ●

"I SEE A LACK of appreciation for employees. Management tends to forget the level of responsibility or the knowledge it takes to do some of these jobs. I'll give you an example. I've got one facility that, if something happens there, it would change the course of the Ohio River. It's within a five-mile radius, so when I go there, I stay 15 miles away for that particular reason. The sense of urgency to train people on these jobs and to retain these employees with that knowledge is a big thing."

Generational Differences ■

"I DO THINK THAT younger generations of workers are asking more pointed questions about the point of work in a way that we Gen Xers didn't ask. Boomers didn't necessarily ask the questions. Like the intensity of the pursuit of a certain set of goals meant that we would work lots of overtime. It's worth taking the perspective of younger workers right now and trying to understand where they're coming from. You shouldn't have to work overtime to make a living. And if there is a lot of overtime, why aren't employers creating more jobs? Why are we expected to sign on to an agreement that work is everything and life has to fit in around it, versus a job should be a way I get to live?"

The Future State

SUMMARY: Looking ahead, union leaders envision a renewed labor movement grounded in equity, education, and collective purpose. They anticipate deeper alliances across industries, communities, and even responsible employers to restore worker influence in shaping economic and political systems. The future of organizing will require not only new laws and funding models but also a reimagining of labor relations to reflect modern realities such as AI, automation, and platform-based employment. Leaders emphasize preparing younger generations through mentorship and civic education while elevating women's leadership and redefining what solidarity means in a diverse, globalized workforce. As climate change, inequality, and deregulation continue to reshape work, unions aim to champion a broader social contract—one that values all forms of labor, strengthens worker voice, and safeguards dignity in an economy increasingly defined by volatility and technological change.

KANDEKA
14



Preparing for the Future ●

"HISTORY – IF YOU don't learn from it, you're doomed to repeat it."

"I BOUGHT A GENERATOR years ago because I know what the electrical grid looks like in this country, and it's not good. I advise all my friends. I've got a guy who's got a small business, I've known him my whole life, and I went and bought tires off him about a month ago and he said, 'Everything you've told me about the utilities has come to pass over the last 35 years, except one.' I said, 'What's that?' He goes, 'I bought that generator, but I don't need it as often as you said I would.' I said, 'Just be patient.' And I explained to him how the margins have shrunk. He said, 'I definitely wanna make sure I keep that up.'"



"I TELL PEOPLE, 'SAVE up, don't spend it all. Get a nice healthy savings because you don't know when the work is gonna slow down.' We're somewhat temporary or project-based workers. We're not working all year round. We're not always working 40 hours a week. So, 'Everybody save up.' It has been very difficult in the high-cost-of-living parts of the country for people to afford housing, even with a good union job."

"I'M MAKING SURE I'M paying attention to what's going on around me. So whether it be politics, economics, or the industry that I'm working with, I'm having a finger on the pulse of how it's going forward. At the same time, I'm trying to enhance my skills so that I'll be ready for what comes next."

Education Around Unions

"SOMEWHERE ALONG THE EDUCATIONAL journey, students have to be exposed to what unions do. They may inquire more about how they work and why we have them."

Finding Union Allies

"WHAT ARE THE NEW, unusual allies that we can build as a labor movement to create a clear standard of workers' rights or worker performance?"

"HOW DO WE ALLY ourselves with those companies that do want a set of rules that are consistent across industries?"

Government

"IS THE GOVERNMENT GOING to set the parameters within which workers and employers then negotiate? Or is this the wild west again, and all of employment is up for grabs? What we know is that, absent a union, workers always lose in that situation."

"WHAT IS THE ROLE of government, and how do we take back influence in public policy so that we can actually change our model of labor relations in this country? How do we bring worker ownership into companies? This is not a new idea, but it's a new idea in the United States – to have worker cooperatives."

Publicity

"WE AS UNIONS DON'T do enough to publicize our victories. More talking, more about what we do and the reason why all people need a seat at the table, and why this will benefit them. We need to put more of that out there because when you're going out there as an organizer, you hear the misinformation that people are fed about unions."

"WE DEFINITELY PUBLICIZE WHAT the union does when we're on a membership drive, when we're about to enter contract negotiations, but really that needs to be every day throughout the year. We need to post flyers that list all the benefits that come out of union contracts and all the things that are being threatened by the administration, whether it's a university administration, whether it's a state administration, whether it's the federal administration, we have to keep that at the top of people's minds."

SANDBOX
14

Strikes

"I DO FEEL LIKE the labor movement is nothing if not us getting together collectively for mutual benefit. More protesting, more objections to our rights being taken away. My fantasy is there's a general strike. When people get fed up enough about what's happening, union members and other sympathetic individuals get together and say, 'We need to show something on a large scale about how unhappy workers are about the current climate of the way that the government is making these changes.'"

Investment and Funding

"WHERE IS THE FUNDING coming from to do [union and labor] research? It's not coming from the federal government right now. What are the investments the states are gonna make? What are the investments foundations are gonna make into figuring out what's a new system of labor relations in this system?"

"SO I FEEL THAT we know a lot about the trends and what's happening, but how we are preparing for the future to be relevant in that discussion, that's an ongoing struggle as somebody who has to get funded to do the work that we do. Who's funding new ideas from collective bargaining? How to pursue new ideas on collective power building? How do we move the discussion away from trying to fix the NLRA and the NLRB to actually thinking boldly about what new labor laws should look like in the United States? That has led us to exploring different models of sectoral bargaining for different industries in the United States. Do we need a sectoral bargaining approach there? Do we need a sectoral bargaining approach for AI because that's impacting those careers that used to be high-end?"

Climate Change

"CLIMATE CHANGE TO ME is the ultimate, unstoppable force, or it might not be unstoppable, but we've done nothing to stop it. That to me has the potential to drive such powerful changes in everything. Many of them will be bad and horrible and painful, and some of them might be good. The dynamics could change quickly if we were able to establish the government's role in the economy in a way that was more about securing a future for workers."



Economic Insecurity ◆

“THERE’S LOTS OF STRUGGLE. As the economy tanks, people’s finances are gonna get worse and worse. It’s gonna be harder and harder to get people to sign up, and that means we’ll have fewer resources to fight big battles. So I am very worried while also hopeful because I feel that as the situation worsens, people will also see how they need to have a voice, and that unions are one of the few remaining avenues for workers to actually be heard and have power.”

Economic Inequality ◆

“THE RISE OF THE billionaire class and the corporate control of politics is the main driver of everything right now. And as long as that continues, we’ll see these trends continue, if not get worse.”

“IN A MOMENT WHEN wealth inequality, which has been really bad for a long time, is worsening, we have billionaires trying to control levers of government and the most frightening oligarchic tendencies on stark display.”

“THE DIRECTION GOING FORWARD is pretty dire. It’s not just the number of people, the 10% of the workforce, but it’s the tipping point we seem to have arrived at where the ultra-rich treat the world as their playground and regular, everyday working people are completely expendable in the service of their whims.”

Power Differentials ◆

“THE PEOPLE WITH THE most power in our world really hold working people in contempt and are happy for them to suffer.”

Wages ◆

“WAGES HAVE BEEN STAGNANT for so long. We need to somehow bring up wages. We know these corporations are making money hand over fist, and they’re looking at shrinking wages to their workers. Sometimes I look at what some people make and I’m like, “How can you survive on that?””

“WE REALLY NEED TO work on advocating for either a UBI or an increase in the federal minimum wage. But that needs to be a significant increase, not just \$2 or \$3. It needs to come up to \$30, if not more.”

“WE NEED TO SUPPORT people. That does include child care, too. But then again, you can’t afford child care if you’re making \$20 an hour, at least where I live.”

Shortage of Workers

"I'M AFRAID IN THE next five or 10 years, there's gonna be a massive shortage of blue collar workers."

Navigating Political Differences

"ONE OF THE CHALLENGES of getting higher union participation is how unions handle political controversies. There are a lot of different views about things in society at large and you have different groups demanding different kinds of actions, sometimes in opposition to each other. How do we navigate the individual differences while addressing the shared needs?"

"WE DON'T WANT TO separate workers by politics. All workers deserve the same benefits and protections even if we disagree with their views."

Social Impact

"IT'S NOT DOOM. WORKERS will continue to organize and demand better wages. Rethinking our social pact as a society is going to be next."

"I DO WANNA HOLD up that we see the ability to connect the dots in a different way about how exploitation of working people is happening. That gives me a lot of hope."

"I DON'T HAVE AN expectation about what will happen in the future. I have a commitment that we have to make the future we want. I see unions as the most essential ingredient in helping all working people, not just union members, but all working people get to have a say in their own future, and what we should be doing is increasing our power to make the future that working people want and need."

Collectivism

"THIS COUNTRY WAS FOUNDED on individualism. Instead, we need to start thinking about things as a collective – we interact with each other as a collective. The work that I do, if we're in the same shop, plant, whatever, directly affects the work that you do. We need to work together to make this a better place for us."

KANDORA
14



Future Generations

"WE NEED TO FOCUS on the generation coming after us. We need to focus on the people who are here right now so that we make sure that they are equipped to handle the job going forward. I don't see that we do a good job of that. I'm constantly asking, 'Okay, if you're planning on retiring in the next few years, who do you see who will be the next leaders?' I'm encouraging our fellow brothers to start looking at women to take on those leadership roles."

Dignified Jobs

"SOMEHOW WE, AS A society, created this division of whether you're going to college or not going to college. We need to be able to equate those jobs with good paying, dignified jobs."

AI

"ONE THING THAT WE'VE done in the last year and a half is send out general information requests to our employers about the use of AI. If they're already using it, what aspects?"

"AI ROBOTS ARE GOING to affect us, but, at the end of the day, you still need a human being to make some of these decisions just for safety's sake. Nobody's gonna care if a trench collapses and a robot's destroyed, but they do care when a human being's in there and he's 28 years old and he's got a two-month-old daughter who's never gonna know her dad. I don't see how they can completely take out the human factor in the utility sector."

Surveillance Technology

"MANY OF OUR EMPLOYERS now use surveillance systems. We've worked to get language in the contract to limit what the employer can do. For instance, in electronic monitoring, which could be GPS, telematics, video, audio recording, they've tried to put in cabs of line trucks. We work to get that language in there, and as technology expands, we are updating that language to reflect a new reality."

Women in Union Leadership

"WE NEED MORE WOMEN in elective offices throughout our respective local unions and on the national level."

"WITHIN MY WOMEN'S CAUCUS committee, I've had maybe about five or six people who have run for office who were told that they didn't have a chance and they are now vice presidents or presidents or delegates."

"THE OTHER THING THAT holds women back is the mindset that we need to know everything. Men, when you are approached and asked to take on a leadership role or to move into a certain position, you are more apt to do so knowing that you'll learn along the way. Women seem to wanna know everything upfront, and I am mentoring them, saying, 'You don't have to know everything, you just have to have a desire, whatever that is.'"

Unions in the Future ●

"I'M HELPING OUR UNIONS and union leaders have time and space to see into the future themselves. A lot of leading a union is incremental and reacting to everything that's happening. It's taking members' phone calls and dealing with problems they have on the job site and negotiating contracts. All of that is critical, vital, important work. But if you spend all your time doing that, you don't have a chance to pause and try to see into the future and use that to make really hard decisions about what parts of the work you keep and what you let go of. What's most powerful at this moment? How do we go where the opportunity and the energy is?"

"I'M HELPING UNION LEADERS think about equity and inclusion. This whole DEIJ thing is actually an attack on working-class people. If union leaders can't be articulate and fluent in how that is happening, then we see what has happened, which is that our own members are divided, working people in general are divided, and then that makes it harder for us to be part of reclaiming the power to set the terms of what work should be doing."

"I'M HELPING UNION LEADERS think about what it means to have their members see the union as their home and not just a thing that helps me when I think about it. When something bad happens, I have someone to call. This is the place where I have a chance to be powerful. There's so many things happening in the world that make all individuals and households feel like they don't have power and that actually ensures that the current trends will just continue. So how do we help people feel like they do have power in a collective to help set the table?"

"I'M TRYING TO EDUCATE our younger workers who haven't been in the workforce that long, who don't have a general understanding of how organized labor works. I've spent 90% of my career in organized labor, and I'm looking forward to the next few years 'cause I'm ending my career."

"I HAVE A 15-YEAR-OLD, a 12-year-old, and a 2-year-old. I've gone into their classrooms, and friends who are teachers' classrooms, and told them what I do. Answering questions, explaining to them that's what a union is. These kids are very receptive to hearing about it, and they ask good questions."

"WHEN I DO GET to the point where I retire, I leave our union in good hands. I'm constantly talking to union leadership about a succession plan. I spent half my career in what we call the 'dark side,' in management, and they always have a succession plan."



Participants' Takeaways

POWER

- We need to value the individual and the worker. There needs to be a larger focus on being attentive to basic needs, pay equity, and organizing.
- Work is very individualistic. It is about choice and what people want, but we need to think about it in terms of power and who sets what choices there are.
- There is rampant inequality of historic proportions when it comes to maximizing profits, labor power, and labor costs.
- We need to constantly be building leadership to fight the flood of misinformation and ignorance to keep growing union power.
- Who defines the conversations we're having about work leads to what story you hear.

VALUING ALL WORK

- Blue collar jobs are just as good as white collar jobs. There is going to be a shortage of blue collar jobs because of the push on college education.
- We need to value all types of work. This means elevating all work to hold the dignity and value of a more professional job.

HUMAN DIMENSION OF WORK

- How much work needs a human touch? There is a big debate with remote work. Work needs community but people want to be in community with their kids, families, or neighborhoods instead of their workplace.
- Working should serve human well-being but in our current society, it serves corporate agendas.
- Mental health and wellness should be a focal point of any workplace.

REMOTE WORK

- While there is a little bit in these industries, remote work is not as prevalent in union jobs.
- Remote work has made it very difficult to organize certain classes of people.
- The effect of remote work on membership organizing and participation is something that we really have to address.

GENERATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

- Work-life balance is very important to the younger generations – something that was not expected by the older generations.

CHANGING WORK ARRANGEMENTS

- Work is getting gigified. The pressure is on you to support your household whatever way you can. The dynamics are different depending on the formal structure you're in. Workers in many different industries are experiencing the pressures of the gig economy.
- The gig economy is playing a big role in the economy and these workers need to be protected so the platforms or employers don't abuse them.
- Employment relationships are not bilateral anymore. We have these tertiary levels where you are signing up to an app or a third party. How do we reimagine a labor relations system for a tertiary employment relationship with the person who actually pays you?

EDUCATION

- Education about unions is necessary. For K-12 kids, you can have conversations with parents who are in unions. Talk about our union involvement and why you're a member.
- We need higher education to help carry the message to the appropriate power – to affect change. We need partners.

CHILD CARE

- Child care isn't working for the child care workers or the parents.

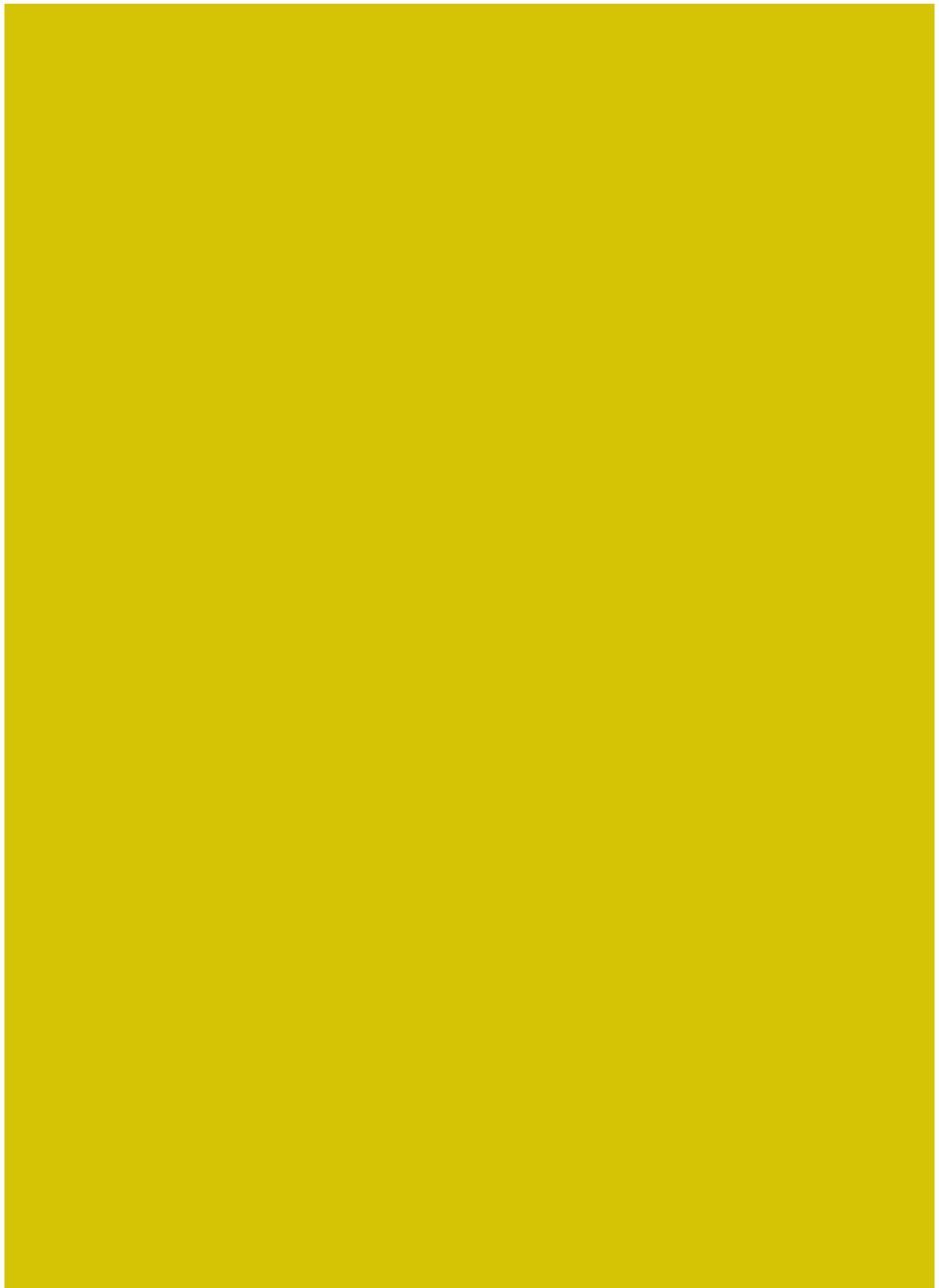
ECONOMIC FACTORS

- We need wage support. They have been depressed for a long time. There is rampant wage insecurity.

KANBOX
14

GOVERNMENT AND POLICY

- How do you reimagine labor law and relations in this country? We need to move beyond the NLRB and NLRA as the only system of labor relations in this country. How do we think about sectoral bargaining models in each industry differently?
- How do we create a government that actually fights for working people? How do we regain influence over government policy so it becomes the counteractive force to corporate America?
- How do we protect access to citizenship to everyone who works in the US? Because if not we are allowing for the creation of two workforces.



Chief Executive Officers

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO) is the highest-ranking executive responsible for the overall management, direction, and performance of an organization. The role encompasses setting strategic priorities, guiding leadership teams, and ensuring the organization fulfills its mission and goals. The CEO oversees all core functions, including operations, finance, risk management, investment, talent, innovation, and stakeholder relations, focusing on short- and long-term objectives depending on the business horizon and shareholder interests.

SANDBOX 15 THEMES

 Culture, Belonging & Social Connection	 Change, Adaptability & Agility	 Leadership, Management & Organizational Roles	 Education, Development & Training
 In-Person & Remote Work	 Collaboration & Organizational Design	 Workplace Design, Experience & Urban Planning	 Technology & AI
 Policy, Public Sector, Societal & Labor Issues	 Equity & Workforce Diversity	 Economic Factors	

PARTICIPANTS

EVAN BENWAY

Chief Executive Officer/Co-Founder,
Moodsonic

ELIZABETH BRINK

Co-Chief Executive Officer,
Gensler

STEPHEN COTTRELL

Chief Executive Officer/President,
La Terra Fina USA, LLC

TRICIA EMERSON

President/Founder, Emerson Human
Capital Consulting, Inc.

JOHN FORAKER

Chief Executive Officer/Co-Founder,
Once Upon a Farm, PBC

TOM POWERS

Chief Executive Officer/Co-President,
IA Interior Architects

DANIEL RYAN

Co-President/Regional Market
Director-San Diego,
Alexandria Real Estate Equities, Inc.

ALANA STEVENS

Chief Executive Officer
North America, BLANCO

The Current State

SUMMARY: CEOs, having the ultimate responsibility for an organization's financial and operational effectiveness, struggle with the new business and employee-expectations landscape. Old models of how to manage a workforce do not fit the current landscape, and new models have not been developed that adequately address complicated work arrangements, talent turnover, rising employee expectations of personal time mixed with work time, and hybrid/remote work in general. A few report chaos in attempting to satisfy both business and worker demands. They report that the ground keeps shifting under their feet and their need to be agile, which are new demands that they are not adequately prepared for. Additionally, they report that old habits are hard to break. AI is a major disruptor of their business models, but integration of AI into their business processes is imperative. Striving for a stronghold, they believe organizational culture is critical for consistency and stability.

CHAPTER
15



Current State for CEOs ●

"WE TALK A LOT internally that hope is not a strategy. It's good to have hope, but you can't really take that to the bank. As leaders, we have to be inspirational. We have to be authentic. The people have to believe that we truly believe what we're saying. And so sometimes when you're just trying to say what you think someone wants to hear, there's a pretty good chance you don't know what they wanna hear. That's the world that I live in. The best thing to do is listen and respond and try to be authentic."

"A LOT OF TIMES, the people who are leading the actual project do not have insight into what the real objectives are for the project, 'cause those come from the C-suite a lot of times, or HR issues and things like that. And when you get down to building something, it becomes very tactical. So, trying to bridge that gap."

Remote Work and Isolation ●

"THERE MAY BE A correlation, if not causality, with the social isolation [and remote work] piece of it. So I think people are less engaged socially. Not reading physical social cues, which is important to interpret interaction. I think that's actually driving hostility now."

"WE DON'T RECOGNIZE HOW hard it is for individual managers to understand the differences between a remote employee and someone who's sitting next to them. The people who are remote, many times by choice, are feeling left out because they don't have that same interaction that other people are getting just by being together. And that's a challenge. How do you begin to talk about that and have people understand that part of their own choices are driving maybe some of their concerns?"

"ONE OF THE CHALLENGES is [that everyone in this session is] of a certain generation where we grew up in the workforce. We were there five days a week. I think in some ways the younger generation wants to work from home, but they don't necessarily quite understand the impact, that they're also missing out on a tremendous amount of learning and development."

"WE'VE UNLEASHED THIS REMOTE work, so we have to get everyone, management, and all your providers, to work a little harder now than we ever had to before to create that. It's a lot more intentional and a lot more sophisticated than has ever been."

"I'VE HAD A NUMBER of people – we don't have a lot of turnover, but when we've had turnover, one of the primary reasons has been because they wanted to interact face-to-face with other people. They wanted to be on-site, and they wanted professional development. This was with our younger people. I'm starting to see a lot more ads for social networking clubs, and it's peeling towards connection. Some come here and hang out, come here and make friends. And I wonder if this might be the beginning of a swing."

"THE CONNECTION TAX THAT you have with people not being together and the costs in terms of weak ties and innovation, which is really my background and what my business is all about. And we know that it's tough to get those water cooler moments with remote companies."

"THE INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE really pining for 'I wanna be 100% remote' in our world are recognizing that they are missing things."

Remote Work Policies ●

"A LOT OF COMPANIES out there are looking for the answer. And there is no one answer. And sometimes that goes over well, sometimes it doesn't go over well."

"[MY COMPANY] IS FULLY back in person five days a week. In a group of a lot of leaders who have remote or hybrid companies. Now, that hasn't been easy for everyone, but it was a call we made a few years ago, and we have really been trying to push forward. We have a lot of flexibility. We've been trying to push flexibility."

QUOTE
15

Remote Work Challenges ●

"WHEN WE ALL USED to go to the office, you'd get that half an hour, 40 minutes of commute time, to listen to your favorite station and prep yourself to get to work. Now, I get a yogurt from the kitchen and I'm in my office in eight seconds. There's no preparation for the day. And there's no relinquishment at the end of the day."

Success and Work Schedules ●

"THE STUDIOS IN [ARCHITECTURE] that are in the office four days, five days are more successful. We are talking with studios that are trying to look at how they can be more prolific. Chase the work, do the work, all that kind of stuff, but there's also bottom-line issues, and that is something that we've seen, that's documented. We can say if you're in the office together more, those studios are actually more financially successful."

"WHEN YOU LOOK AT our strata of companies, the top 10% that are the most successful come in every day. The bottom quartile are ones that have flexible work schedules."



Return to Office ●

"ONE THING ABOUT THIS conversation that I don't think is talked about enough from the employee perspective in this move of companies that had to go remote and that are trying to figure out how to get everybody back, is the cost impact on the employees themselves. I don't see companies that say, 'Everybody should come back and by the way, here's your extra \$15,000 a year we're adding to your pay to compensate for those costs.' Now, they didn't get their salary reduced at the beginning of this whole thing either. So there's both sides of it. But I do think that a big part of the employee resistance comes back when you think of childcare costs and commuting costs and all that stuff."

"IT'S NOT JUST A draconian thing that we're trying to do here. It's because we are actually better when we're together."

Flexibility ●

"**I SEE MY EMAIL** traffic on Fridays go to zero. It's nothing. So people aren't doing it anyway. I wonder if you just don't recognize that as a trend and say, 'You know what? Come in four days, Friday you're off, see you Monday.' And that's it. And then you're building people, they're getting that flexibility, but you're building that culture that you need to get."

Pace of Change ●

"**THE PACE OF CHANGE** is just so fast. It's very challenging."

"**CHAOS. I WAS JUST** remarking to some colleagues and peers recently, there's never been a more chaotic, rapidly changing upside-down time to be a CEO leader in a fast-growing company – at least in my experience since I've been doing this since the mid-nineties. You have these changes in public policy and expectations of employees in the workforce. We've been leveraging technology tools hard to actually make remote work really well, or as well as it possibly can, with high engagement. Many of those tools are really new and evolving every time an upgrade comes out."

"**IT IS JUST AMAZING** to me how quickly trends change. What used to be a trend, you could talk about it for years. Then maybe it came down to months, and now it's weeks and maybe it's even days. A trend that was really interesting yesterday may be completely different tomorrow because of the impact that we're seeing with AI and things like that."

Change and Expectations ●

"**SETTING EXPECTATIONS WITH OUR** people. Whatever direction we're taking right now, we reserve the right to be smarter today than we were yesterday."

One-Size-Fits-All Approach ●

"**WE HAVE A FACTORY** 100% in person. Warehouses, obviously, distribution centers, are in person. Salaried employees are hybrid. I'm totally remote. Other people are not, or a few days a week, and the Germans are 100% in person. So we have all these different cultural cues, and when we talk about what isn't working, imposing one view and all those different functional geographic experience levels to this discussion, that to me is what is not working. Because it's just not feasible."

AI ■

"[WITH AI], I WOULD say where I see more opportunity is actually on the sales and marketing side. The basics can get done faster, and then we can add a level of creativity. It will never be replaced, but it's happening very quickly. People are sending me stuff that I can tell is AI-generated. And I'm like, 'Okay, this is just for an idea.' So it's also, and I hate to sound like an old person, but the younger generation needs to understand that's like a draft that is not output, that is the beginning of creativity. It is not creativity itself, at least not at this point. The tools aren't good enough. But that's a hard conversation to have with someone that's year one."

CHAPTER
15

AI Integration and Preparedness ■

"I WANTED TO BRING my entire company to a baseline of competency on AI so we had a speaker come in. I pulled everybody in for one of our all-hands meetings and trained them all. And we had various levels of competency. Some people were so good that they were teaching Deloitte how to use AI – others had no exposure. And so now we're at the same base level. That's super important, and things are changing so fast."

"THE ABILITY FOR BIG companies to onboard this innovative tech is gonna be huge. I think of Apple, I'm a big Apple fan historically, but wow, they really missed the boat on AI, didn't they? And now they're just like, really paying the cost of that."

"LIVED EXPERIENCE GIVES YOU wisdom and the judgment you use when you're using these digital tools."

Technology and Innovation ■

"[THERE IS] GREAT POTENTIAL in AI and for me, leading a startup. Again, I'm benefiting so much from a lot of the amazing things that large language models can do, or in the realm of audio, that we're in large diffusion models. So in terms of our tech, in terms of sales, wow, we need to spend a lot less money on people to do a lot of things. But that just underscores all the pressures on the people and the extent to which these technologies undermine my value and may take or threaten my job."

"TECHNOLOGICALLY, THE SPEED WITH which we can create better tech for that is incredible. And as a startup, we're building all of our systems compared to my past experience in the corporate world, where you're inheriting – you're trying to improve systems."

Organizational Behavior and Teams ◆

"A POINT ABOUT PROFESSIONALS and their need for training. There's only so much they learn in school. I would say 20%. They learn some skills and some social interaction. Everything else is learned on the job. And it's much harder in our world when you're working as teams. We don't have people to work independently. Almost every single person works as a team. And if that team is together, they're more prolific."

"WE'RE SO SILOED, WHETHER we like it or not, and so we've been doing a lot of organizational behavior work around what does it mean to be a team? How do you even define a team? How do you develop high performance around the teams you have, whether they be functional or project-based, or in my case, the global-local dynamic?"

Innovation and Collaboration ◆

"THE INNOVATION PIECE IS one of the things, frankly, that we are struggling with right now. I believe it's because people are not in the office, not collaborating, not just brainstorming. It doesn't happen. I think the collaborative aspect and innovation really have suffered."

"WE HAVE A DOZEN plus patents, not a single one of them was done in a scheduled meeting. These were all from something else that happened. And conversations that were unplanned and yeah, we have a lot more planned meetings and a lot less out of the box thinking, I think, in those meetings."

Working in Different Time Zones ◆

"WHAT ARE SOME THINGS that work or are challenges...with the time zone differences? I don't think that's well understood in terms of what companies can do."

The Workplace, Connection, and Collaboration ■

"PEOPLE ARE 65% MORE likely to stay at their jobs if they have a friend at work. So, breaking down all that noise, what have we evolved to be over the past, whatever million years, and what are the basic things that we can provide at the campuses, to our companies, to our investments that satisfy those basic things? (My organization is) regressing a little, doing a lot more research. We're thinking a lot harder about it than we ever have, but really trying to break it down: What is happiness? What is contentment? What are the things that are gonna make people comfortable and enthusiastic for the workplace?"

"[HAVING A REMOTE-FIRST COMPANY] is absolutely not cheaper than having a headquarters because we're doing regional get-togethers. We bring everybody to Berkeley or Southern California for three or four days, once a year, if not twice a year. We do team off-sites, probably quarterly, where they're going in and say, flying into Denver, and then that Denver person's coordinating everything. And then we're constantly encouraging people to do company-funded get-togethers in their local micro markets. We're in like 49 states. There are places where there are clusters of 4, 5, 6 people. We're encouraging them to get together. That's something that has been interesting to me. It's not cheaper 'cause we're funding all of that to try to get at this issue of connectivity and coaching and mentoring."

CHAPTER
15

"POST COVID, IT WAS all about digital connection. 'Okay, we respect hybrid, so let's figure out the digital team format.' And now they want a complement that's physical. So, is it these hubs? Is it coworking spaces? Is it saying 'Everyone northeast, baby, and here we are, we're gonna be together.' That's what I'm trying to figure out. But that to me is the biggest shift."



Workplace Culture ■

"IN OUR WORLD, THERE'S very little you can do to have [an employee] stay forever. They have the ability to move to other places, to move other directions, up and laterally. As leaders, you can't obsess over something that you can't change. So how do you work with that? How do you understand that there is, at a certain level, there are gonna be people that are gonna be moving and very valuable people are gonna be moving in and out. And I think about how you quickly reinforce culture and internal processes so that it does not become onerous on either side. The people joining or the people training the people joining are gonna be important."

"THE BIGGER GESTALT TO me is the cultural overlay and how does that feed in and how do you build a strong and vibrant culture given hybrid work, given AI."



Purpose ■

"PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR purpose. They want to have something that they can get behind. Does the company have an overriding purpose? Is my manager, my direct manager, supportive of all that stuff where I can have some growth? Do I have a place where all that can be accomplished?"

"DOES THAT PHYSICAL SPACE manifest the purpose and core values? Does it express it in a way that connects to people and their desire for that? I'd say everybody wants to have a higher purpose, in some way, whether they can articulate that or not. But I think the new employees really care about that. How do you create the touch points for them, whether it's virtual or in the office to reinforce that connection? It's probably both."

Diversity in the Workplace ■

"IN PREVIOUS RESEARCH WE had done, we found that 80% of people form significant relationships with people who are a different race or a different age than them when they're in the workplace. And when you start to look at that, I think there are some very significant larger-scale social impacts."

"YOU'RE GONNA WORK WITH all sorts of different cultures and sexes and all the plus and you're like, 'Oh yeah, these are reasonable, nice people.' But if you're remote, it's easy to be prejudiced or upset 'cause you don't get any of the rest of the communication that happens in person."

Contradictory Needs ■

"THERE'S A LOT OF contradictory information. There's a lot of dualities that I do think we as leaders are having to navigate constantly, and they are shifting that ground all the time as we go. When we're talking about big issues that this group of leaders is facing when we think about the future of work, that shifting ground, that need to be agile, that need to understand that there are going to be contradictory dualities in the landscape and what people are asking for, what they need. Even sometimes I see they're asking for totally contradictory things."

Navigating Uncertainty From the Federal Government 🔒

"THE SHEER PACE OF change, the number of initiatives that you have to work on because you've got a number of strategic initiatives you need to act on to move the business forward, while at the same time being in reactive mode because of changes coming outta Washington or wherever. Not to get political, a big thing for us is tariffs and how the pendulum has swung back and forth. It's very hard to know what we should do there. Regarding ICE, we employ a fair amount of Hispanic workers. From their perspective, it's top of mind. So we have to be able to calm the waters and communicate and be very clear on how we need to address that if and when that situation arises."

"THERE'S DEFINITELY A LOT OF uncertainty coming outta Washington. I was reading that we're already short 400,000 manufacturing jobs. That's only gonna get worse. So I think on one hand, we as a country are gonna be facing a shortage of those types of jobs. Most of that automation has already happened, but we will continue. But I think there's gonna be a shortage there."

"WE ARE RIGHT NOW experiencing social upheaval, and we go through this every few years, right? That's a fact. But this is gonna have some long-lasting implications."

"WHAT WE TEND TO dislike is a lack of direction. And so the whiplash makes it very difficult to make decisions, and therefore clients are doing things like waiting. We're looking for opportunities where the waiting is. So where people are not investing, we're looking for places where they might be."

"IN ALL OF THIS change, where are those opportunities to really have an impact? There's a lot of disruption right now in a lot of different industries, and yet huge opportunities to harness an entirely new generation. We were talking a little bit previously about this new generation that is so facile using a lot of new tools to get their ideas out there, and they're not holding back in terms of what they'd like to see change. So I think there's a huge amount of opportunity in the world out there. I think there's a lot of creativity. I think there's a lot of interest in taking people's efforts and, again, from a design perspective, having a positive impact."



The Office and the Physical Environment ●

"WE SPEND 80% OF our money on people, we only spend 10% on real estate. If real estate is impeding people's performance, that's dumb. We should spend more on inexpensive things."

"WE DELIBERATELY CREATED SPACES that were more informal, like couches and that type of thing, to try and encourage people to go back into that space and collaborate. Then at the same time, we've put in those telephone pods, if you need private space, to various degrees. We've increased the density of our cubes 'cause people frankly don't need as big a cube as they used to have."

"DOES THAT PHYSICAL SPACE manifest the purpose and core values? Does it express it in a way that connects to people and their desire for that?"

"PHYSICAL SPACES, AS MUCH as we'd like to say they're agile and they can change, they don't really change that much."

"VERY FEW THINK THAT the need for space is going away. That's not the use of space, micro districts and things like that; it's not just about how much a piece of real estate costs to rent. Where is the real estate? Will my people have something to do when they leave the office?"

"AMENITY SPACES WITHIN THE tenant space is a very big thing now."



Talent and Skills

“WHAT I LOOK FOR in people now is changing a lot. I’m now valuing extremely high EQ way more than even some technical skills and stuff. And I’m also valuing curiosity and speed of movement way more than I ever did 10 years ago. Because I find that those people who have those attributes are the ones who are helping navigate this crazy stuff we’ve talked about.”

“ROSTERS IN ANY PROFESSIONAL sport generally have enough salary flexibility to lock up the top one or two players, but not the three, four, five who truly make the difference between whether you win a championship or not. And so you have to get the most out of those players. You got ‘em for two or three years or whatever. You gotta figure out how you get the most out of them in that time. And then the other piece to me that triggers is like the idea of developing your own talent and bringing people in early and then building that bench like the rookies that you’re gonna hold onto.”

Learning

“WITH PROFESSIONALS, A LOT of your learning is through observation. And we’re seeing a difference between fully on-site workers and people who are in the studios for three, four days a week. They’re growing more mature in their careers. And it’s hard to explain to somebody that this individual is advancing quicker than you are because they are showing skills and exhibiting skills that are evolving and growing. And they’re getting those by something that is not prescribed by the company. It’s because of their interactions with people of all other makes. And I think it’s gonna be a challenge going forward.”

“WE HAVE TO BE a learning organization to bring up people in the design architecture field. And we’re a client service field, professional services firm, so we have clients to serve and we have team members that we need to constantly be growing and developing in order to have those interpersonal skills because it is a professional services organization.”

The Future State

SUMMARY: Leaders, charged with preparing their organizations for an uncertain future, face growing pressure to adapt to rapid technological and social change. Traditional models of leadership, talent development, and organizational design no longer align with a workplace shaped by AI, hybrid work, and rising employee expectations. Many describe the need to learn faster, embed agility in their teams, and balance innovation with well-being. While some express optimism about AI's potential, others see it as an existential threat to jobs, equity, and human connection. As linear career paths give way to skills-based and gig-oriented models, leaders view empathy, culture, and clarity of purpose as essential anchors in a time of constant disruption.

LANDSCAPE
15



Preparing for the Future ●

"FOR ME PERSONALLY, I'M planning my retirement and hence the transition within my team. So I'm thinking a lot about succession planning and really building a legacy so that when I move on, we've got the right elements in place in terms of the right people, the right software. We're beginning to look into AI and then leverage that. It's about ensuring we have the right culture and are focused on the right things."

"WE GOTTA LEARN TO surf the wave."

"SO I THINK PREPARING for the future is just not being afraid of it. Sounds trite, maybe, but I am very optimistic."

"FOCUSING ON THE CORE values, mission, teamwork, connectivity, culture, those things 'cause then no matter what happens around us, these are the things we can control."

"IN TIMES LIKE THESE of heightened uncertainty, [we are doing] everything from living in other countries to multiple options in that respect. The same with hiring plans as well, looking at alternatives to conventional safe bets like the US. What I expect to happen in the future is so hard to say because we're in times of such uncertainty, and my sense of history, too, is that often when things are at their worst, you also have the opportunity for the positive."

"I HAVE TO BE way more proactive about learning. It's not just absorbing and creating adjacencies like, 'Gimme the opportunity to do that.' I've been trying to go as deep as I possibly can on AI to try to figure out what it actually means for our organization. What do I need to understand about it? What does the organization need to understand about it? That's one example, but I feel like I need to learn and grow a lot faster than I ever did before to stay up with what's happening."

"MAKING MYSELF TAKE VACATION is one way. Putting your oxygen mask on first so you can take care of others.... Encouraging all the leaders in the organization to be taking care of their own mental health and wellbeing."

"IT'S REALLY INVESTING IN technology, really investing in people and making sure we're all taking care of our own wellbeing. 'Cause it's gonna be tough, a lot of decision making out there."

AI and Job Elimination ■

"I THINK WE'RE GONNA have a bunch of college graduates who are gonna struggle to find employment and those entry-level jobs, which are so formative when you start your career and you learn, I worked in public accounting-type firms and consulting firms. You learn so much from that, and those jobs are gonna be eliminated and you can't suddenly go from ground zero up to, 'Hey, I'm the CEO using AI to plan all this.'"

"IF WE'RE GUTTING MID-LEVEL management, because of the ROI on AI and high tech eliminating the middle, we've now gutted wisdom and experience. That's the thing, you need to actually be able to make good decisions around what you're being presented with."

Threats from Technology ■

"TO ME, [AI] IS an existential threat. I think it's gonna be a lot of power concentrated in a very limited number of hands. It's what people have risen up against a little in the current environment. I think it's only gonna get worse. This feeling about elites and control. That is gonna have a major impact on us as a society. And we talked about workplace violence and that feeling of being completely disempowered. 'Not in control of my life. My life is dictated by this.' I definitely try to stay positive, but I definitely have doom and gloom moments. There's some massive challenges with this, and it's a little bit different from the Industrial Revolution, or the computers, you could see that really enabling things. I think this truly can replace, not initially, but I think ultimately it can truly replace a lot of what is done by humans today."

"HISTORICALLY, WE HAD BOUNDARIES in terms of how we relaxed. And we relaxed in nature, we relaxed going out, socializing, whatever, but relaxation now is on the very same tool that we used to work. So that boundary is getting blurred. And it is possible that it also has a negative impact."

Opportunities with AI ■

"THE PACE OF CHANGE and the plummeting marginal cost of intelligence, obviously, there's tremendous opportunity in that. For solo entrepreneurs, the one-person mega companies, the speed with which we can engineer better things, whether that's eliminating disease or solving some of the other big problems. Obviously, there's tremendous potential in all of that for the good."

"AT THE END OF the day, [AI] is a tool. It's clay. We shape it. It's having the tools to figure out how to shape the clay to get the outcome we want."

AI and Inequality ■

"WE'VE NOW GOT THESE large language learning models. We've now got access to really wonderful technology. But I am worried that not everybody's gonna have that access and the implications of that. And then I'm concerned that the few jobs in big corporate America are gonna be given to those at the blue chip level—the Ivies, the insular class, fundamentally. And that access to these other things will not be available potentially, and so I think then the only real path, the primary path to wealth, has been entrepreneurship."

Remote Work and AI ■

"WHAT WE'RE DOING BY reinforcing so much remote work, not necessarily bringing people together in these day-to-day work activities, is reinforcing mental health issues, that sense of isolation, that lack of connection. So that we're allowing AI to be an even faster, deeper, more existential threat."

CHAPTER
15



AI and Disruption ■

"AI IS GONNA BE a massive disruptor to how we work. And I think it's got some positives, but I think it's got a lot of challenges as well."

"IF WE'RE GUTTING THE lower levels of our workforce because we're replacing them with AI, then those who are actually managers, it's probably gonna get more exclusive. It's probably gonna be the guys in the Ivies and who know people. So if I'm gonna hire a senior executive, it's probably gonna be a blue-chip person who's in the network. And so I think there's gonna be some real societal disruption potentially if we aren't really thoughtful about this."

"MY TWO SONS ARE 23 and 21, and they're worried and they don't know what to do. They don't know what career to choose, that's not gonna get eaten up by AI."

Relationship of Different Generations to Work ●

"OUR PARENTS USED TO be [at an organization] maybe 25 years. And us, maybe we've been there 10. For [the next generation], it's gonna be every couple of years. Every year. I think they're gonna have a gig economy. There's gonna be a lot less certainty, a lot fewer ties to one employer. Because I think jobs will be, 'Yeah, you got a job today, and then AI has eliminated it.' Okay, now what do you do? You gotta constantly reinvent yourself."

"I EXPECT MY KIDS to have multiple careers because...they're gonna learn differently and they're gonna learn faster than I do in the tools needed for today. They might be able to, instead of going up the ladder, go [vertically].... So I think that's the other thing, the space needs to not just be flexible because of this use, but because talent and teams will evolve more than when I started in my career, which could be really great or very scary for my kids. We're thinking about that a lot, not being so wed to single individuals, but building teams and dynamics and cultures that can flex as the skillset and competencies require."

"I DON'T THINK THE expectations of what a career looks like are going to be the same for our generation. Up or out. Not at all the expectations of the next generation. And I think there's something a little scary and wonderful in that, and what that is going to look like as the younger generation defines their careers, maybe even in a more entrepreneurial way and a more empowered way."

Dealing with Challenges ●

"THE STOCKDALE PARADOX. JAMES Stockdale was one of the captives along with John McCain in the Hanoi Hilton. They were obviously desperate, didn't know what to do, and he came up and said, 'You can only control what you can control.' It's really too much optimism. Those are the ones that really suffered.... Being empathetic, but being realistic, is leveling with people about the challenges. And you can spin around and worry about all that stuff, or we can control things that we can control. I've been thinking a lot about that and how to deploy that within the employees."

LEARNING
15

Choice in Work Arrangements ●

"FOR ME, THE METRIC is if people wanna show up, then it's valuable, and that's been working really well. So they opt in and they opt out. I think it's possible the future of work may be more about control within certain parameters, certain givens."

Evolving Work Demands and Models ◆

"AGILITY. I THINK THAT it is going to be less, a decision is made, and then it is stuck with, but more decisions are made to allow more agility in how we move and how we organize our teams. That's something I see for the future, new models of structures that are more agile, that allow teams to flex in different ways, that may allow spaces to flex in different ways."

"ONE OF THE QUESTIONS that needs to be answered is how to get flexibility. What does that really mean? In the future, even when you're clear on the direction of your organization and what your organization needs, how to meaningfully build in flexibility and equity of experience so that it's not stagnant. It's not one place, five days a week for 40 years, and you get a gold watch at the end of it.... How do we create a new kind of model that isn't the same old model, but that can get the benefit of what we need, which is more in-person engagement?"

"THE WAY THAT EGG got scrambled with COVID, you had established workplaces and everything. They get scrambled, and everybody gets thrown into having to be remote for a while. It seems to me like we're in this settling out phase now, and that if I were thinking forward like a few years from now, I think you're gonna see more companies whose workplace and their culture are very much defined by how they're gonna answer that question. And people will self-select into it."



Talent Development

"I AM DOUBLING DOWN on talent development specifically, more competency-based rather than the career ladder, because I think that's gonna be different."

"WHAT IS THE TALENT we need for tomorrow and not just the talent we have today? That's been a very big focus of ours. 'Cause it is different. What do we expect to happen in the future? I'm not really sure. I just know it won't be yesterday."

Gig Economy

"ABOUT THE GIG ECONOMY, I think there is a lot of entrepreneurial spirit in younger people. I've been on panels with millennial entrepreneurs who are happy to be doing three things all at once, their gig and their other gig and then their side gig. But I think there is something that I wonder about, particularly in the US, maybe other countries have it a little bit more under control, but the sort of social infrastructure that would allow for this non-singular job to actually exist. You know the country's built so much on that fabric of one job providing that stability, that social stability, that healthcare, financial stability. Those systems need to change in some way or there is something that's gonna come in and fill the vacuum. I'm in LA and so I know a lot of people in the entertainment industry; it's always been a gig economy, but they have their builds that then provide some of that stability for them. And if there's going to be some version of that, that could fill in some of that vacuum as the structure of work shifts. When I think about my kids, what's gonna be there for them and what are the challenges? And then what are those opportunities? I don't know what it's going to be, but I would hope that something will come in to fill in some of that gap to allow these new models. Because I don't think the old models are going to be sustaining everybody. It's not possible."

Leading with Empathy

"WE HAD SOMEONE COME in and talk to our leadership group about leading with empathy. This is probably obvious to all of you, but it was a little bit of a learning experience for us. The coach came in and said sometimes empathy is delivering the hard truth. It's not just agreeing with people and making sure they feel good about themselves and their lives. Talk to them. How can they be better professionals? And I think that's something that we need to do, we need to not lose touch with it in the future, especially if we have those with experience and need to be able to have honest discussions with those who are just developing their experience."

Participants' Takeaways

CULTURE

- Using the power of culture, values, and purpose to drive connection and employee engagement. A focus on culture is key.
- Human connection will play a big role. Our people are better when they are together. Showing up is really important.

LEADERSHIP

- Leaders are genuinely concerned about being empathetic. They want to empathize with people's experiences and focus on wellbeing.
- Leaders must provide their employees with clarity and the answer they need, even if the answer is unpopular.
- Control what you can control. You can control your mission, values and clarity of communication.
- There is a community of struggle. Leadership is more complicated than it used to be. There are so many factors to consider now and different cultural focuses.
- From a hiring perspective, you're looking for adaptability and curiosity.

CHAPTER
15



CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY

- Trends are not as clear or directional as they used to be. The expectation of experience is changing. Expertise is changing.
- The pace of change made things like experience less important than it used to be. There is now a larger focus on skill sets.

THE FUTURE

- The future will probably not be what we think it is today. It will be influenced by something we cannot conceive of.

TECHNOLOGY

- Who is going to be affected by technology? Where is the squeeze going to happen? It is going to be the middle management. It is going to be very hard to get to that level.
- We do not know a lot about AI and the potential for bad.

Business Executives and Investors

BUSINESS EXECUTIVES are responsible for managing the strategy, operations, and performance of an organization or division to achieve defined goals. The field emphasizes leadership, resource allocation, and decision-making across business functions such as finance, marketing, operations, risk management, investment, and human resources. Business executives translate organizational vision into action by developing plans, leading teams, and ensuring accountability for results.

INVESTORS investigate potential targets for investment and allocate financial resources to companies, especially at start-up phase, with the objective of generating returns over time. The field focuses on assessing risk, value, and opportunity through financial analysis, market research, and portfolio management.

SANDBOX 16 THEMES



PARTICIPANTS

MARTIN BABINEC

Founder/Managing Partner,
UpVentures Capital

STEVE CARNAVALE

Founding Partner,
Blue Ash Ventures

JEROME ENGEL

General Partner,
Monitor Venture Partners,
Adjunct Professor, Emeritus,
Haas School of Business,
University of California, Berkeley

STEPHEN ETTER

Professional Faculty,
Haas School of Business,
University of California, Berkeley

PETER MOLLOY

Lecturer, Haas School of Business,
University of California, Berkeley

The Current State

SUMMARY: Driven by AI disruption, shifting labor dynamics, and evolving employee expectations, business executives and investors navigate the business landscape with significant concerns regarding the effective operation of new and established businesses. Traditional experience-based hiring is giving way to skills-based models, with soft skills like collaboration and communication becoming increasingly important. Remote and hybrid work provide flexibility but challenge culture, training, and tacit learning, while experiments like four-day workweek provide alternative work arrangements to consider. Generational divides are widening, as Millennials and Gen Z prioritize mission and values, while leaders struggle with return-to-office mandates they themselves resist. Looking ahead, corporations may rely more on part-time, skills-based workers, making cultural and values alignment essential for cohesion.

SUMMARY
16



Current State of Business Executives and Investors

"IN MY VENTURE WORLD today, not only have I made investments in companies where I've never met the people in person before, but I don't have a single company that has an office and all the companies have their senior employees literally scattered all over the world. That would've been unheard of 10 years ago. And so the world has radically moved on and I think it's important to understand what we've lost and try to figure out how to get it."

"I SPEND A LOT of time watching and seeing how my people are affected and how I can transition us to the next stage when the world takes its due course."

“ONE THING THAT’S BECOME clear out of my investing is that we have to move away from an experience-based hiring and categorizing of work, and we have to move to a skills-based taxonomy because the experiences we had in the labels just don’t mean anything anymore and it’s hard to evaluate people’s skills in today’s world based on what they did yesterday. And the one thing the research shows is that, if you want to call them the vertical or the task, skills that are typically required in a lot of jobs, especially the non-trade jobs, go away rapidly with AI. But what stays are the transferable skills, the soft skills that we require around collaboration, communication, et cetera. The research shows this youngest generation are worse at those skills than ever. Now, you might argue nobody was ever very good at it because that was always the complaint, but now it’s even worse. And so we have this opportunity to lean more into making those soft skills, the essential skills we teach even more around.”

Investing in AI ■

“TECHNOLOGY INVESTING IS TOUGHER than ever because of the capital requirements, et cetera. What I see in the venture firms I advise is that everybody’s moved off of platforms and into vertical solutions because you can’t afford the platforms. You can’t really move the dime when people are investing \$10 billion.”

“AI INVESTING IS A lot like the environment. Small entrepreneurs can’t afford to invest in capital intensive power plants and things like that, and it feels like that with these large language models and such. That’s why people have gone to vertical solutions because you find little niches that you can invest in.”

Agentic Technology ■

“AS I’M INVESTING NOW, not just in AI, but in agentic technology, and I see where this is going and it’s not tomorrow, it’s today. We have a tsunami that’s hit. We have an existential crisis. Kids are coming outta school and are not getting jobs. I would suggest the universities are full of people that are gonna be unemployed, that unemployment rates are gonna soar. There’s gonna be a radical restructuring of everything that looks like work in so many different ways that talking about this other stuff feels like rearranging the chairs of the Titanic.”

Technology and Employee Knowledge and Skills ■

“AS AI COMES ON, a lot of the things that make a profession in their unique knowledge, the unique judgment, becomes trade-like. There are tools to deploy, so as the professions will evolve, of course there will still be medicine and law, et cetera, but they’ll be different and there’ll be more subordinate-degree people deployed and fewer elegant specialists. And those elegant specialists will be the true professionals and everybody else is gonna be in the trades.”

"IF YOU GOT ENTERPRISE, you got unions. And when you have enterprise, you have the distinction between capital and labor. And this intellectual engine becomes capital. But professions, a lawyer, moves from law firm to law firm, you have that model. A doctor moves from hospital to hospital. Is it fair that my medical knowledge goes with me, my agent goes with me versus being in the public domain or versus being in the enterprise. Who owns what?"

"ONE PARTICULAR COMPANY WE'RE invested in actually can tell the data structure level, what's personal and what's company-related and can parse it out. So when you leave a company, you take your personal stuff, but you leave the corporate stuff."

"THE OTHER THING THAT I think is interesting about this culture conversation is the historic view, culture eats strategy. It's very powerful. It's very hard to change, but we're now investing in agentic technology that we believe can change it more rapidly. It's more changeable now because the agentic technology moves faster. And so I think culture becomes something that's new and more powerful and different. We can use it and activate it more than we could in the past, and that's one of the things I'm excited about."

Technology's Effect on Employment ■

"WHEREVER AI FALLS IN the next 36 months, it will change the dynamics of the workplace. If you go to Blackstone, they have fed in every underwriting for the last 50 years, and they don't need analysts and associates to turn it. They can have an investment committee memo of 40 pages prepared by AI and ready for discussion in about 10 minutes. The world will change. I'm pretty old fashioned and I've used it over the last month or two, feeding in a series of things and it gets about 90%. So it does a lot of the analysts and associate work, but you still need the elderly men and women here on the line to evaluate."

"I WENT THROUGH STRAIGHT from college, joined Nestle, moved up with Nestle, and then got into entrepreneurship. But the thing is, a lot of these students aren't gonna have that kind of pathway. So I think, what am I gonna be teaching them about what's going on? So it is a dilemma. You've gotta embrace AI, but are there gonna be jobs out there? I don't know. They're talking about 50% of all entry level jobs going in the next one to five years. That's gonna be staggering if that actually happens."

"THERE'S GONNA BE A lot of dislocation and unemployment and underemployment, and I think there's gonna be a radical shifting between the, if you want to call it, professions versus the trades. The professions are gonna be going away in a lot of ways. The irony, I think, is that the people who've created this agentic movement are gonna mostly be outta jobs and the vocations that have suffered, in this income gap, are gonna be the ones that are gonna be much more employable."



"AND I THINK ONE of the differences here is that it's not just the have-nots that are paying the price. We've had this deal where the haves, if they invest in their kids' education, they will end up in a good life, a better life than they have. That entire myth is about to explode. It's not just that they're not gonna get better jobs, they're not gonna get jobs at all. They're not gonna be in careers, they're not gonna have paths. That's all in the process of blowing up. And it's unclear what the answer is, but you're gonna have the haves who are gonna be as much in crisis as the have-nots, and that's part of what's gonna create this different economic turmoil, I predict."

Return to Office ●

"ON THE REMOTE PART, a lot of companies have said, 'I want everybody back at work.' There was this whole thing back in COVID times and now things have moved on."

"BOTH MY KIDS ARE 100% remote. They love it."

Remote Work and Training ●

"I FIND THAT THE new culture of remote working does a disservice to training and development of the employee. There's something about Zoom and remote working that doesn't get the employee trained – there's some nuances and non-AI knowledge missing and that comes from interaction and almost, pardon me if I could, the little zebra follows the big zebra, the little elephant follows the big elephant there. There's certainly a whole different culture. What kind of culture could you build via the Zoom? I find that efficiency suffers greatly. I find that we don't build relationships there."

Work Arrangements ●

"I WAS READING AN article in the Wall Street Journal about the four day week. They had done a study that said that 245 businesses were evaluated, 88,700 workers. After the study was done, only 20 of the companies, so 20 out of 245 companies went back to a five day week. And they found that they were just as productive with a four day week as they were with a five day week, and therefore the employees had less stress and they had more time."

"I HAVE SONS AND they are in tech. And they have totally unstructured lives 24/7. It doesn't mean they're not working hard. They think they're working hard, but the stress comes from the unstructuredness of life. In other words, they're working around the world, in all sorts of time zones, so they essentially can create free time slots whenever they want."

Remote Work and Legal Issues ●

"LEGAL FAUX PAX COMES much easier via email, text, and Zoom than they do sitting across each other in a conference room or even in a closed office.... I often ask my students, 'Would you send this to grandma or your mother when we're sending messages.'"

Office Culture ■

"I LIKED HAVING A daylong meeting on culture. Every six months I'd get the team together and we'd go over different aspects of how the culture is gonna be implemented. It's great to actually recruit on that basis, but you've gotta keep on communicating about it all the time. And so it's nice having everybody in the office at that time to go over everything because you then find out who isn't really 100% behind you, and then you can bring them on board slowly as you get through that. Culture is a really important part of driving the company forward. And so one of the aspects that I always used to do was I said, 'When I come into work, I want to have fun.' And that kind of surprised everybody in the office. You better have work-life balance as well."

Developing Relationships ■

"I WAS JUST COACHING some staff today. The task was to figure out how the co-investment partner feels and what's their motivation. And they go, 'What, do I send 'em an email?' I'm going, 'No, you've gone to a ball game, the ballet. You've had lunch or breakfast. Their significant other, if they have children.' And so you have developed a relationship so you can ask on the side."

"WE HIRED A REMOTE CFO for one of my VC companies. They lived in Minnesota. And so what I had them do was spend the first six weeks at headquarters and then visit each location for two weeks at a time. And after we committed 90 days of relationship building, culture building, and knowing who the people were, you can go sit in Minneapolis-St. Paul the rest of your life and it doesn't matter."

Episode
16



Generational Differences and Expectations ■

"IF WE REALLY WANT to move the needle for the future, it really means focusing on millennials and Gen Z 'cause the opportunity to move the needle on the workplace near-term for the baby boomers and Generation X, that window is rapidly closing. So the big changes that are gonna take time to unfold are more likely going to benefit the coming generations, millennials and Gen Z and beyond."

"YOU ALMOST HAVE TO take it generation by generation. With the young generation, what some people are calling it, 'the mission generation,' these young kids are very principled and they really care more deeply about their life, goals, and expectations than ever. And they're just saying 'no' to a lot of this. At the more elderly end, people are also saying, 'Is this how I want to spend my time at work? Why am I bothering to come to work if I'm just gonna sit on Zoom all day anyway?' And I've got good friends who are senior executives who are saying at the same time, 'I want everybody to come back to work, but I don't want to come back to work.' They haven't reconciled it for themselves. It's one of many storylines that are really completely upended and it's not reconciled. And a bunch of big egos who want the world the way they want it, which is not aligned with the way people want it to be."

"I SENSE A SOCIAL shift in the millennial and Gen Z for interest in working in an environment where they feel connected to mission—be it a company or nonprofit... These days I do a lot of stuff in nonprofits too. I started a few nonprofits and recruited teams that work remotely and in person and built community from the bottom up. I understand the workplace challenges to do that. I think there's a tremendous amount of opportunity for growing, be it a smaller organization or, trying to influence those that can be more nimble, if they're larger, to provide opportunities for people to control their destiny while still meeting the needs of the organization. And it's the connection to mission that I think we have a lot of latitude to put time, energy, resources, and commitment. Hiring people based on their values and then training people on their skills."

"WHEN WE LOOK AT the younger generations, I believe the data also supports the notion that an increasing number of them want more control over their destiny. Entrepreneurship is not for everyone. But I think there's a macro trend of the expression of interest. Of course it's one thing to say, when they're in college or in their twenties, that someday they wanna be an entrepreneur. It's another thing to actually do it, 'cause it's not for everyone. But the data is saying that there is a growing interest in it and, to some extent, participation, 'cause the barriers to be an entrepreneur are getting lower."

The Labor Market ◆

“PEOPLE WERE ‘QUIET QUITTING.’

That was all about two years ago or maybe three years ago. That’s history. Everything is much tighter in the labor market now.”

Entrepreneurship ◆

“I’M WONDERING ABOUT

ENTREPRENEURSHIP. More people will actually go into entrepreneurship because the pathways are blocked in other areas.”

Power Imbalance in Work Arrangements 🔒

“**IT’S JUST THAT THE** economics have changed, the balance of power.... Starbucks [corporate offices] are in an existential crisis right now because they’re one of many companies who said, ‘We want to come back to work,’ and the employers are saying, ‘No, we don’t.’ And so there’s a huge fight going on.”

“**THIS IS A CRISIS** at the highest levels of employees. In other words, it’s not about the hourly employee or the trades. It’s not about the people who know how to do something. It’s the people that make decisions on what to do. Those people are not coming. And they really shouldn’t come back because the way we work has changed.”

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities 🏠

“**THIS ISSUE IS ADDRESSED** by a guy named Naka. I just wanna point him out. He’s Japanese. It goes back to the eighties when we all thought the Japanese miracle was remarkable. They did a lot of studies in terms of what they do, and there were a couple things, like good enough for now – that was a management technique. The thing Naka studied was tacit learning. So tacit learning is the technical term, if you will, for the interactivity, the things you learn not by being told or written in a memo. You can’t even define it. They happen between people and among people without definition.”

“**CULTURAL ALIGNMENT OR MISSION** alignment or values alignment, somewhere in there is an asset that you can build people on. It’s not maybe so important to have skill alignment. If we’re gonna have this rapid evolution of skills, but we wanna have some consistency in the labor force, so that we can have this tacit learning between people over time, you need something in common, and it could be values or culture, broadly speaking.”

“**THERE’S A LOT OF** structure that can be put into not only the assessment process when you’re looking to hire people, but also building into decisions made in the workplace, even post-hire, that have to do with identifying values, screening on those values, and rewarding people. Removing people based on non-value fit, for example, can make all the difference in having a team of people that are marching in the same direction because of the commonality of those values, not only in the initial hire, but throughout all the decisions that get made in HR throughout the workforce.”



Corporations as Collections of Assets ◆

"I HAVE THIS RADICAL view that one day corporations will simply be collections of assets and, mostly, they won't have people working for them. They'll be hiring lots of part-time people that come and go that are skills-based and corporations will not look the way they look today. I don't know if that's in 10 years or in a hundred years, but I think that's where we're generally going."

Mental Health ●

"I AM ABOUT TO close on a mental health deal. Talk about an industry that's gonna grow. I'd like to have the solution to that issue in addition to having nice IRR investments, and so we're booking something in mental health."

The Future State

SUMMARY: Driven by rapid advances in AI and automation, leaders are rethinking what it means to prepare for the future of work. Adaptability, emotional intelligence, and continuous learning are replacing traditional credentials as the most valued traits in hiring and leadership. Emerging agentic technologies promise to transform how individuals and organizations operate, while raising new concerns about identity, ownership, and equity. As automation accelerates across industries, the displacement of blue-collar jobs and widening class divides are renewing debate over universal basic income and how societies will define human value in an increasingly digital economy.

Preparing for the Future

"I SPEND A LOT of energy around trying to build community and do things from a bottom-up perspective, including supporting entrepreneurs."

"I HAVE ACCELERATED MY learning process to understand AI. I do not have to be a programmer. I do not have to make it work, but I need to be able to have enough understanding so I know its capabilities and I can teach it in the classroom and I can use it in the workplace."

"I'M GONNA CONTINUE TO hire people the same way. I've always hired people and I hire, to use a sports analogy, athletes. I don't hire pitchers, catchers, first basemen, and shortstops. I'm looking for people that have an ability to adapt, who are lifelong learners, who are coachable, driven, who have a heart and emotional impact. You wanna have fun and enjoy your work."

"I'M NOW PUTTING IN a class completely on AI and I'm getting the head of the library to come and assist me in doing this – all this to do with entrepreneurship and feasibility analysis. Instead of pouring over data, we can do it with AI, where you can find out the market size, the customer, et cetera, et cetera. It's a great tool. Two years ago I was saying to my students, 'Don't use AI, use critical thinking.' Last year I said, 'Forget it, we're all going AI. Whatever you want to do in AI just let us know that you're using AI.'"

The Future of Technology

"THE INTERNET IS MOVING to voice-based agentic technology. I think you'll see within a couple of years almost everything we do today is gonna change and agentic is a whole new game."

"THE ENTERPRISE LEVEL VERSUS consumer level economy. How that is adjusted to the digital economy, maybe there are analogies of how AI might roll through and you can make some predictions that have analogies with the Industrial Revolution, capital concentration, organizational labor."

"WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT culture, if you don't have the right people or the right culture, heart or mission and objective, then you're gonna utilize this technology in not such a constructive way."

Interview
16



Agentic Technology ■

“WHAT HAPPENS WHEN VERY soon each person is not only themselves, but also their agent when you hire, and it's proprietary. [Someone] has his own digital twin or whatever you wanna call it—a partner that is yours. So when I hire you, I not only hire you, but I have to evaluate your proprietary set of historical questions you've ever asked and shaped that you bring with you to the job. And I can't go and buy that anywhere, it's yours. And then that's built over years. So you have decades of experience embedded in all your questions you've ever asked—good and bad are embedded in an agent that is your colleague. What are you hiring?”

“I'VE GOT A COMPANY that's doing that right now, and the company's developing agents for teams. So agents will have agents and they will talk to each other. That will not involve humans.”

Technology and Blue Collar Jobs ■

“WHAT ABOUT THE TRADES? What happens when the robots come in a large way and start replacing the trades? What does that mean to work in the economy and the world?”

“ONE REAL EXAMPLE THAT we've been looking at is the janitorial space. Think hospitals around the country, think Home Depot, think Walmart. In the next 12 months, they will all be cleaned by robots. They will not be cleaned by employees. It's interesting to think about robotics. Automotives have robotics. As we start to order our coffee in the morning, the waste basket gets emptied and the floors get cleaned. There will be an enormous amount of robotics in our lives.”

“THE PEOPLE WE ALWAYS said we were gonna retrain in the 1980s with digitalization. We said we were gonna retrain this generation and that never happened. That's why we have Trump. I don't mean to bring Trump into this discussion, but you have this class distinction. It's gonna be heightened with capital concentration. Who's gonna empty that waste basket? It costs \$10,000 to build that automated waste basket. It's the old Industrial Revolution.”

“WE HAVE SOME GROUPS of people that are working on [quantifying skills], and the objective is to take all of the skills that people have and actually quantify them. CEOs say people are our greatest asset in our company, but you can't find it on the balance sheet. We actually think we're reaching a moment in time where we can quantify people's contributions, put it on the balance sheet.”

Unemployment and Universal Basic Income

“UNIVERSAL INCOME CONVERSATIONS START coming in because we're gonna have swarms of people who are gonna be unemployed and unemployable and are not gonna have skills. I don't have all the answers, but I think it's a massive problem. And I think it's right around the corner.”

“IN ADDITION TO THE normal dislocation in the work world, we're gonna have massive challenges in the social world that are going to get much worse as this employment crisis hits us. We are going to have a lot of people who are unemployed and I think we're gonna have to re-address issues of universal income. I think there's gonna be massive social disruption at a level we haven't seen before on top of everything else that's going on that's pretty disruptive with this political divide that we see.”

Interview

16



Participants' Takeaways

DISCUSSING WITH OTHERS

- Try to have healthy exchanges of ideas once or twice a month. This has really helped me throughout my career.
- You can read all you want, but being able to communicate and learn from other leaders is very valuable. These meetings are not happening as much after COVID but with the speed of change today, we need more of these discussions.

EXPANDING NETWORKS

- I want to expand my network to be able to do a better job of having more diverse thought processes.
- I am too micro-focused and so is my network. A lot of things are going to affect me so I need to wake up and learn. I am very limited.

DEALING WITH INSTABILITY AND CHANGE

- The single most important thing for any organization, company, or nonprofit is being able to adapt to change. The workforce needs to adapt, and the people that are running the companies are the ones that have to set the table to make that happen from the board on down.
- Drop, cover, and hold on. This was an earthquake phrase. This is what I am telling my students right now.

- We have to be building robust people. They need to be able to sustain the instability and swim with it rather than against it.
- Think of the war in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza. People always survive and proceed even if, on the individual level, there is tremendous pain. We need to think about the tension between the aggregate and the concerns on the individual level.
- Instability is frightening. Chaos looms. This is not all negative though. We are all seeing it and it's good that we can all see it coming.

CLASS DISTINCTION

- I am very concerned about class distinction and capital concentration. It is becoming more and more difficult for entrepreneurs and creation through innovation.

GENERATIONAL AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

- What are the social issues for millennials and Gen Z? Not only should we provide opportunities to that generation to be successful but also recognize they're digitally savvy. But the social skills are often not strong.
- There are regional differences in culture, urban vs rural. Countries have culture. There's a lot of diversity in industry now that filters down to the jobs that people perform. That creates another layer of complexity because there is not one solution that will cut across all those levels.

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

- There is always tension between management and the workplace. It is not in every workplace all the time, but it's not new.
- Governance: we have independent boards at organizations but still have to drive change from the board level down in order to institutionalize anything.

HIRING

- Lean into things that are human capital-related. Hiring based on values and mission. Creating institutional processes that support human capital decisions is a journey.

PROVIDING STAKES FOR EMPLOYEES

- What is the work that is being done by the individual? Companies that are growing present growth opportunities for the individual. People know that intuitively; create a line of sight to support their unit goals but all the way up to company goals. Most organizations do not do a good job of providing that line of sight 'cause it's hard.
- Employee stock ownership plans. The successful ones do a good job at the things we discussed. Where there is a line of sight, there is that commitment to what the company is doing and the people are engaged. We want to give them a stake in the outcomes.

Conclusion

Sandbox data are presented to you as quotes because it matters what people say – not someone’s interpretation or synthesis of what is said, regardless of the brilliance of the interpreter or how convenient it is to summarize their words using AI. Your words matter—all people’s words matter. *We learn the most by listening.*

Today, we need to listen more than ever. The world we experience day-to-day has become quite complex and infused with often conflicting directions such as having the freedom to stay home to do one’s work and at the same time missing one’s professional relationship with the boss and co-workers, and having to schedule a virtual meeting with co-workers that is never long enough for real connection and a lasting friendship or for professional development. Albeit an unconventional approach to data collection, the Sandbox methodology offers potentially a brand-new set of data points compared to traditional research or experimenter-driven methods, because these voices are *unfiltered*: undirected, spontaneous, top-of-mind, thoughtful, and a result of peers talking to each other in whatever direction they desire.

Reviewers of this work have questioned the “reliability” of this data – whether the data are “representative” of the rest of the occupational or stakeholder group population. If they aren’t representative, then how can their statements be generalizable to the rest of the population? How can they be meaningful at all since they are anecdotal and not part of a standardized protocol of inquiry? Worse yet, the sample size per group is under 25!

Our answer to these challenges of data legitimacy and validity is this: Sandbox participants provided ground-level, personal descriptions of what it is like for them to be in this world of work and how they see

the future. Every statement is true to the speaker. Each statement is free from experimenter bias or social desirability driven by the researcher. Perhaps most important, the data are *their lived experience*.

Without knowing how a person or group of people sees the world from their point of view, researchers would be less likely to know what questions to ask to begin addressing their needs, reducing their impediments, enhancing opportunities for growth and happiness, and improving their lives in other ways, because *they have less insight regarding what needs fixing*. For the Work Futures Initiative, we began with the ambitious task of gathering information about participants' current lived experience and gathered information from a *wide spectrum of workers and stakeholders who collectively painted a varied and complex picture of many things we need to fix*.

The Sandbox methodology generated a rich baseline of information from which we can identify opportunities and targets to pursue to change the status quo. Based on the data, we can reimagine how the world of work, worker experience, and workplaces can be different in the future and interact synergistically not only to improve worker health, safety, and well-being, but also to generate more business success by improving productivity, lowering turnover, attracting and retaining talent, and creating stable and predictable work arrangements for all workers. We believe the Sandbox was the best place to begin the journey toward a movement within our nation's workforce that leads us in this direction.

We provided deep, varied, extensive, and sometimes surprising information in this book. Some say this book is not an easy read, not something you can consume easily and finish quickly. True. It is dense because it is meant to reveal important new information about each participant group, information that could be useful to the Reader in several ways. For example, telling the Reader in their words:

- *What it is like to be a particular professional and how they contribute to their organization's success and worker well-being.*
- *What they need to be more successful in their jobs.*
- *What threatens their organizations, profession, colleagues, and themselves.*
- *Who they need to partner with to create a better work environment,*
- *How they are preparing for the future as far as they can predict it.*

Where else can you have this information all in one place?

You might then ask, why should the Reader care? The answer is, because we are all connected, directly or indirectly, and we need to work together to shape a better future.

How can this book be useful to the Reader?

- *Understand these unfiltered voices as a historical record of where we were as a nation in 2024 before the presidential election and in 2025 after the presidential election. Comparisons in subsequent years to this period are now possible and could be instructive.*
- *Understand what the needs are for any occupational group and begin building research questions, conducting research studies to advance our understanding, and developing interventions based on this knowledge base and other sources to meet those needs.*
- *Examine the problems and issues facing professionals in one or more occupations and determine how they interact in a complex organizational system, and then identify system changes that identify commonalities and promote collaborations as a path for resolving problems and issues.*
- *Conduct Sandboxes with key occupational groups within the Reader's domain following the Sandbox methodology, for the purpose of gathering additional information from groups of particular interest to the Reader as a supplement to the information provided here.*
- *Begin discussions with groups that participated in these Sandboxes to learn more in-depth information about issues and problems voiced for the purpose of developing strategies for addressing these more comprehensively.*
- *Develop presentations to highlight important information conveyed in the Sandboxes to raise awareness of critical information that the public should know (e.g., anti-microbial resistance, agentics) and invite participation in forming projects that create interdisciplinary solutions to these complex problems.*

Above, we name just a few, but there are likely to be many more ways this information will be useful. We invite all Readers to take their time learning from the participants, chapter by chapter, to get the full measure of what they generously offered for you. We have experienced something very special to provide this to you.

NEXT STEPS

Now that we have collected extensive information about professionals' lived experience and the challenges and issues that need to be addressed for the workforce as a whole, we will start the process of organizing the Sandbox data into a whole picture, capturing all the different parts of the world of work, worker experience, and workplaces culled from the Sandbox data and "knitting" all the parts together to form a new vision and framework for the nation. This next ambitious task involves inviting experts who have the skill of integrating disparate pieces of information together, spanning disciplinary boundaries, and eliciting insights and who are given the task of figuring out how these pieces fit together and which aspects need to change individually and collectively to shape a better future. These "Knitters" will be joined by a team of subject matter experts (SMEs) who can advise and inform the Knitters how their subject matter can inform and assist the knitting process as the vision is being shaped. Together, the Knitters and SMEs will create a new vision and framework in detail to the extent possible. Once the vision and framework is set, the next set of experts who are skilled in change management will create a suite of change management tools to translate the vision and framework into programs, processes, and practices so that the nation can move forward.

At the end of this journey, the nation will have a new vision of a better future and a suite of change tools that can execute change toward this new future. All products of the Work Futures Initiative will be available to the public to use freely.

We sincerely appreciate your interest in and support of the Work Futures Initiative.

The Work Futures Leadership Team

Appendix

SANDBOX AGENDA

- 9:00 am General Introduction to the Sandbox and its Purpose
 - Introduction of The Work Group
 - Introduction of Sandbox participants
 - Description of the Sandbox

- 9:10 am Opening remarks; the current state of work, worker, and workplace experience
 - Setting the stage for discussions
 - What we want with Sandbox discussions
 - Where we want to end up: a new combined vision of the future of work that includes new forms of work, changed expectations of work-life, and flexible places of work, and makes room for everybody

- 9:20 am First set of questions for discussion: open forum (20 minutes)

- 9:40 am Second set of questions for breakout groups (20 minutes)

- 10:00 am Third set of questions for breakout groups (20 minutes)

- 10:20 am Individual Participant Recording points and ideas (10 minutes)

- 10:30 am Sharing of ideas from breakout sessions (25 minutes)

- 10:55 am Wrap up and next steps (5 minutes)

- 11:00 am Adjourn

PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS

Your participation in this discussion is critical. We want to hear what you think. Be generous with your sharing, spark off each other, have fun with the discussions. We are all here to learn.

We will record your discussions and discard recordings after we review them and make notes from the discussions for the summary report. Your confidentiality is assured—notes will not identify you in any way.

After the Sandbox, we will provide you with a summary of the information collected, which you can use for your own purposes.

We will keep you updated with our progress toward the end goal of these meetings. We will invite you to join a dedicated LinkedIn Group that only Sandbox participants can join.

We will not identify you personally in any reports—your comments will be de-identified, but we will acknowledge all participants' contribution in the summary reports.

Thank you for being here today.

QUESTIONS SETS

Question Set for Full Group:

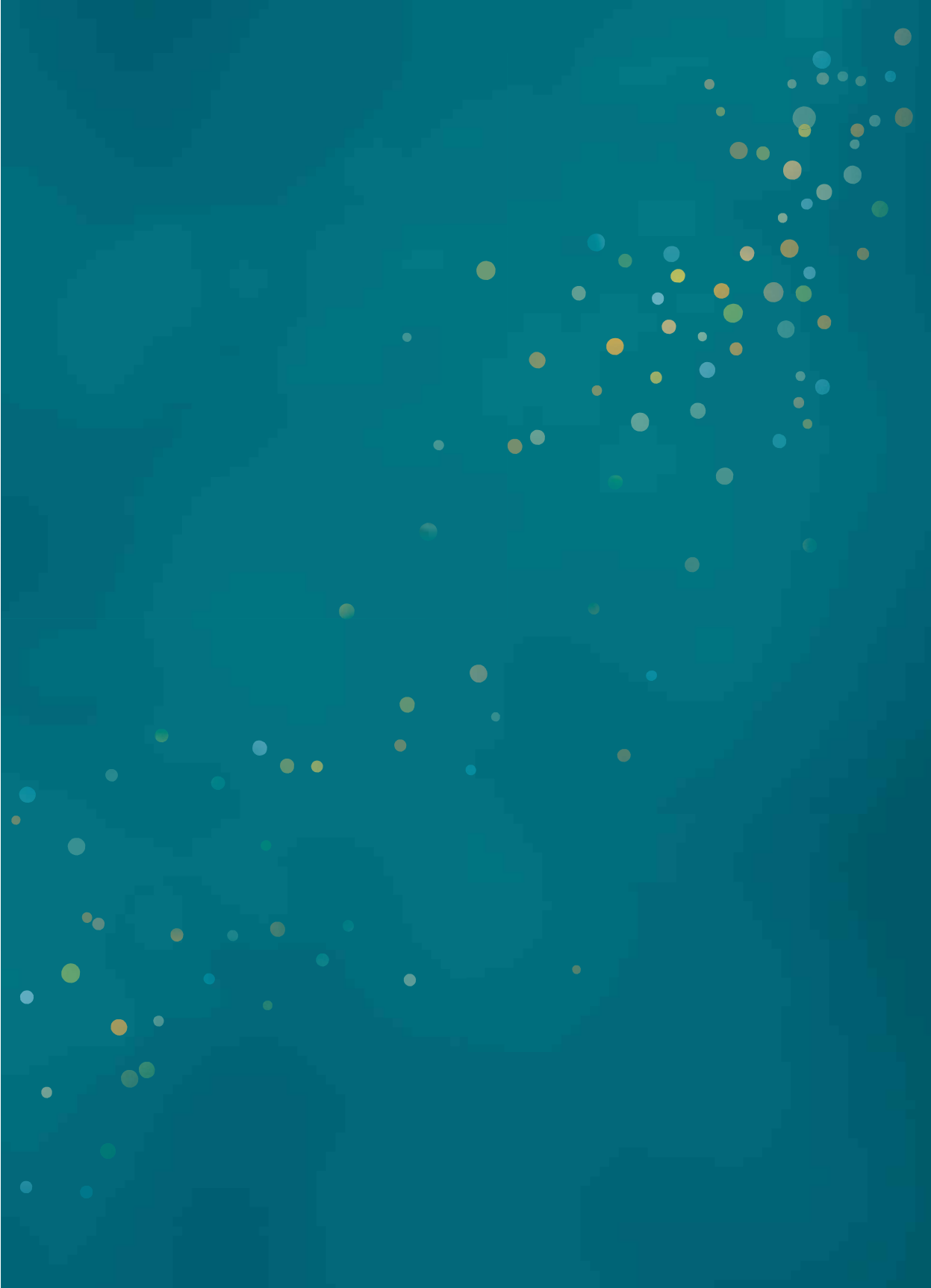
1. After this briefing of the current events, what is your reaction to this presentation? Do you agree/disagree?
2. What other emerging problems should we bring into this discussion?
3. What have we been doing that's not working anymore?

First Breakout:

1. What is the current state in your area of expertise?
2. What do you know about what you think will happen or what you think will be driving the future?
3. What questions need to be answered?

Second Breakout

1. How are you preparing for the future?
2. What do you expect to happen in the future?
3. What general thoughts do you have about the direction going forward?



UNFILTERED VOICES

"The unfiltered voices from the 16 'Sandboxes' in this book reflect targeted crowdsourcing from a variety of perspectives. They offer deep insights into what it's like to be in the current world of work and how they see the future. If you're looking to spark actionable ideas to improve work and productivity, this is a great place to start."

– **Wayne F. Cascio, PhD**,
Distinguished Professor
Emeritus, The Business School,
University of Colorado, Denver

"As the modern workplace rapidly evolves, protecting employee well-being requires authentic, unfiltered insights from workers themselves to drive breakthrough solutions. This book offers that essential, fresh perspective. As we navigate the uncharted future of work, the Work Futures Initiative serves as a critical guide for developing lasting health and safety strategies."

– **Nico Pronk, PhD**, President, HealthPartners Institute, Bloomington, MN

"The data show work is often stressful and unengaging. In this book, professionals from occupations relevant to work provide their unfiltered ideas and perspectives about work, thereby providing readers and policymakers with the material needed to ensure better, more productive, healthier work environments in the future."

– **Jeffrey Pfeffer, PhD**,
Graduate School of Business,
Stanford University &
Author, *Dying for a Paycheck*

"Having followed the evolution of worksite health and well-being scorecards over several decades, I've observed that the 'best practice' that routinely gets short shrift is that of engaging the voice of employees in the creation and direction of well-being initiatives. *Unfiltered Voices* takes this short-coming head on. It's a tour de force in laying the groundwork for future states where organizations, and their employees, thrive."

– **Paul E. Terry, PhD**, Editor in Chief,
American Journal of Health Promotion,
Senior Fellow, The Health Enhancement
Research Organization.

If we want a holistic view of our health, we need to have a holistic view of where we spend about a quarter of every week – the workplace. This book is a cornucopia of knowledge and wisdom about where we work, and it uses a creative, user-friendly structure to allow the reader to weave current and future ideas about the workplace into a whole. It's a must-read!

– **John Swartzberg, MD, FACP**, Clinical Professor
Emeritus & Editorial Board Chair, UC Berkeley
Wellness Letter, School of Public Health,
University of California, Berkeley

**Work
Futures
INITIATIVE**

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