



Workplace of the Future

# Beyond work-life balance

A series of white papers by Ade McCormack, Auridian

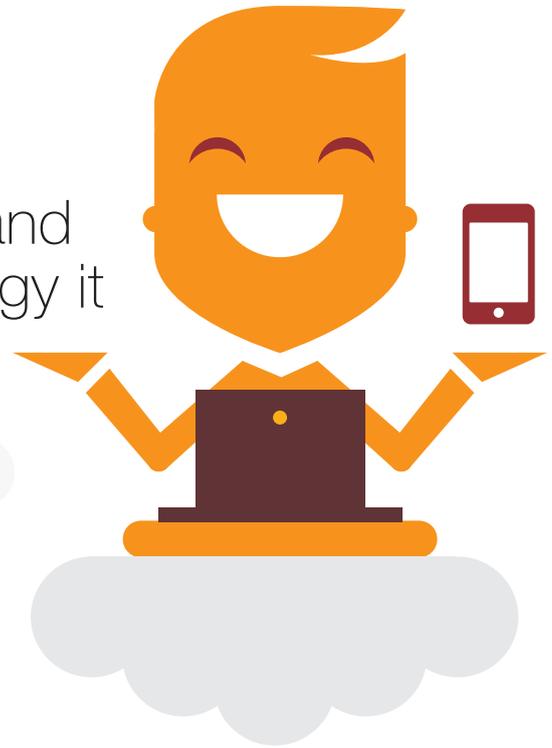


Sponsored by



## Introduction

The world of work is changing and whilst this is fuelled by technology it is driven by people.



This white paper looks at how the world of work, workers and leadership are changing.

It focuses on the associated strategic, operational and personal opportunities for organisations and leaders who take a proactive approach to providing their workers with a working environment that goes beyond work-life balance.





### A short history of the work-life relationship

The typical day of a hunter-gatherer involved waking up, hunting breakfast, lunch and dinner and then finding a cave to sleep in before repeating the process the next day. Work and life were very integrated. As the climate increased, both hunters and prey gathered at oases, which ultimately led to the agricultural revolution. Here again work and life were integrated.

Around the seventeenth century with the advances in steam technology the industrial revolution took place. Now workers had to turn up to a specific location that wasn't home for a set period of time. Thus work and life became separated.

As social reform took hold people considered life after work in terms of the evening and the latter phase of their life. Given that workers were now being paid for their time rather than their output (e.g. captured rabbit or sold sheep) they were motivated to be as unproductive as possible, i.e. minimise the expenditure of energy for the time they were employed. In turn it was the job of management to maximise the amount of productivity for the time employed. Thus the need for unions and industrial relations emerged.

The dynamics and geographics of the industrial revolution gave rise to the concept of work-life balance. Workers compartmentalised their lives into 'in work' and 'outside of work'. Work was not conducted at home and domestic activities were not conducted at work. Again the workers' aim was to minimise work and maximise 'life'. This has occupied the minds of many workers for a century or so.

Today the boundary is blurring. People are working later into the day and later into their existence, as retirement ages come under review. Email and social media has made it easier for workers to conduct elements of their social life at work. Thus we are seeing a return to work-life integration.



### Towards the people-centric organisation

There has been much talk along the lines that people are our most important asset. The absence of Human Resource representation within the senior management team in many organisations suggests that this is not the case in practice. Similarly the drop off in training investment in economically difficult times ("we can treat the staff badly, because they have no other option") suggests that people are not at the heart of the strategy.

Increased automation is driving humans out of the organisation. If a task can be done by a computer it should be done by a computer. On a positive note this unburdens staff from undertaking repetitive and unfulfilling work. The 'race to the bottom' in terms of pricing is accelerating the automation of organisations. The end game for many sectors appears to be to eliminate all people thus leaving a high-tech factory human-free and almost margin-free. Once all surviving organisations get to this point there is likely to be a race back up the value stack. In a fully automated factory the only new differentiator will be the addition of people.

However these people will not be highly paid compliant-cogs that complement the workings of largely automated tasks. They will be more akin to artists. These highly creative people will stimulate value-adding innovation. Those organisations that can secure such individuals will be at an advantage. And those organisations that have a collaborative technology infrastructure in place will be able to harness the neuronc power of all their people as if the organisation had one super-brain.

This trend is converging with an increasing global talent shortage. There is also a trend towards a re-evaluation of financial rewards versus meaningful work. In many cases money will lose its allure and so organisations will need to be adept at creating engaging opportunities that will attract the best talent. So if Human Resources are going to be invited to join the top team they will need to raise their game beyond simply people management.

As workers become more like sports stars and movie stars we are likely to see an increase in Diva-esque behaviour. Perhaps BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) is an example of this. It is quite possible that securing workers may require not

only embracing their chosen hardware, but also their chosen software. The IT function in turn will need to re-evaluate the service it provides.

As people wake up to the fact that time is more valuable than money, there will be an increasing focus on helping the worker optimise their time. Thus work-life integration will become a growing trend. Sitting in traffic or monitoring volcanic ash distribution from an airport departure lounge is to be avoided. So it is likely that home working or at least non-corporate location working will increase substantially. Work is where the worker is rather than where it suits the organisation's property portfolio manager.

Collaborative technologies that span geographies such as video conferencing will be required.

Industry has tried unsuccessfully to bend nature's reproductive cycle to the 'factory cycle'. Child birth and the associated care do not sit easy with the traditional world of work. This has the detrimental impact of alienating circa half the potential workforce. This female-unfriendly arrangement has resulted in many women redirecting their creative energies in their own enterprises, designed to fit around motherhood.

Twenty first century organisations cannot afford to exclude this abundant capability. Again work-life integration is required.

### The Leadership implications

The power imbalance between the employer and the employee is radically changing the nature of leadership. The notion that leadership drives strategy comes into question. Firstly, in a highly volatile market, nobody has a better sense of what is happening and what is likely to happen than those on the front line. Disempowered sales staff are unlikely to capitalise on time-sensitive opportunities if they have to have permission from their chain of command before they can commit to anything. Similarly service staff lose the opportunity to transform a negative client-experience into a brand-strengthening one if they are unable to use their discretion, and even spend some of the organisation's money, in solving the issue.

To operate in a fast-moving volatile market, leadership needs to be decentralised and the management structures need

to be flattened. On the basis that the workers are genuinely expert in what they do, then the job of the leader is not to micromanage the workers but to clear the obstacles that stop them from doing their best work. The concept of servant-leader is not a new one.

The model whereby the senior management team define strategy and then engage HR to assess the people implications, which in turn leads to a set of job specifications is likely to change. Specifically the recruitment and development of staff is also likely to change in a talent-short market.

Smart leaders will not so much impose their will on the market with a strategy largely based on fiction, but will look at the talent they have access to and infer strategy from this capability. Managers of premier league sports teams have been doing this forever.

The emerging reality is that talent management will evolve into genuine talent management and increasingly look less like commoditised procurement (think office stationery).

Another way to look at this shift is to think in terms of stakeholder rather than shareholder value. Engaged workers are more likely to be loyal, more productive and see genuine meaning in the organisation beyond a source of cash flow. This leads to better customer service which when managed carefully leads to happy shareholders.

The drum-beating command and control model of leadership may have been effective in Victorian workhouses but is no longer fit for purpose. 21st Century leaders need to balance the needs of all stakeholders in the organisation's ecosystem. For enlightened leaders this is an opportunity to create long term value.



## The technology implications

Delivering the work-life integration that today's workers will increasingly expect requires a rethink in respect of technology management. IT has already radically changed the world of work. Increased automation has served to drive out unnecessary cost and speeded up production. Advances in business intelligence are enabling better business decision making.

However the relationship between the workers and the IT function has in many cases been an uneasy one. In some respects there is an ongoing war between these groups. In summary:

- The mainframe – Centralised power in the IT function.
- The PC – Was a user-driven uprising.
- Thin client – Was an exercise in the IT function regaining control.
- The Cloud – This second uprising is enabling the users to buy their own IT services.

The IT function did not invite the PC into the department, the users sneaked it in. The same is true of the first generation of handheld devices. RIM's Blackberry was a user-fuelled revolt that the IT department could not ignore. Tablet devices are on the same trajectory.

The CIO as 'Dr No' is no longer acceptable. The CIO is of course correct to highlight security and cost implications, but to have the best low-cost fortress is unlikely to impress the market or the workers.

I would encourage the IT function to see the emergence of a post-industrial business model as an opportunity and not a threat. It is an opportunity to move from marginalized technology manager to enabler of the digital revolution.

Work-life integration needs similarly integrated technology. Practically all IT functions are doing a great job in this respect without realising it. The network is key to collaboration as is email, instant messaging and intranets. But there is more to be done.

Fully embracing user-driven IT services requires a light-touch approach to technology management. Finding the balance between this and good corporate governance will be the challenge.

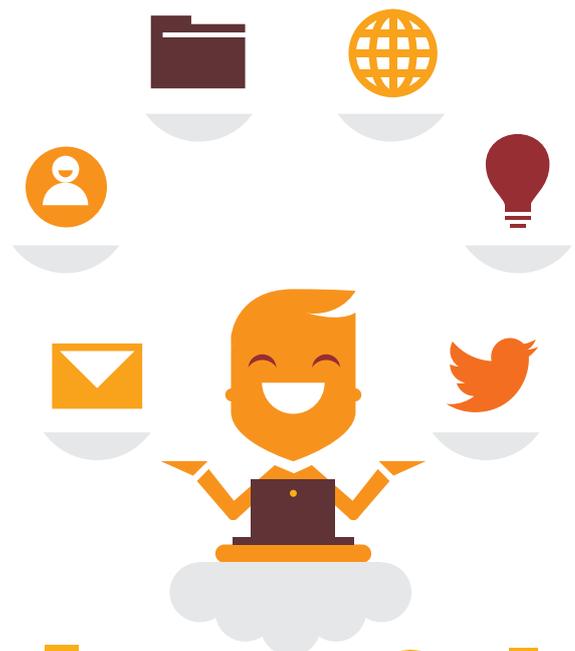
Whether we like it or not social media is entering the workplace and is not necessarily being used with work in mind. This is a consequence of work-life integration and again this has to be embraced rather than rejected.

Along with social media comes a deluge of data in many formats from 140 character text messages through to storage-crippling video. The IT function's ability to not just manage this, but to provide tools to enable the users to make sense of the data will be a high priority.

Some CIOs may well see the Cloud as a threat to their empire, particularly those that value their self-worth by server, staff or application count. Smart CIOs will see this as an opportunity to redirect their limited resources from reactive supply-side management to proactive demand creation. At the end of the day CIO stands for Chief Information Officer and not Chief IT manager Officer.

There has been a gradual shift in who manages the innovation budget. Increasingly IT-spend allocated to innovative activities is being given directly to the users, thus leaving the IT function to get on with the less stimulating housekeeping aspects of technology management.

Again this work-life shift presents an opportunity for the IT function to move centre-stage in terms of strategic relevance.



 **Conclusion**

The transition to the digital economy is fuelled by technology. However it would be unwise to focus solely on the technology. A focus on mobile technology rather than mobility would be to miss the point. The digital economy is about people. How to maximise human potential must be the focus. And given that humans are social animals then technologies that support collaboration are very important.

This is a fascinating period in man's history. As we transition from the industrial to the digital economy, we are witnessing a return to work-life integration. Eventually employers will embrace this new model to everyone's advantage. It is likely that historians will look at the industrial era as a blip in the history of mankind when he was at his most disconnected.





## Ade McCormack

is an opinion columnist with the Financial Times (since 2004). He is the author of a number of books relating to new technology and leadership, including the acclaimed 'e-Skills Manifesto – A Call to Arms'.

He is also a visiting lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management where he lectures on digital leadership as part of the MBA programme. He also helps organisations prepare for the digital economy through his eWorld Academy [www.eworldacademy.com](http://www.eworldacademy.com).

Ade's eWorld Radar blog [www.eworldradar.com](http://www.eworldradar.com) was recently short listed by Computer Weekly magazine as one of the most influential blogs in respect of digital leadership.

Ade has worked in over twenty countries across many sectors. He has a degree in Physics with Astrophysics. You can find more information here:

[www.ademccormack.com](http://www.ademccormack.com)

## Published Papers

To read the other published white papers from this series, go to [www.hp.com/mobile/white-papers](http://www.hp.com/mobile/white-papers)

HP is the world's largest provider of IT infrastructure, software, services, and solutions to individuals and organizations of all sizes. We bring the advantages of our scale, the breadth and depth of our portfolio, our innovation, and our competitiveness to our customers every day and in almost every country in the world. HP invents, engineers, and delivers technology solutions that drive business value, create social value, and improve the lives of our clients.

In Enterprise Services, one of the largest divisions of HP, our strategy is to deliver high-value solutions to help clients innovate, manage information and risk, and become more agile so they can better serve their customers and citizens.

HP wants to take you on a journey to the **Mobile Enterprise of the Future**, a flexible "as a service" model, where the user rather than the device, is driving the computing experience. At its core, we aim to lower your operational costs, increase employee productivity and business agility, all within the limits of high IT security. For more information please visit:

[www.hp.com/mobile/future-enterprise](http://www.hp.com/mobile/future-enterprise)