



Work As We Know It Is Dead

Jacob Morgan

Yes, you read that correctly, DEAD! Let me explain...

If you look up the word “manager” in the dictionary you will find synonyms such as: “slave-driver, boss, or zookeeper.” If you look up “employee” in the dictionary you get back: “cog, servant, and slave.” If you look up “work” in the dictionary you get: “drudgery, struggle, or daily-grind.” So, we are all cogs working for a slave-driver as we go about our daily drudgery. That’s just lovely isn’t it? This is how we have literally built our organizations over the past hundred or so years and this is exactly what I mean when I say “work as we know it is dead.” The idea that “work sucks” is literally engrained in almost every aspect of our professional lives. Employees are no longer cogs, work should not be drudgery, and managers can no longer be slave-drivers.

This isn’t a manifesto about following your passions or being happy, it’s a call to action to change and evolve our organizations to reflect the world that they operate in.

Consider that we spend more time working than doing anything else including sleeping, being with our friends and family, traveling, or anything else. The one thing that perhaps we spend more time doing than working is breathing. Clearly if most people in the world spend the majority of their lives doing something that they aren’t engaged in, then that leads to a lot of unhappy and stressed out people. You don’t need to go far to see that this is exactly what’s happening across almost every cubicle from San Francisco to South Africa.

Humans are batteries that are powering businesses around the world and the vast majority of these “batteries” are not engaged in the work they are doing, in fact only 13% are. It’s not that all of them are bad, it’s that they are being misused, underutilized, and treated like... batteries or cogs. I’m sorry, but in 2014 it’s really unacceptable for us to think and work in this way. It’s time for change and not just because it’s a nice thing to do but because it’s crucial for any organization that wants to succeed and thrive going forward. Simply put, if organizations don’t change, then nobody will want to work there let alone have a relationship with that organization. The war for talent is becoming more and more fierce and organizations are shifting their approach from creating a place where they assume people NEED to work, to creating a place where people WANT to work. So how do we change? Two words, “challenge convention.”

This isn’t a new concept. There are many examples of companies that have done this. Apple challenged convention for how music should be stored and accessed, Google challenged convention for how information should be accessed, Airbnb challenged convention with how people should book lodging, Uber challenged convention with how people travel, and the list goes on. We’ve also challenged convention within our organizations; everything from how we market and sell products and services to how we hire employees. So then, why haven’t we challenged convention around how we work? It’s about time we do just that.

If you were an alien that came to visit earth for the first time to observe the human race and how they work you would probably think humans were a bit... stupid. As your flying around in your spaceship you might observe and wonder things like:

“Why are all of these people spending hours on clogged roads driving to and from work?”

“Why do these earthlings sit in little cubes?”

“How is it that they have self-driving cars and homes that can be controlled from their phones yet the technologies they use at work are decades behind where it should be?”

“Do they really have to work during a scheduled time that somebody else assigns them?”

“How come the people doing most of the work don’t get a say in how they do it?”

“Why are there some people inside of these big buildings who appear to be the only ones getting access to the information to make decisions?”

“What is this ‘email’ that everyone keeps checking a hundred times a day and why do they get so much of it?”

“Why do most of the people who work appear to hate what they are doing and why are they always so stressed out?”

Upon docking with the mother-ship you might report to your fellow aliens that the humans you observed on earth are crazy! Well, we are, or at least we work like we are.

When I first graduated from college at UCSC I moved back to LA and applied for a lot of jobs. I finally got one I wanted (or at least thought I did). I was told that I'd be going to business meetings with the executive team, working on cool projects, and traveling to various locations throughout the country. After a few months of driving an hour and a half each way to work (that's 15 hours of commuting every week) I was basically stuck doing data entry, following up with people on the phone, and putting together PowerPoint presentations. "Wow" I thought, "I'm so glad I went to college and graduated with honors with a double major in business management economics and psychology so I can do this." The day an executive came out of his fancy office and asked me to go get him coffee was the day I knew I couldn't work there anymore. Since then I became fascinated with the future of work and have been exploring that ever since.

For as long as anyone can remember there was a certain "flow" to how work got done. It all started at the top with executives. This elite group of people dictated how the rest of the organization should work, when they should work, and what they should work on. These "commandments" were then passed down to managers who in turned passed them down to the rest of the employees. This included everything from where people should sit, what projects they should work on, what expenses they are allowed to have, when they need to work, the technologies

they must use, when they are allowed to take a break, and anything else you can think of. Many organizations around the world today can be thought of as a type of prison. For most companies there is still a top-down approach to getting work done. However, today we are seeing this approach being completely flipped around.

Employees are now starting to guide how work gets done. They are shaping everything from how they want to work, the technologies they want to use, the projects they want to work on, when and where they work, and why they work. This then gets passed up to managers who in turn pass it about to the executives within the organization.

This new flow of how work gets done is dramatically impacting organizations around the world. It's more than just an employee revolution, it's a work evolution.

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This evolution is being driven by five trends which are shaping the future of work.

New technologies | Things like big data, mobility, wearable technology, collaboration platforms, and the internet of things are forcing organizations to rethink how employees communicate and collaborate with one another. All of these technologies were virtually a blip on the radar just a few short years ago.

Mobility | The fact that we can stay connected to our peers and information via our smartphones is astonishing. Think about it, you can literally be thousands of miles away from your office yet still be able to access presentations, documents, and have chats with co-workers, all while being on the go.

Millennials | By 2020 millennials are projected to comprise 50% of the workforce, by 2025 this number is going to be 75%. This is a group of people with unique expectations, values, and approaches to getting work done. Not only that but the number of millennial managers is also increasing.

Globalization | This is essentially the ability for any organization or individual to work in a world without boundaries. It no longer matters where you are located, what currency you transact in, or what part of the world you want to market in. You can be anywhere and work with anyone.

New behaviors | Living a more public life through social channels, building communities, accessing people and information, and shaping our experiences are all examples of new behaviors that employees are bringing with them into their organizations today.

These trends are at the forefront of causing disruption in every single company around the world. It's no longer safe to watch and see what others do. The organizations that will succeed and thrive in this new world are the ones that lead the way. This change is going to impact how employees work, how managers lead, and how organizations are structured. However, this change is also an amazing opportunity, here are some things you can do to take advantage of it.

1. Challenge convention around common practices in the workplace such as working 9-5, sitting in a cubicle, working within a strict hierarchy, and managers making all of the decisions.
2. Have a dedicated team or "task force" at your organization that is focused on the future of work. This team's job is to make sure that the five trends mentioned above (or any others that come about) don't overwhelm your organization. This "future of work" team pays attention to trends and comes up with strategies for how the organization should keep evolving.
3. Define the future of work for your organization. It's crucial to take a step back and examine what it means to work at your organization. How do you define the words "work," "employee,"

“manager,” and “organization?” Give yourself a vision or scenario for the type of organization you want to create or work at.

4. Communicate this defined future of work to your employees so that everyone is on the same page and can work towards a unified goal.
5. Run experiments within your organization to test out ideas and new approaches to getting work done. Perhaps you want to try out flexible work environments in your marketing team or maybe you want to get rid of annual employee reviews for your engineers. Run experiments continuously and implement the ones that are well received.
6. Replicate the successful experiments across the organization with broad based change. So, if you experimented with a flexible working program in your marketing and sales departments and saw it worked out well, then now you can explore implementing this type of a program across the entire company.

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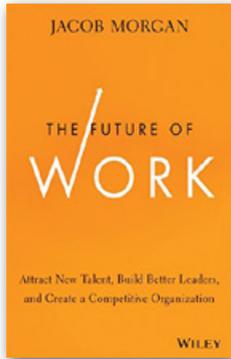
Some people see change as a threat, as something scary that is going to disrupt their ways of doing things. Well, they're mostly right, except that change doesn't have to be a scary threat. Instead, it can be an amazing opportunity.

These six steps can help make sure that your organization is able to adapt and evolve in any type of environment. Remember that there is no end-state when it comes to the future of work. This is a constant evolution and adaptation. Organizations today are already having a hard time keeping up with the pace of change that is happening around them, but this rate of change is accelerating without showing any signs of slowing down. This means that organizations essentially have two paths going forward. The first is to keep with the status quo and perhaps disappear in the next few years, and the other is to accept and understand that the world is changing.

Nobody wants to feel like they are a cog, nobody wants to work for a slave-driver, and nobody wants to do daily drudgery. Does this mean that nobody wants to work for you or your company? That's the question you should be asking yourself.

After all, **if your organization doesn't think about and plan for the future of work then your organization will have no future.** 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Jacob Morgan is a futurist and globally recognized thought leader on the future of work and collaboration. He is the co-founder of the [FOW Community](#), an invite only membership dedicated to the future of work and collaboration. Jacob also co-founded [Chess Media Group](#), a management consulting and strategic advisory firm that focuses on the future of work and collaboration. Jacob has worked with companies such as Safeway, Sodexo, Siemens, Lowe's, Franklin Templeton, and many others. Jacob is frequently cited in media outlets such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, CNN, *Fast Company*, *Inc.*, and others. He is also the author of *The Collaborative Organization*, has a column for *Forbes*, and speaks at conferences and events around the world.

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