

[Homepage](#)

## Accessibility links

- [Skip to content](#)
- [Accessibility Help](#)

### [BBC Account](#)

- [Home](#)
- [News](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [iPlayer](#)
- [Sounds](#)
- [CBBC](#)
- [CBeebies](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Bitesize](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Taster](#)
- [Local](#)
- [Three](#)
- [Menu](#)

### [Search](#)

Search the BBC

UNKNOWN QUESTIONS | UNKNOWN QUESTIONS

# Coronavirus: How the world of work may change forever



*(Image credit: Emmanuel Lafont)*

**Covid-19 upended our jobs. We've tried to adapt, but what about the long term? BBC Worklife asks dozens of experts to flag the biggest questions we should be asking in 2020 and beyond.**

*Article continues below*

Menu 

More than seven months have passed since the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic. Hundreds of millions of people have lived through lockdowns. Many have made the abrupt shift to working from home; millions have lost jobs. The future looks uncertain. We don't know when, or if, our societies might return to normal – or what kind of scars the pandemic will leave.

Amid the upheaval, BBC Worklife spoke to dozens of experts, leaders and professionals across the globe to ask: what are the greatest unknowns we face? How will we work, live and thrive in the post-pandemic future? How is Covid-19 reshaping our world – potentially, forever?

We'll roll out these important views from some of the top minds in business, public health and many other fields in several articles over the next few weeks. We'll hear from people including Melinda Gates on gender equality, Zoom founder Eric Yuan on the future of video calls, Lonely Planet founder Tony Wheeler on what's next in travel and Unesco chief Audrey Azoulay on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

Today, we're starting by looking at the issue of work: how the pandemic has normalised remote work, and what that might mean. Will we go to the office again – and, if so, how often? What impact will a **'hybrid' way of working** have on how we communicate, connect and create? Will work-from-home be the great leveller in terms of **gender equality** and diversity? And what will work mean if our offices are virtual and we lose those day-to-day social interactions?

We're also examining what happens to people who can't work from home as well as those **whose jobs depend** on a steady flow of traffic into urban hubs. Can we learn from Covid-19 and build better safety nets for the most vulnerable workers? And if the future is digital, how do we make sure swathes of the global population **aren't left behind**?

“We all know that work will never be the same, even if we don't yet know all the ways in which it will be different,” says Slack co-founder and CEO Stewart Butterfield. But we've started asking the questions – and here's what our experts had to say.

*Many are spending more time than ever inside their homes, as remote work, distance learning and social distancing shape the workweeks of many families*

---

### **Melinda Gates: Co-Chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

#### ***What is the future of gender equality?***

Will the world finally get serious about gender equality? That's a question of long standing, but I'm asking it even more insistently now. Because when the world's economies were pushed to the brink, it was women who fell over the edge.

When the world's economies were pushed to the brink, it was women who fell over the edge.

That's just paid work. With billions of people staying home, the demand for unpaid work – cooking, cleaning, and childcare – has surged. Women already did about three quarters of that work; in the pandemic, the breakdown is even more lopsided.

Of course, the paid and unpaid economies are intimately connected. (One is a lot more visible, but it's built on top of the other!) The unpaid work women do is one of the biggest barriers they face to reaching their potential in the workforce.

I hope Covid-19 forces us to confront how unsustainable the current arrangement is – and how much we all miss out on when women's responsibilities at home limit their ability to contribute beyond it. The solutions lie with governments, employers and families committed to doing things more equitably.

### **Stewart Butterfield: CEO and co-founder, Slack**

#### *How many people actually want to work in offices?*

We all know that work will never be the same, even if we don't yet know all the ways in which it will be different. What we can say with certainty is that the sudden shift to distributed work has provided a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine everything about how we do our jobs and how we run our companies.

If we can move past decades of orthodoxy about 9-to-5, office-centric work, there's an opportunity to retain the best parts of office culture while freeing ourselves from bad habits and inefficient processes, from ineffective meetings to unnecessary bureaucracy. Every leader believes they can do better, and things can move faster: this is their chance.

From the employee perspective, the shift is massive and very consequential: people are making new choices about where they want to live and creating new expectations about flexibility, working conditions and life balance that can't be undone. Our **Future Forum research** of 4,700 knowledge workers found the majority never want to go back to the old way of working. Only 12% want to return to full-time office work, and 72% want a hybrid remote-office model moving forward.

All this change in our methods will go hand-in-hand with a change in our tools. Of course, we think Slack has an important role to play as a new kind of headquarters for a digital first world, but the opportunities for digital transformation are expansive and wide-ranging. Businesses that do it well will drive engagement, achieve organisational agility, maintain alignment and empower teamwork across all disciplines and locations. They will have a competitive advantage in this new era of work.

### **Elisabeth Reynolds: Executive Director, Task Force on the Work of the Future, Massachusetts Institute of Technology**

#### *What happens to the workers that remote jobs leave behind?*

For those who can work from home (approximately 40% of US workers largely from the higher educated quartile), our daily experience of work will change significantly. Commuters will gain an hour back on average in their day and estimates suggest that post pandemic, some portion of the week will involve working from home – from one to three days a week. A hybrid model is likely to emerge that will try to

balance the efficiencies gained by remote work with the benefits of social interactions and to creativity and innovation generated by working in person with others.

But the greatest challenge that we face regarding work is what happens to the other 60% of workers who can't work from home. The decline in daily commuters as well as business travel has a knock-on effect on those whose jobs support and serve these workers and offices. A full one-in-four workers are in the transportation, food service, cleaning and maintenance, retail and personal care industries. These jobs, often concentrated in cities and lower paid, are disappearing or are at risk of disappearing in the near term. We need to shore up the social safety net and invest in ways to further skills and increase access to education and training for our most vulnerable workers.

*The unpaid work women do is one of the biggest barriers they face to reaching their potential in the workforce - Melinda Gates: Co-Chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

**Indranil Roy: Executive Director, Human Capital practice, Deloitte Consulting**

*How can companies become 'virtual first'?*

More than half of the global workforce is working remotely and as the pandemic continues to threaten health, we are looking at a prolonged period of hybrid working – from home and office in different proportions.

Some lessons learned: we can accomplish most tasks remotely without significant drop in productivity or quality. Most employees appreciate flexibility, especially those with long commute times. Over time, however, face-to-face interaction is required to facilitate collaboration, build relationships, solve complex challenges and generate ideas. Continuous remote work extends the work day, diffuses work-life boundaries and reduces mental wellbeing.

Given these pros and cons, organisations have to rethink their working arrangements. This re-calibration will eventually settle on a sustainable new normal, likely a hybrid workforce and distributed workplace.

Enterprises adopting this new way of working – “virtual-first” – have these characteristics: One, the workplace is distributed across home, office and satellite offices. Employees can choose to work remotely or face-to-face based on their nature of work and teams' preferences. Two, the teams are virtual ready. Managers know how to manage, coach, collaborate, evaluate performance and motivate their team remotely. Three, the technology enables multiple modes of working. Data is saved on cloud; access and security are tailored for different working modes; and applications allow seamless virtual collaborations. Four, the culture prioritises trust and belonging. Interpersonal bonds are formed with intent and care.

With these four critical moves, organisations can transit to a hybrid-workforce model and build a “virtual-first” enterprise.

**Diane Coyle: Co-Director, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge**

The economic shock caused by the pandemic is making even more pressing some of the questions about the economy that many people had already started to ask. There is a demand to ‘build back better’ as the phrase goes, because it was clear that some things had already started to go wrong and have now gotten worse.

For example, one is low pay and terrible conditions of work in the types of jobs we’ve been praising as ‘key workers’, in everything from care homes to delivery drivers and warehouse staff. Another is the terrifying decline in environmental indicators from extreme weather events and loss of biodiversity – both threatening food supplies – to polluted air and the consequences for human health.

I would highlight an underlying question about the role of the state in the economy. We have grown used to the idea that government and markets are separate spheres, and the market generally knows best. Yet in the crisis responses across the world, we have a demonstration of how dramatically governments can intervene in managing the economy. It might take years for the state role to unwind even if a government wanted to do so. But, with a focus on new infrastructure investment and green transition, on establishing job schemes, on making up for the educational deficit due to disrupted learning through 2020 and beyond and on supporting key industries such as travel and the arts, I think there will be a lasting change in perceptions of the role of the state.

**Eric S Yuan: Founder and CEO, Zoom**

***How will video calls continue to shape businesses?***

Now that the world is familiar with video communications, the way businesses and individuals communicate and connect will be forever changed.

Healthcare, education, finance and businesses large and small are growing and improving with the help of video communications. This year alone, hundreds of thousands of small business owners – yoga and piano instructors, therapists, accountants and others – maintained and even grew businesses using video to connect with customers. We believe that model will be a large part of our future, so we’ve made those interactions easier with OnZoom, a new all-in-one solution for Zoom users to create and host free and paid events on Zoom.

In the near future, some organisations will adopt a hybrid-work model, with certain days in the office and others remote, and might align employees’ in-office and remote schedules to create equity. Other companies will use video communications to be completely remote. Both models will enjoy increased productivity and deeper collaboration, and the ability to attract a more diverse workforce.

*Long-term remote work has completely reshaped the 9-to-5 and blurred the lines between home and office*

---

**Erica Brescia: Chief Operating Officer, GitHub**

***How will workers interact with each other?***

The future of work will be distributed. We're going to see a big shift from office by default to remote by default. GitHub has been a predominantly distributed company with people working across the globe, which has helped us learn and evolve quickly. With people in every part of the company working remotely for years, we've seen how virtual interactions drive innovation.

With Covid-19, we're rethinking how we design and use our office spaces – making them more about

people to reframe the way they communicate and connect with people at work. Those whose superpower is connecting with people live and bringing energy to conversations will need to become good written communicators. And companies who do not have a strict need for physical interaction are going to have to operate more like open source communities – distributed, asynchronously and online. We will quickly see a material shift in who succeeds in this new mode of working.

### **Robin Dunbar: Emeritus Professor of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford**

#### *Is remote working overhyped?*

The last few months has seen a great deal of media hype about new ways of working – the dispersed office and working from home. No more of the drudgery of the morning commute, the arrival home exhausted long after the children have been put to bed. Alas, it is all hype. We have forgotten that we tried it 20 years ago and very quickly gave it up. At the time, big business with expensive London real estate spotted it as a way of radically reducing their overheads. A round of golf over lunch, and collecting the kids from school... what could be better? At a personal level, it probably is better, but it didn't last long – for three very good reasons.

First, the work place is a social environment and business in any form is a social phenomenon. Without face-to-face engagement, and those casual meetings round the coffee machine, the 'flow' that makes things work, and work fast, will be missing. Work groups quickly lose focus, and the sense of belonging – and of commitment to the organisation and its aims and objectives – is very quickly lost.

Second, we have been in the midst of a loneliness epidemic among the 20-somethings for the better part of the last two decades. It is a particular problem for young new graduates moving to an unfamiliar city on their first job. With no family or friends nearby, work is the only place they can find friends and arrange social events. "We come in to work to see our friends!" has been their response to surveys.

Third, the digital world of Zoom and Skype is no substitute for face-to-face meetings. It is easy to hide away reading your emails and newsfeed. People find the virtual environment awkward and very quickly get bored. There is a very strict limit on the size of natural conversations at four people. Anything bigger, and it becomes a lecture dominated by a handful of extraverts.

*The greatest challenge that we face regarding work is what happens to the 60% of workers who can't work from home - Elisabeth Reynolds: Executive Director, Task Force on the Work of the Future, MIT*

### **Jean-Nicolas Reyt: Assistant Professor of Organizational Behaviour, McGill University**

#### *Could working from home increase gender equality?*

Even as modern organisation are challenged by attracting, retaining and promoting talented employees, they underutilise one major source of available talent: women. Women account for half of all entry-level employees, yet they compose only **a third of senior managers and a fifth of C-suite executives**. One of the reasons women have a harder time advancing professionally is that they are much more likely than



Giving employees more flexibility in choosing when and where they work can increase gender equality via two pathways. First, **research** has long established that remote work can help mothers better balance their work and family responsibilities, which makes them less likely to sacrifice one for the other. Second, data collected during the pandemic suggests that working from home may also make the father more involved. More couples share family responsibilities more equally now than they did before the pandemic, according to a **survey** of American couples. In a **survey** of Canadian fathers, a majority report doing more household chores and spending more time with their children now than they did before the pandemic.

If organisations continued to offer remote work opportunities after the pandemic is over, more women will have a level playing field.

**Reetika Khera: Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi**

*Will our jobs still give us value?*

To me, the most significant realisation due to the pandemic and related restrictions, has been that people have become aware of the – call it ‘social’ or ‘intrinsic’ – value of work in our lives. For many, those much loathed and dreaded three words – ‘going to work’ – is something they crave.

I’m not referring to those who have lost work and income and need it to survive. I have in mind those who are comfortably working from home, even rediscovering old loves (such as cooking or sketching), honing new skills (many are baking) and so on. I’m referring to work broadly, including students who are longing for lectures even. There are signs of this across economic classes. Even the admittedly small fraction of domestic workers who continued to be paid through the lockdown were restless to resume work.

For different reasons, we’re socialised into thinking that work is about money. With WFH people have continued to enjoy the economic value of work, but they still feel like there is a hole in their lives. The obvious next step is that we value other people’s work, even when it is lower paid. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

*For those who are able, remote work has allowed people to do their jobs in secluded areas outside of cities. But such a luxury has also shined a light on existing inequalities*

---

**Karin Kimbrough: Chief Economist, LinkedIn**

*How is remote working changing job searches?*

We're seeing a huge increase in demand for remote work on our platform, one that will have a significant long-term impact on the labour market. Globally, we're seeing four times the number of jobs that offer remote work since March. We also see that trend reflected from jobseekers: the volume of job searches using the "Remote" filter on LinkedIn has increased ~60% since the beginning of March, and the share of Remote Job Applications has increased nearly 2.5 times in the same period.

The advent of remote work and an increasingly virtual world seems to have reduced barriers for people to connect and build their networks. Lately, LinkedIn members are more likely to connect with others outside of where they live.

With the rise of remote work, one of the most exciting trends that we're going to see is a democratisation of opportunity and movement of skills all around the globe. Companies may be able to source diverse talent more easily, especially from groups that are underrepresented in their area, or for skills that are locally less available, through remote-work options.

**Naohiro Yashiro: Professor, Global Business, Showa Women's University**

*Will white-collar workers get more freedom?*

Covid-19 is reshaping the traditional urban work style in Japan. In Tokyo, 2.4 million people commute in the crowded trains every day. The Covid-19 pandemic forces remote work for many employees, who find it quite efficient and comfortable. However, the flexible combination between work and family life at home is interrupted by the rigid labour law that forces the employer to monitor the working hours of the employees from 9 to 6, including lunchtime break. The law was originally established based on the blue-collar work style, and it mechanically applies to the white-collar jobs. The current official guideline for teleworkers requires the employees to take an hourly paid holiday when they leave temporarily from the work at home.

Nevertheless, the expansion of the new workstyle facing the Covid-19 will eventually not only release the white-collar jobs from the restrictions on time and place, but it should change the traditional unspecified job style under a lifetime commitment toward more specific contract-based employment. An increasing number of teleworkers would be an important step toward activating the elderly and handicapped workers and raising the labour productivity of the white-collar workers by letting them free from rigid time-based management in Japan.

*We will need more managers from shop floor to top floor who have emotional intelligence and social skills if we are to manage people more remotely - Cary Cooper: Professor of Organisational Psychology & Health at Manchester University*

**Jeanna Lundberg: Co-Founder and CEO, Respaces**

*What is the future of workspaces?*

A few months ago, I had the luxury of a beautiful office close to home, and a boss who would allow me to work from home whenever I wanted. My friends were envious, as almost all of them were expected to work from the same desk every day.

Then Covid-19 hit, and show-up culture was officially dead. No one was expected to show up anywhere. Suddenly companies were forced to leave the standard office buildings behind, and trust both technology and their employees to truly work remotely. So, what have we learnt so far?

If I ask my friends if they would like to go back full-time to working from one office, five days a week – most people say no. They like skipping the obligatory commute, feeling trusted by their bosses, and having the freedom to customise their days to their personal needs. But they also complain that the home office is cramped, boring, and lonely after a while.

Companies have discovered that both remote work and trusting employees is not only possible, but in many cases more profitable. Employees remain effective and productive, and they feel better, too. Many are now questioning the need for the big, expensive and static office they used to have.

So, if the general population won't be going back full-time to the office, but also won't be staying at home full-time – what is the future of workspaces?

Covid-19 taught us the importance of flexibility and trust, from economic, sustainability and health perspectives. As companies dare to explore options beyond the 'one-size-fits-all' office solution, we can start sharing spaces in a new way. Imagine if you could have access to inspiring new locations adapted for different tasks and projects – wherever you are.

### **Rashmi Dhanwani: Founder, the Art X Company**

#### *What does employee trust look like?*

In the formal economy, we have observed that the impact has been most evident around intangible ideas of trust, accountability and boundaries. In India, we have operated on a trust deficit in the workplace, which made it necessary for specific hierarchical and social structures to be in place.

The pandemic, the disruptions it has caused to what we know and the enforced move to work from home has allowed for a multi-polar power dynamic to emerge with power bases shifting from leaders and experienced bosses to younger professionals more adept at adapting to digital working environments. Secondly, with the transparency of processes, allocation and status updates that digital planning tools bestow, employee accountability to tasks is made more visible to everyone across the work chain, leading to challenging the aforementioned trust deficit. Lastly, boundaries between office and personal space, digital and lived experiences and work and play have become far more fluid. It remains to be seen how organisations are able to capitalise on opportunities arising out of this unprecedented situation, while also syncing it into creating a “better normal” for its employees.

*Striking a balance between business as usual and social distancing has been a delicate dance, and only possible for those who have quality internet access*

---

**Karen Mills: Senior Fellow, Harvard Business School and Former Administrator, US Small Business Administration**

*Is being an entrepreneur harder than ever?*

Small businesses and entrepreneurship are the hidden assets of every democratic society. In the US, they have long been the pathway to the American Dream. But what if this pathway became less available in the future? It's getting harder to start a business in the US, and entrepreneurship is already on the decline.

One way to reverse this trend is by widening access to capital. Fintech [financial technology] lenders can help fill the gaps left by banks in underserved markets and communities, although we must be vigilant that hidden biases in lending algorithms do not exacerbate existing disparities. The future of access to capital remains unclear, but one thing is certain: if entrepreneurship fades, so will economic opportunity and mobility.

**Jay Van Bavel: Associate Professor of Psychology and Neural Science, New York University**

*Will our behavioural changes last?*

We have just undergone the largest behaviour-change experiment in the history of humanity. The question is, which new habits will stick around after the pandemic is over? I think it's safe to say that people will quickly flock back to restaurants and bars, weddings and funerals, vacations and graduations once a vaccine has been developed. But it's less clear if we will continue to wear masks during flu season – which could save countless lives and better prepare us for a future pandemic – or continue to work from home.

The population has had a massive crash course in modern technology, so I think that these new skills and experiences will be the true engine of change. For instance, now that companies have been forced to try telecommuting, I bet that many will decide it's less expensive and more efficient to allow people to work from home. This has lots of second- and third-order effects that we haven't considered. One possibility is that it could increase gender equity in the workforce as parents are better able to balance work and home life. Telecommuters might flock to smaller, cheaper cities or rural environments. But if they do, this won't be the end of big cities – I expect they will rise from the ashes like a phoenix as artists and young parents will suddenly be able to afford life in an urban hub.

The restructuring of society might seem frightening, but it provides the opportunity for radically new social arrangements that are not only more efficient, but also more humane.

*One of the biggest effects of the pandemic has been to illuminate the utter lack of voice and influence most people have in their workplace - Anna Stansbury: Inequality & Social Policy Scholar, Harvard University*

**John Trougakos: Associate Professor, Organizational Behaviour and HR Management, University of Toronto**

*How do we modernise traditional work arrangements?*

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally shifted the way in which people work. As a result, traditional office jobs may never be the same. The pandemic forced millions of employees to work remotely, and numerous companies have elected to make this move a permanent feature of their business models. However, in order to maximise the benefits of working remotely, ways must be found to ensure people remain productive and connected while not being overburdened.

Companies need to look at the pandemic as an opportunity to modernise how people work. This should not only include a shift to having employees working from home, but also being open to alternative schedules including ideas such as four-day work weeks and six-hour work days. At the same time, employees must build resilience and actively preserve boundaries between home and their job, not only to boost performance, but to also maintain personal well-being. One way to help achieve this is to empower workers by giving them more autonomy in determining their working arrangements. Greater control over how and when to work leads to greater satisfaction, productivity and reduced stress. People may choose to work from home, go into the office or find alternate arrangements that work for them.

Local neighbourhood Covid-safe remote work spaces, such as those offered by new companies like Toronto-based WorkMode, have arisen specifically to address this growing need. These types of spaces offer alternatives to large crowded office buildings, while providing employees a simple way to deal with their work-home boundary dilemmas. The key is to focus on keeping workers productive and healthy by giving them the freedom to work in ways that suit their needs while also meeting corporate objectives. Proactive and progressive companies will take this opportunity to embrace this new normal and turn it into a competitive advantage while simultaneously improving the lives of their workers.

### **Anna Stansbury: Inequality & Social Policy Scholar, Harvard University**

#### ***Will all workers now have a voice?***

For the world of work, one of the biggest effects of the pandemic has been to illuminate the utter lack of voice and influence most people have in their workplace.

This is starkest if you consider low-paid essential workers in industries like food production or delivery – working for meagre pay at the best of times, in poor working conditions and during this pandemic often forced to choose between losing their income or risking contracting a disease which could threaten them and their loved ones. But it is also true for employees throughout the income distribution. Healthcare workers – on the front-line in dealing with the pandemic – are dying at alarming rates, and are often forced to go without the information, the protective equipment or the workplace practices needed to stay safe. Employees in retail, in office jobs, in hospitality have hesitated to return to long days of working in enclosed spaces with poor air circulation – but have often had no real choice in the matter.

And for many people, this has raised the question: why do I have so little say in my workplace? And: what can we do to change this?

This desire for a greater voice in the workplace has manifested itself with strikes and walkouts across industries and countries, from warehouse workers in Milan to bus drivers in Detroit, food packers in Northern Ireland to nurses in Hong Kong. It has manifested itself with calls for greater unionization, or for employee representation on workplace health and safety committees. And, I expect, it will manifest itself over the longer term, in a generation which has viscerally experienced the risks of not having a meaningful voice in their workplace – and who will put substantial emphasis on organizing for, advocating for, and voting for measures to strengthen employee representation and workplace democracy in the future.

*With in-person chats swapped for video calls, the way we interact with colleagues might never be the same, even after Covid-19 infections subside*

---

**Chinmay Tumble: Professor of Economics, Indian Institute of Management**

***Which divides between workers will deepen?***

The pandemic is starkly reframing societal inequalities between those who have good bandwidth connectivity and those who don't. The former can work from home, choose to live remotely, exercise at home and accumulate their savings in a world with limited opportunities for instant gratification. The latter are either struggling or out of work, stalling mortgage payments, climbing down the nutrition ladder and dipping into their savings. This includes a large class of migrant workers, dependent on their families for support.



Unemployment and growing inequality could thus herald new political opportunities, if not outright revolutions. The post-pandemic world will also be interesting: a resumption of the consumerist economy with reduced time-horizons (why postpone purchases and exotic vacations when life can be so short) as well as a nostalgia for the possibilities that the lockdown offered us – of streets without cars, of clean air and of spending quality time with family. Expect more suburbanisation and multiple-home-ownership for the wealthy and a strong urge to upgrade digital skills among those not so well-off but who want to thrive in the new age high-bandwidth society.

**Cary Cooper: Professor of Organisational Psychology & Health at Manchester University**

*Will presenteeism get worse?*

The world of work will dramatically change over the next few years, not only because of Covid, but also because of the deep recession we will all be facing. There will, of course, be more flexible working – that is, people working substantially from home if they can and using a central office environment from time to time – but the 9-to-5 in an office environment is dead. Even employers will want this given the recession because it will enable them to substantially downsize their estate costs.

Business travel will virtually cease both within the country and between countries as well because people are reluctant to use trains and planes and also employers want to minimise travel expenses – so Zooming, Skyping, etc. will be the future of business relationships. Given the fears of redundancies and a massive increase in job insecurity, we will see a great deal of presenteeism over the coming couple of years, which is likely to reflect itself in the short term by more visits to the central office environment to connect with office politics and to show facetime.

But in the medium term, [presenteeism will be reflected] by people working longer hours and creating and attending more virtual meetings – which will not be good for the health of employees and their productivity. And finally, people in management roles will have to undergo a major transformation. We will need more managers from shop floor to top floor who have emotional intelligence and social skills, if we are to manage people more remotely, to identify when people are not coping with their work or suffering from mental ill health and to team build and develop in a virtual world new products and services. In the past, we promoted and hired people to leadership roles based on their technical skills; in the future, we will need managers who have parity between their technical and people skills – this is a major shift in emphasis in the new world of work.

**Scott Galloway: Professor of Marketing, New York University**

*The pandemic has accelerated societal change – will it last?*

The pandemic's most enduring impact will be as an accelerant. While it will initiate some changes and alter the direction of some trends, the pandemic's primary effect has been to accelerate dynamics already present in society – from e-commerce to online education to remote healthcare.

The biggest question facing the world as the pandemic recedes will be: will these accelerations stick? Millions of people shifted their grocery purchases online – will they keep that up after it is safe to shop in person? Thousands of colleges invested in distance learning technology, and their teachers and students

online for the first time – will they make future appointments this way, saving time, money, and gas, or will they miss the physical closeness?

Beyond the world of business, the pandemic revealed and accelerated stark disparities in income, lifestyle and opportunity. Working class people got laid off, or – if they were deemed “essential workers” – were forced to risk their lives for minimum wage. While office workers relocated to their suburban homes and kept on collecting their \$100,000 incomes. Will the generation that came of age into such a world reject the system that produced it, push for reform or decide that ruthless competition is their only hope?

---

*Commutes, a once daily ritual for workers around the world, have all but disappeared for many of them*

**Poornima Luthra: Founder and Chief Consultant, TalentED*****What will inclusive offices look like?***

It is the year 2020. What would a futurist in the early 1900s have predicted about the state of equality in the year 2020? It is quite likely that the predictions would have been around absolute equality for all human beings. And yet here we are, in 2020, still struggling with inequality, biases and discrimination in our workplaces.

As we design the workplaces of the post-Covid-19 era, we need to put inclusive workplaces for diverse talent at the forefront of how we think about the future of work. This will need us to embrace a broader scope of diversity in our workplaces that includes gender, ethnicity, age, physical disabilities, cognitive diversity, lifestyle choices, sexual orientation and socioeconomic backgrounds. Whether work is done remotely, in our offices or perhaps some hybrid of the two, we need to be asking ourselves if we have inclusive workplace cultures for our diverse talent to thrive?

The foot needs to stay on the accelerator. This will require all of us, individually and collectively, to ask ourselves if we are doing enough to be active allies – are we actively creating inclusive workplaces in which all its diverse talent feel that they are valued, appreciated, respected and that they belong.

**Lila Preston: Co-Head of Growth Equity Investment, Generation Investment Management*****How can we make work more sustainable?***

The pandemic had a profound impact on the labour market almost overnight: the equivalent of nearly 500 million full-time jobs disappeared. What happens next is enormously important, and we at Generation are focused on ensuring a sustainable future of work.

The pandemic has brought home how many of the current models of work are not sustainable. Employment has dropped across the world, but the young, people of colour and women have been hit hardest of all. As economies reopen, we have the obligation to build back better.

We are investors dedicated to sustainability. For us, a sustainable future of work would have three main traits. First, people would receive adequate compensation – not only in terms of their take-home salary each month, but also in terms of retirement savings and healthcare coverage. Second, the world of work must address longstanding issues of underrepresentation of minority groups. Finally, companies must help improve productivity growth, which was weak long before the pandemic and is a fundamental source of societal discontent.

A number of young companies are doing important work in this space. Some companies are focused on improving financial inclusion, trying to make it easier for workers to start and build a retirement-savings plan. Other companies in this space reduce the costs of access to benefits including health insurance. These services save small business owners hours of administration – and also immeasurably improve workers' lives.

Improving diversity and accessibility is also crucial. For white-collar workers, by removing the requirement to be in a physical office, businesses can open up access to new talent pools like working

mothers, veterans and people with disabilities. The opportunity for remote and distributed work can also allow us to challenge human biases that impact recruiting processes.

As sustainability investors, we believe that we are at an exciting turning point. The pandemic, despite its many horrors, could be a catalyst for a better world of work.

*Will the generation that came of age into such a world reject the system that produced it, push for reform or decide that ruthless competition is their only hope? - Scott Galloway: Professor of Marketing, New York University*

**Vinod Kumar: CEO, Vodafone Business**

***How will emerging tech shape post-Covid-19 offices?***

We're seeing a massive rewriting of the social contracts between employers and employees as a result of Covid-19. The way businesses function and employees work fundamentally changed overnight which forced both to reset their expectations of how work fits into life. The traditional 9-to-5 work day as we know it has also changed, as employers seek to accommodate its employees with flexible windowed hours of working.

These new social contracts between employers and workers centre on blending in-person offices with remote capabilities as well as traditional office hours with asynchronous work, all enabled by technology. As a result, when I think about the future of work and how it will evolve in years to come, I believe our workday will be more virtual and automated. The rise of 5G networks and connected machines will enable virtual on-the-go workstations. These virtual stations will provide employees with all the amenities of a digital workplace, from AI-powered assistants that prep whiteboard presentations to virtual reality headsets that put you at the table of a morning meeting with co-workers around the world.

Ultimately, businesses will need to create digital workplaces that make it easier for all kinds of employees to work in flexible environments while also living their lives.

**Vaibhav Gujral: Partner at McKinsey & Company**

***What about the 'heartbeat' of the office?***

As lockdowns swept through the world earlier this year, the speed with which companies adapted was nothing short of remarkable, switching to a remote work model virtually overnight. Living rooms and kitchen countertops were converted into workspaces, and backgrounds for video calls were carefully curated. Many desk job workers even experienced a productivity 'honeymoon', with hours that were erstwhile spent stuck in traffic or airport lines, redeployed to staying on top of a zero inbox and sometimes enjoying mealtime with family.

However, as the crisis dragged, we realised that it wasn't sufficient to measure productivity by the simple yardstick of hours worked. We were missing the 'heartbeat' of the workplace: the energy that comes from

collaboration; the trust and relationships that are built through countless and unsaid small gestures and interactions.

So, the question that is critical for us to answer – as we eventually emerge from this crisis – is ‘will we work differently?’ Will companies that are announcing permanent work from home policies become beacons for the rest, or remain exceptions?

Even small shifts in work patterns could have a profound impact on commercial real estate – most directly on the demand for office space, and inevitably a multiplier effect on urban downtowns that are designed for the 9-to-5 worker. Companies are now reflecting more than ever on their real estate footprint. Does it make sense to keep large HQ spaces in urban centres, or should they adopt a more flexible model? The pressure on demand will create a flight to quality, toward buildings that deliver a better experience for users, and are more technologically advanced.

Organisations that get it right may emerge from the crisis ahead in the war for talent, with policies that employees prefer, and workplaces that are purpose-designed to be vibrant, foster collaboration and productivity for the new way of working.

### **Rosanna Durruthy: Vice President, Global Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, LinkedIn**

#### ***What will become of working parents?***

Across the globe, it’s apparent, one thing will remain constant: remote work. Whether mandated by an employer or a personal choice, chances are many of us will be working from home for the foreseeable future. For many professionals, this shift is a positive and welcomed change. **Our recent survey** revealed that 63% of professionals would choose to continue working from home in some capacity even if their employer opened offices because most of them (57%) are not yet feeling safe to return to work.

In this environment, having managers and company leaders who also recognize the unique challenges working parents are facing is critical. As a leader, you can foster an environment and culture where working parents are supported by offering flexibility such as moving away from traditional 9-to-5 working hours and encouraging transparency and regular check-ins between colleagues on work schedules and availability. It's also critical that organisations understand the challenges and barriers of returning to work. A LinkedIn study found 30% of working professionals with school-aged children at home right now feel they do not have the necessary childcare available to return to work. And 60% of workers say their employers have not made accommodations to their work schedules to help with parenting duties. As companies look to reopen, they must address the concerns of working parents.

*This series is produced by: Philippa Fogarty, Simon Frantz, Javier Hirschfeld, Sarah Keating, Emmanuel Lafont, Bryan Lufkin, Rachel Mishael, Visvak Ponnayolu, Maddy Savage and Meredith Turits.*

