

NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE FUTURE OF WORK

MÓNICA SANTANA
RAMÓN VALLE-CABRERA

(FOREWORD BY PROF. DAVE ULRICH)



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Contents

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	ix
List of Contributors	xi
Foreword: Demystifying the Future of Work	xii
Acknowledgements	xiv
Chapter 1 New Directions in the Future of Work: An Introduction <i>Mónica Santana and Ramón Valle-Cabrera</i>	 1
Chapter 2 Leadership and Values: A New Framework for the Future of Work <i>Simon L. Dolan</i>	 19
Chapter 3 Talent Management for the Future of Work <i>Eva Gallardo-Gallardo and David G. Collings</i>	 35
Chapter 4 New Forms of Work <i>Eva Rimbau-Gilabert and Susana Pasamar</i>	 55
Chapter 5 AI, Digitalisation, and HRM: Foundations, Extensions, and New Directions on AI, Digitalisation, and HRM <i>Maarten Renkema</i>	 77

Chapter 6 Vulnerable Workers and the Future of Work <i>Paul Boselie, Rik van Berkel, Jasmijn van Harten, Laura van Os and Rosan Haenraets</i>	97
Chapter 7 The Impact of Technology on the Present and the Future of Work and Skills <i>Sergio Torrejón Pérez and Ignacio González Vázquez</i>	119
Chapter 8 The Future of Employment and Industrial Relations <i>Paz Arancibia and Raymond Torres</i>	143
Chapter 9 Well-being, Happiness, Satisfaction, Burnout and the Future of Work <i>Ricardo Chiva and Jacob Guinot</i>	163
Chapter 10 The Impact of COVID-19 on the Future of Work and a Research Agenda for the Future of Work <i>Mónica Santana</i>	183
Index	201

List of Figures

Chapter 1

- Fig. 1. Evolution Map of the FoW Research Themes in the Periods of 1959–1997, 1998–2008, 2009–2014 and 2015–2020. 2

Chapter 2

- Fig. 1. The Three-dimensional PIR Model of Leadership by Values Competencies for a VUCA World. 26
- Fig. 2. Leadership Types Based on Combining PIR Generation. 27
- Fig. 3. Tzafrir and Dolan RCH Triple Dimensions of Trust. 32

Chapter 4

- Fig. 1. General Characteristics of New Forms of Employment. 56
- Fig. 2. A Classification of the New Forms of Work. 58
- Fig. 3. Human Resource Architecture Framework. 70

Chapter 5

- Fig. 1. A Multilevel Framework on the Impact of AI on and Digitalisation on HRM and the FoW. 83

Chapter 6

- Fig. 1. Human Capital Characteristics and Employment Modes. 102

Chapter 7

- Fig. 1. The Risk of Automation across Occupations. 122
- Fig. 2. Aggregate Reported and Compositional Change in Task Indices in EU-15, 1995–2015. 126

Chapter 8

- | | | |
|---------|--|-----|
| Fig. 1. | Jobs by Occupation in Advanced Economies. | 145 |
| Fig. 2. | Working-age Population Growth, by Region, 2015–2040. | 150 |

Chapter 9

- | | | |
|---------|---|-----|
| Fig. 1. | The Three Organisations and Well-being. | 172 |
|---------|---|-----|

Chapter 10

- | | | |
|---------|--|-----|
| Fig. 1. | Strategic Diagram of the Future of Work and Covid-19 Themes in 2020 (Number of Union Documents). | 184 |
| Fig. 2. | Cluster's Network of Future of Work and Covid's Themes (Work) for 2020. | 185 |
| Fig. 3. | Cluster's Network of Future of Work and Covid's Themes (Social Support) for 2020. | 188 |

List of Tables

Chapter 4

Table 1.	Employee Sharing: Main Positive and Negative Outcomes for Employers and Workers.	59
Table 2.	Job Sharing: Positive and Negative Outcomes for Employers and Workers.	60
Table 3.	Voucher-based Work: Positive and Negative Outcomes for Employers and Workers.	60
Table 4.	Casual Work: Positive and Negative Outcomes for Employers and Workers.	62
Table 5.	Telework: Positive and Negative Outcomes for Employers and Workers.	64
Table 6.	Platform Work: Positive and Negative Outcomes for Employers and Workers.	66
Table 7.	Collaborative Employment: Positive and Negative Outcomes.	68

Chapter 9

Table 1.	Disciplinary, Achievement and Conscious Organisations.	170
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Foreword: Demystifying the Future of Work

I am trained as an organisational taxonomist (no, there are not very many of us!). Taxonomists seek patterns in events, themes in ideas, and order from randomness. Over the years, I have heard many speak passionately about ‘future of work’ and I have silently nodded my head affirming the value of the topic, but privately wondering what ‘future of work’ really meant. Under this broad banner, it included eloquent discussions of technological innovations, climate change, demographics, social justice, political systems, economic gaps, immigration patterns, industry disruptions, government policies, sustainability principles, organisation reinvention, workforce and workplace dynamics, employee experience, leadership requirements, governance systems, etc.

Of course, each of these topics will create ideas that shape the nature of work. But sometimes I felt lost in the randomness of all these ideas and could not find an order or pattern to make sense of future of work.

Without a doubt, questions (where, how, who, when, and what) about *work* matter. Individuals spend a large part of their waking hours working and their work shapes personal identity, experience, and well-being, or a positive workforce. Organisations with effective work processes succeed in the marketplace with customers, investors, and communities thus creating a better workplace. And, the *future of work* will shape how individuals and organisations operate. It is helpful to glance backwards to learn from what has happened; it is more helpful to fixate on the future so that it can be created.

But ordering all the ideas about the future of work into patterns and themes related to the future of work turns an otherwise interesting set of nearly random insights into specific actions with choices that leaders can make to work better.

So, I am delighted to read Monica and Ramon’s book. They recognise that ‘content is king, but context is the kingdom’. In this case, the context (or kingdom) sets the conditions for the what, where, and how work will be done. In a relatively condensed time frame, the world faced multiple crises of global pandemic (health and social isolation), social unrest (refugees and black lives matter), political squabbles (dysfunctional government elections and bickering), technological advancements (AI and cloud data) leading to a digital age, economic turbulence, and emotional malaise.

From this context, the content of work has had to change. Leaders have had to:

- redefine the boundaries of where work is done (work is not a place, but a shared set of values);
- how work is done (through a mix of face-to-face interactions and virtual settings);
- who does work (with a melding of people and technology); and
- what impact work has on employees (helping employees believe, become, and belong from their work activities), customers (adapting work to changing customer expectations), investors (ensuring confidence in the future through intangibles), and communities (being socially responsible).

In this changing context of work, Monica and Ramon create a useful typology of eight dimensions of the content of the future of work, bringing order to work choices. Their classification leads to very thoughtful chapters on how work will affect individuals (talent, vulnerable employees, education, and well-being), leaders (values and competencies), and organisations (forms and flexibility, technology, and policies). Each chapter offers insights on how individuals and leaders can make choices to shape the future of work to respond to changing contextual conditions.

I leave this book more aware of what ‘future of work’ really means. With this meaning more clear, I am more able to demystify the future of work from a set of interesting insights to specific actions and choices that will help me (and others) imagine, invent, and implement a work setting that works.

Dave Ulrich
January 2021

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'To my family'. (Ramón)

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