



“ We always overestimate the change that will occur in the next two years and underestimate the change that will occur in the next 10. Don't let yourself be lulled into inaction.” **Bill Gates**

Introduction

In 2027, human beings will still be at the center of work, even as intelligent software and machines become our co-workers. Smart machines, consumer technology, AI and robotics will augment human aptitude and capabilities raising questions around people's worth and where they may fit in the future.

Social developments, digital business, consumer behaviors and emerging technologies will drive six planning assumptions that characterize work in 2027.

In this Research Note summary, we look at each of the six planning assumptions and assess the implications for leader's as organizations prepare for the world of work in 2027.

Planning Assumption 1: “We Working” will take out middle management

We will gravitate toward work and organizations that accelerate “We Working” — a work philosophy that depends on ensembles of autonomous and high-performing teams fulfilling crucial outcomes. Work will revolve around portfolios of diversified roles performed in teams that dynamically resize and reform. The trust among We Working teammates will dovetail with the rise of algorithmic management reducing the need for middle managers.

By 2027, We Working will be a proven model to orchestrate talents and expertise to achieve critical outcomes. It will become the de facto organizational operating model. The complexity and scale of business objectives will demand the involvement and

orchestration of brainpower and expertise across boundaries and borders in ways more intricate than today. We Working will take the concept of teaming and industrialize it, removing the casualness and converting it into a source of excellence.

The leadership style for We Working resembles the style used by ScrumMasters. Leaders act as a coach and process expert, guiding the team to ever-higher levels of cohesiveness, self-organization and performance. A key role of the ScrumMaster is to eliminate things that get in the way of the team's progress.

Leader implication:

- Be a role model for the We Working leadership style, and plan to hire and develop people to apply ScrumMaster leadership styles across the organization. By 2027, people will expect intentionally designed We Working ensembles.

Planning Assumption 2: Constant upskilling will outweigh tenure and experience

The digital economy will demand new ideas, new information and new business models that continually expand, combine and morph into new ideas, new ventures and new businesses. People at the center of the rapid morphing — change-ready leaders and eager contributors — will not look backward for a solution. They will apply creativity, critical thinking and constant upskilling to complex problem solving.

By 2027, more than two out of three jobs will likely be defined as nonroutine. Most non-routine work is considered cognitive, meaning it requires thinking rather than doing. Non-routine cognitive work traverses uncharted territory, new activities and unprecedented challenges.

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Each of us will need to build a constant program to learn and relearn. As lifelong learners, we will use all-in-one platforms focused on new and emerging areas of technology and business to connect with learning-content builders, assessment providers, mentors and coaches.

Leader implications:

- Be a champion for lifelong learning for yourself and for the business.
- Start to experiment with boot camps, nanodegree programs, consumerized learning, competitions and hackathons. Leader's have almost nothing to lose in trying out non-traditional programs and channels to anticipate how people will learn in 2027.

Planning Assumption 3: Extreme work choices will blur boundaries, businesses and buddies

Digital business, built on vast networks and ecosystems, will increase the distribution of work across communities of people and across businesses globally. By 2027, the consumerized "pull" mindset will have such a hold that the 20th century "push" mindset will seem ancient.

We will take control of our work, our environments and our collaborators. We will personalize the information, sources and tools we need where and when we need them, without restriction. Tensions will emerge as work traverses borders, as security imbalances surface, as We Working creates patchworks of preferences and as we each customize our work options.

We will work and speak with team members across languages, borders and cultures, using avatars, language software, conversational interfaces and real-time dialect translation to translate and interpret with almost no loss of context or meaning.

Few of us will be able to count on work simply coming to us. We will have to think up new ways to generate value, tap into new We Working ensembles, and market the output or outcome to ventures, companies and causes.

Leader implication:

- Use technology and information to build a hybrid workplace — physical and virtual — that embraces work styles of all people, not just those who are permanently employed or who have high digital dexterity.

“ The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.”

Alvin Toffler

Planning Assumption 4: Smart machines will be our co-workers

Artificial Intelligence, consumer technology, internet-based applications and tons of computing power in smaller devices will change where and how we work. Smart machines will get smarter and ubiquitous, doing not only what was previously reserved for humans, but also what was thought to be impossible for machines.

As high-performing workers, we will recognize that we can achieve more by distributing our tasks across smart machines, software, apps and avatars in our personal portfolios. We will develop personal toolkits of virtual doppelgangers — AI software and devices that fulfill aspects of our personal or team-based activities. Making these personal toolkits work will be personal infrastructures that enable us to carry our personal workplaces with us using cloud communities, open applications and personal virtual assistants.

Extreme digital dexterity will lie at the core of how we will work. Personal digital dexterity will enable us to use AI in our teams and projects. We will share consumerized toolboxes with We Working ensembles to tackle challenges, share mind maps, advance hypotheses and resolve customer challenges.

Leader implications:

- Experiment with AI to see how it can be applied to daily activities, enhance complex problem solving or free up time for both.
- Challenge high performers to create and share AI tools or personalized portfolios of apps, tools and smart technology to raise the bar for extreme digital dexterity.

Planning Assumption 5: We will work for purpose and passion, not just money

We will seek work that challenges us, peers who stimulate us and purpose that drives us. Many of us will bypass the corporate world and experiment with independent work and socially responsible ventures to meet those personal drivers.

We will become deliberate in shaping and shifting our careers in a meaningful direction. Our impact and value will be tied to our mission, our purpose and our passion. Businesses and institutions will make themselves attractive not solely by money, but by offering us an opportunity to fuel our purpose and make a socially meaningful impact through work.

Leader implication:

- Make what people do resonate personally. Weave in personal stories, experiences and successes to demonstrate commitment and drive engagement.

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“ The standard for evaluating any work experience is no longer work ... it’s life.” **Bill Jensen, The Jensen Group**

Planning Assumption 6: Work-life challenges will reveal a dark side

Because many of us will work independently or in remote locations, we will face a tension. To fuel our upskilling and take on grander portfolios of assignments, we will take on more work assignments, to a point where we will feel as if we are working 24/7.

To counter the tension, we will look not to balance work-life but to emphasize life over work. Technology will emerge to monitor when we have worked too much and when we need to recharge. Cognitive load will be monitored and fit into the available time. Technology will catch up with our biorhythms, nutritional needs and exercise needs and help us prioritize.

The work-life balance equation will not be so crisp. We Working — built on autonomy, alignment and trust — will force us to recalibrate work arrangements and create more equitability. Instead of striving to reduce the impact of work on our non-work life, some of us will need to ensure that our non-work life does not interrupt our work commitments.

Leader implication:

- Create scenarios in which work-life balance swings back and forth as work distribution, time and life stages change. In particular, incorporate the darker side of work-life challenges in the scenarios, including fragmentation and privacy.

Recommendations

Leader’s seeking to master the dynamics of leadership, culture and people during the next decade should:

- **Go to the extreme and be daring.** Assume that the unconventional approaches will be true to a greater degree than not, then lead a new vision of how people will work in and around your business. Don’t stop at the perimeter of the organization. The future worker will not.
- **Create a 10-year scenario for “We Working”.** Assume that people will enter and exit through ever-changing networks of people, both inside and outside the enterprise.
- **Prepare for the killer combo: people + technology.** Investigate how AI, smart software and robots will enrich and invigorate work strategy.
- **Build a brand and a message that resonate.** Passion, purpose and balance will intensify as anchors for our work and prosperity. Master the message.