



Post-Session Notes on

# **FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING**

10TH EDITION

**QED CHANGEMAKER FORUM**

ON 4 NOVEMBER 2022



# About Post-Session Notes

These post-session notes will shed light on key takeaways from the roundtable discussions at the 10th QED Changemaker Forum – around how People, Ideas, and Technology are impacting, shaping and redefining our Workforce, Workplace, and Workday as part of the future ways of working.

## About the QED Changemaker Forum

The QED Changemaker Forum brings together senior management and leadership from enterprise and governmental organisations, to engage in dialogue and discussion around critical industry issues in an intimate closed-door setting. The forum aims to both challenge and chart the future for their respective industries and organisations, and empower change for the better.

Each edition of the QED Changemaker Forum is focused around a new pertinent business issue voted on by senior leaders in the QED Changemaker Network. Senior leadership speakers, moderators, and attendees are then brought together to exchange views, share candid opinions, and gain a deeper appreciation of the issue through exclusive, by-invite-only panel sharings, Q&A sessions, roundtable discussions, and networking opportunities.

The event (including these post-session notes) adheres to the Chatham House Rule. Beyond the information received at the session, no identities nor affiliations to the attendees have been included in these notes.



# Acknowledgements

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Topic of Focus:

# FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING

The 10th QED Changemaker Forum's focus was on the topic of "Future Ways of Working" (FWoW). The session aimed to explore and address the significant changes occurring in the work landscape driven by the integration of People, Ideas, and Technology. We asked senior leaders about where their organisations were in the journey toward the FWoW, and found that only 30% were ready, while a little more than half are midway, en-route to a final destination.

The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined what work could be, pushing the boundaries of flexible work, testing the attitudes, mindsets, expectations, and unconscious biases of both employees and leaders. While some organisations report better productivity in hybrid settings, others have recognised that insisting on a full work-from-office policy can hinder their employer branding among younger talent, who now view remote work as an entitlement rather than a privilege.

In this evolving landscape, leaders must focus on changing attitudes toward work-life balance and the need for companies to (re)establish trust with all employees. The emerging workforce is driving shifts in trust, work-life balance, and talent demands with the rise of new skills and roles. Employee engagement is at an all-time low, presenting an opportunity for organisations to adapt and prepare for the FWoW.

The reality is that FWoW is not solely defined by artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), automation, or meta, nor can it be determined by any single factor resulting from the exponential advancement of technology today. Instead, it is the confluence of three major drivers - People, Ideas, and Technology - that will impact, shape, and redefine our Workforce, Workplace, and Workday. The following post-session notes seek to provide insights and guidance collected from the various conversations (of the leaders present) on navigating these interconnected forces, enabling organisations to adapt and thrive in the future of work.

# Key Takeaways

Addressing transitional challenges such as talent competition, skills mismatch, hybrid work, and digital burnout.

- Competition for Talent
- Skills Mismatch
- Rising Demand of Hybrid Work
- Changing Employee Expectations
- Thinning & Transactional Relationships
- Digital Burnout & Mental Wellness
- Customer Experience Implications
- Flexible Workspace Planning
- Digitalisation & Security

Seizing opportunities by adopting flexible policies, emphasising employee experience, and harnessing diverse talent pools.

- Adopting Flexible & Adaptable Policies
- Emphasising Human Outcomes & Employee Experience
- Augmenting Technology & Human Interactions
- Segmenting the Workforce & Bridging Gaps
- Harness diverse Talent Pools for an inclusive future workforce
- Investing in a Compelling Purpose & Vision
- Integrated Organisation Strategy
- Continuous Learning & Adaptability
- Upskilling & Talent Development
- Collaboration & Partnership

# Key Takeaways

Implementing solutions focusing on human-centric design, agile policy development, upskilling, technology augmentation, and empathetic leadership.

- Human-centric Design & Compelling Purpose
- Agile Policy Development & Segmented Workforce
- Augmenting Technology & Human Interactions
- Upskilling, Reskilling, & Collaboration
- Diverse Talent Acquisition & Equal Opportunities
- Technology Augmentation & Healing
- Leadership Development & Empathy
- Collaborative Ecosystems & Partnerships
- Regular Employee Feedback & Continuous Improvement





# 1. KEY CHALLENGES

## 1.1 Competition for talent

The rapidly evolving landscape of FWoW has intensified the competition for talent. Singapore, with its tight labour market due to an aging workforce and low fertility rates, faces particular challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these difficulties. Approximately 18,000 job vacancies related to digital transformation remain unfilled in Singapore, emphasising the need for organisations to reimagine and redesign new ways of working to attract and retain talent with the right skillset.

## 1.2 Skills mismatch

The workforce's skills mismatch necessitates employee upskilling to adapt to future ways of working. Organisations must decide whether to hire based on talent and fit or an individual's potential to learn and be trained. This challenge is especially relevant with the growing demand for new skills. Upskilling programs and initiatives are crucial to bridge the skills gap and ensure employees possess the necessary skills for the future.

## 1.3 Rising demand of hybrid work

The rising demand of hybrid working presents new challenges for organisations. However, in some industries like consulting, hybrid work is not new and has been practiced for years. Microsoft's Work Trend Index reveals that 73% of workers want flexible remote work options to continue post-pandemic, while 67% desire in-person collaboration and connection. Organisations must reassess the balance between privilege and entitlement concerning work arrangements and benefits to attract and retain top talent. A highly decentralised and/or hybrid workforce also forces the traditional performance assessment and promotion approaches for most organisations.





# 1. KEY CHALLENGES

## 1.4 Changing employee expectations

Organisations have to consider adapting to meet the growing expectations of employees wanting remote work flexibility and better work-life balance. Hybrid working is now a dealbreaker for many employees rather than a privilege. Purpose-led companies have a strong appeal for attracting talent, and there is a rising trend of employees conducting reverse-interviews on their prospective employers about their organisational purpose and business sustainability.

## 1.5 Thinning and transactional relationships

Decentralised workforces and reduced in-person interactions lead to thinner and more transactional relationships between employees, leading to short-termism. Limited opportunities to build trust with coworkers and supervisors make it harder for employees to feel connected, resulting in diminished organisational loyalty. Cases of companies losing their entire teams to MNCs and Big Tech, which offer significantly higher salaries, are not uncommon.

## 1.6 Digital burnout and mental wellness

The blurring of boundaries between personal and work life in remote setups has led to digital burnout and mental wellness challenges. Employees struggle with maintaining work-life balance and may feel guilty when taking personal time off. Presenteeism has become a concern, and organisations need to prioritise employee wellness initiatives to prevent burnout and support their overall well-being.



# 1. KEY CHALLENGES

## 1.7 Customer experience implications

Organisations implementing hybrid and wellness arrangements, such as "Focus Fridays," must consider the impact on customer experience. Balancing the needs of employees and ensuring a seamless customer experience should be a priority for organisations embracing new ways of working.

## 1.8 Flexible workspace planning

The rise of flexible work arrangements has posed challenges in terms of space utilisation in office environments. Organisations need to rethink their office layouts and consider adopting hot-desking and open office plans. Traditional office spaces are seeing a reduction of up to 30%. The very purpose of the office is also being redefined for many organisations. Finding the optimal format that balances organisational purpose and employee needs, while maximising space efficiency, is crucial in supporting hybrid and decentralised work models effectively.

## 1.9 Digitalisation and security

As the world of work becomes more virtual, cybersecurity becomes increasingly important. Confidential conversations are often taken off premise in unsecured (and often public) locations. So organisations must prioritise data protection and ensure the safety of employee and employer data in remote and digital work settings. Implementing robust cybersecurity measures and educating employees about best practices in digital security are essential for mitigating potential risks.



## 2. OPPORTUNITIES

### 2.1 Adopting flexible and adaptable policies

Encourage employees (instead of employers) to explore the best work arrangements for themselves to foster ownership, autonomy, increased satisfaction, and productivity. Acknowledge that each industry, team, and culture is unique, requiring tailored solutions for future ways of working. Some companies, like Kellogg's, have been early adopters of flexible work arrangements, embracing this approach as early as 1930, where they introduced the six-hour workday and a 12.5% pay raise, amid a norm of eight-hour workdays. Forward-thinking companies have long recognised the benefits of providing employees with flexibility and autonomy in their work schedules.

### 2.2 Emphasising human outcomes and employee experience

Prioritise the end-to-end employee experience by addressing mental health concerns, supporting work-life balance, and recognising individual contributions. Focus on understanding the needs of the workforce to create a positive work environment that attracts and retains top talent. Neglecting the value of human outcomes has led to the "great resignation" impacting all levels, including the C-suite. This phenomenon is when a large number of employees quit their jobs due to dissatisfaction with work conditions or seeking better opportunities is often attributed to widespread disengagement and attrition.

### 2.3 Augmenting technology and human interactions

Utilise technology as a tool to enhance human interactions, not as a replacement nor expect it to be a driver of change. Leverage (People) data insights and process improvement while recognising the human element as the driver of meaningful relationships, innovation, and creativity. For example, AI should focus on aiding (and supporting) human outcomes rather than replacing humans.



## 2. OPPORTUNITIES

### 2.4 Segmenting the workforce and bridging gaps

The workforce profile is often a spectrum. Understand the diverse needs and preferences of various employee groups, fostering trust, stronger relationships, and improved teamwork and productivity through organic interactions and collaboration.

### 2.5 Harness diverse Talent Pools for an inclusive future workforce

Leverage under-utilised talent sources including individuals with disabilities, parents seeking flexible work options, and overseas talent to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive workforce. Technology has opened up access to these varied talents, underscoring that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives should extend beyond gender to encompass age, race, social class, caregivers, and the disabled community. In Singapore, changes in workforce demographics, featuring a surge in gig workers and self-employed individuals, presently constituting 9-10% or roughly 200,000 of the workforce, highlight this trend. The growing presence of white-collar professionals, now representing 40% of the workforce and, alongside technicians, making up about 60%, has accelerated significantly over the past decade due to higher education attainment and enhanced skills. This changing landscape necessitates a consideration of the expanding white-collar sector in the formulation of future work policies and strategies.

### 2.6 Investing in a compelling purpose and vision

Communicate organisational values, purpose and mission with employees as it can provide a sense of purpose to foster loyalty and commitment among the workforce. Increasingly, talent chooses organisations based on purpose alignment as a priority.



## 2. OPPORTUNITIES

### 2.7 Integrated organisational strategy

Foster an ecosystem of collaboration among organisations, government agencies, industry leaders, and employees to shape the future of work collectively, benefiting individuals, organisations, and society as a whole. By working together, stakeholders can leverage technology as an enabler of a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

### 2.8 Continuous learning and adaptability

Foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptability to navigate the evolving landscape of the future of work. Prioritise doing well, doing good, and doing right to create a positive work environment. A learning culture is the best predictor of future success.

### 2.9 Upskilling and talent development

Invest in reskilling programs, training opportunities, and a learning culture to equip the workforce with the necessary skills to thrive in the digital age, addressing skills mismatches and enhancing employee engagement and retention.

### 2.10 Collaboration and partnership

Develop integrated solutions that consider the holistic employee experience, from work arrangements to learning opportunities and career paths. Create a fulfilling and meaningful workplace that recognises the importance of purpose beyond salary packages.



# 3. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS & APPROACHES

## 3.1 Human-centric design and compelling purpose

Place the well-being, needs, and experiences of employees at the centre of organisational strategies. Prioritise employee engagement, work-life balance, mental health support, and flexible work arrangements. Create an environment that fosters trust, meaningful connections, and a sense of belonging. Emphasise a compelling purpose and vision for employees' careers, focusing on doing well, doing good, and doing right by them. This approach is more important than salary for many employees, especially younger generations.

## 3.2 Agile policy development and segmented workforce

Adopt an agile approach to policy development that supports customisation and adaptability, deviating from inflexible policies. Strive for non-binary guidelines and best practices that allow employees to find what suits them, while ensuring alignment with business goals and legal mandates. Segregate the workforce and design policies and procedures tailored to distinct employee groups. This strategy should be like crafting bespoke garments, where the design adapts to the individual's form, providing optimal comfort and fit. This analogy underlines the goal of establishing HR systems that mold to the unique requirements of each employee, similar to how a well-designed garment adapts to the wearer's shape, offering a perfect fit. This serves as a metaphor for formulating HR policies and procedures that are sensitive to the distinct needs of each employee.

## 3.3 Upskilling, reskilling, and collaboration

Invest in continuous learning and development programs to upskill and reskill the workforce. Identify emerging skills and provide training opportunities to bridge the skills gap. Collaborate with educational institutions, industry partners, and government agencies to create relevant and effective learning initiatives.

# 3. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS & APPROACHES

## 3.4 Diverse talent acquisition and equal opportunities

Embrace diversity and inclusion by actively recruiting and retaining talent from diverse backgrounds, including individuals with disabilities, women returning to the workforce, and mature workers. Recognise the value of their unique perspectives and experiences, and provide equal opportunities for growth and advancement.

## 3.5 Technology augmentation and healing

Leverage technology as an enabler to augment human capabilities, improve productivity, and enhance collaboration. Implement digital tools and platforms that facilitate remote work, virtual collaboration, and seamless communication. Ensure that technology solutions prioritise data security and privacy. Use technology for healing and connection, rather than just for war and division.

## 3.6 Leadership development and empathy

Develop leaders who are equipped to lead in the future ways of working. Provide leadership development programs that focus on emotional intelligence, empathy, and effective communication in remote and hybrid work environments. Empower leaders to create a positive work culture and inspire their teams.



# 3. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS & APPROACHES

## 3.7 Collaborative ecosystems and partnerships

Foster collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders, including industry peers, government agencies, educational institutions, and employees themselves. Share best practices, exchange ideas, and co-create solutions to address common challenges and shape the future of work collectively.

## 3.8 Regular employee feedback and continuous improvement

Establish channels for ongoing feedback and dialogue with employees. Actively listen to their concerns, ideas, and suggestions. Use employee feedback to continuously improve policies, programmes, and practices to better meet the evolving needs of the workforce.

By adopting these solutions and approaches, organisations can create a future-ready work environment that attracts and retains top talent, drives innovation, and enables sustainable growth in the ever-changing landscape of the Future Ways of Working.

# CONCLUSION & CLOSING THOUGHTS

The Future Ways of Working present both challenges and opportunities for organisations seeking to navigate this rapidly evolving landscape. By embracing a human-centric approach and focusing on the well-being and needs of employees, organisations can foster a work environment that attracts and retains top talent, drives innovation, and enables sustainable growth.

Key to this approach is the adoption of agile policies, continuous learning, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. Organisations must also recognise the importance of technology as an enabler rather than the sole driver of change and strive to maintain a balance between technological advancements and the human touch.

By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, developing empathetic and emotionally intelligent leaders, and regularly engaging with employees to gather feedback, organisations can co-create solutions that address the common challenges and shape the future of work collectively. The Future Ways of Working demand adaptability, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to the well-being of employees. Those organisations that successfully embrace these principles will be best positioned to thrive in the years to come.

QED would like to express gratitude to all the leaders who contributed their insights and perspectives during this session. As we continue on this journey, let us remember the words of Nike's "Just Do It": in the pursuit of the Future Ways of Working, let us strive to create a workplace that fits the individual, rather than expecting individuals to fit into a predefined mold. Together, we can navigate the challenges and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead.

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