

Why Every Department Should Care About The Future Of Work Today

Demystifying one of the trendiest catchphrases in business today.

By Suz O'Donnell

The “future of work” is one of the trendiest catchphrases in business today. Everybody defines the phrase differently, and it seems everyone has a unique take on what concepts fall under the category “future of work.”

No matter how many ways it's defined, you must determine now what the best version of the future of work should be for your department and overall organization. If you don't, you could put yourself in a talent, technology, and financial hole — and lose the ability to compete in a hyper-evolving marketplace.

Defining the Future of Work

The future of work describes an ongoing transformation in the workplace as we determine how to balance human with machine, physical with digital and on-site with off-site opportunities. It's learning how to negotiate technological changes and maximize strategy in order to better your business. When you have a fuller understanding of what this means for your business, you can achieve greater agility, higher productivity and a more engaged workforce.

Today we see changes in technology, culture, and inclusion that require exponentially faster shifts in the

way we optimize our workforce year over year across every industry and job function.

If you haven't really delved into the future of work personally, it's likely your department or entire company is missing out on a huge opportunity due to one of the following top three myths.

Myth No. 1: Human resources will take care of the future of work for us. A misnomer about the future of work is that it is “just an HR thing.” That is completely and unequivocally false. The future of work affects every department, and HR alone cannot deliver on it.

For example, consider the trend in different office environments. While yes, HR can research and recommend the type of office environment or work-from-home options that would optimize employee performance, each department may have different needs, and you need real estate services and collaboration technology teams to deliver on the right vision.

Similarly, HR will need to partner with technology teams to deliver on trends in digital workplaces, build digital dexterity into your organization and enable robotic process automation. Not all robots are like Rosie from

the Jetsons. There are robotics that can be implemented in your computer systems to do data entry and data analytics much faster and more accurately than what humans can do. Then, those same humans can do more strategic work that requires their creativity and innovation.

If your sales, marketing and supply chain teams are waiting for humans to do quarterly market analysis, you've missed the boat already. Digital technologies can be constantly applied to save your employees time, enable them to make more strategic decisions and ensure your company maintains or grows market share constantly.

Furthermore, with better data and analytics across your organization, HR should be able to predict when new employees or contractors are needed so that you have the right people at the right time instead of waiting three to nine months for the right person who you didn't realize you needed until today.

You absolutely should not wait for HR to advance your workplace. Every departmental leader should be asking for, rather demanding, a future of work budget today in order to survive -- and if you do it quick enough, you can outpace your competitors.

Myth No. 2: All my best people want full-time, permanent jobs with benefits.

There are many elements regarding the future of work that will impact different industries and job functions in unique ways. However, one component that will affect every single industry is the application of gig workers. It has been estimated that by 2020, 50% of the national workforce will consist of freelancers. This fact alone means that the way in which your department functions today will have to change – perhaps radically – in order to acquire and retain top talent in the future.

Twenty years ago, the common belief was that people wanted to be part of a company and that being part of a company brought financial and emotional stability, healthcare and other benefits.

The reality of today's market is that (a) not all companies provide this stability, and (b) even if they did, many of the smartest, most talented people now want to work non-traditional hours and from remote locations. Some workers don't even view health care benefits as necessary -- perhaps their partners are already receiving great health insurance, or they prioritize better take-home pay and greater personal flexibility. These workers would rather be paid more hourly for their skill and forgo more "traditional" organizational benefits.

If you ignore this important aspect of the future of your work and only seek "traditional" or "full-time" employees, your department might miss the opportunity to acquire or retain top talent. Not only that, but why pay more for those work benefits when they may no longer be desired by your employees?

Myth No. 3: The future of work is just a trend.

While the future of work is the hot catchphrase we are using right now, the fact of the matter is that the worldwide discussion on how to optimize your workforce has been happening for decades and will continue to play out in the future. Everyone needs to adapt to market changes in terms of employee expectations, just as everyone should want to enhance the way we run our companies and utilize cutting-edge technology.

You can adapt to marketplace changes and future-of-work topics that are currently top of mind, such as AI, optimized workspaces and automation. However, in two to three years, there will be additional innovations. Technology and society will make new demands on how we address our workforce to deliver profit and benefit to the world.