

A Dozen Surprises About the Future of Work

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What might surprise us about the nature of work in the future? As professional futurists, my colleagues and I are continually scanning the external environment for signals of change. We see several early signs of trends that could result in dramatic changes in the future. This article pulls together a dozen of these signals, which may not yet be on the radar screen of many organizations or leaders.

The dozen surprises listed here have been emerging piecemeal—they appear in small pockets but are not widespread. Things will get really interesting in the decade ahead, however, as most of them will have a reinforcing influence on one another, which could result in a fairly sweeping transformation. By studying the changes that are occurring now and trying to understand their significance for the future, organizations will be able to spot opportunities to proactively shape their future.

The dozen surprises listed here emerge primarily from issues affecting knowledge work and will most likely appear first in affluent nations.

1. **Hey, that's cheating.** Augmented or enhanced human characteristics will present challenges for organizations and individual talent.
2. **Emerging markets rewrite the rules of work and work culture.** As emerging markets improve their positions, they will influence the culture of work.
3. **Intelligence shows up in unusual places.** Information technology (IT) will create new forms of intelligence that will migrate into infrastructure, devices, or persons (wearables or implants), or all of the above.
4. **Work now, get paid later . . . maybe.** Do the work and get paid according to what the customer thinks it is worth (e.g., the Radiohead model, named after the English alternative rock band that released a digital form of one of its albums for free and asked customers to pay what they thought it was worth).
5. **Time- or project-based employment contracts begin to mainstream.** While currently in the domain of the elite athletes and actors, this will become a mainstream practice.
6. **Fairness becomes impossible.** The need to customize and personalize to attract talent will make across-the-board, same-for-everyone types of policies increasingly untenable.
7. **Workers prefer working to live instead of living to work.** Work will be a shrinking portion of time—and even incomes—in affluent nations.
8. **Work increasingly becomes a thing you do instead of a place you go.**¹ Work will be increasingly thought of as a process that happens wherever and whenever.
9. **Employer-provided training disappears.** As organizations become increasingly reluctant to invest in training, new ways

will be devised for organizations to acquire the talent and skills they need.

10. **Nearsourcing will become preferable to outsourcing.** Growing shipping costs and complexity of global supply chains will lead to a preference for local and in-house talent.
11. **Work in the happiness society changes metrics.** Work as a source of fulfillment will influence a shift in measures from GDP (gross domestic product) to GDH (gross domestic happiness).
12. **Meet the new boss.** As boomers approach retirement, Gen X and Gen Y—digital natives with different expectations, goals, and work styles—will reshape leadership and the workplace.

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Let's explore each of these surprises in greater detail.

1. HEY, THAT'S CHEATING

Significant technology advances, from mechanical implants to chemical, genetic, and nanotech-enabled approaches, are making human augmentation a reality. Replacement hips and knees are already commonplace, and more sophisticated "spare parts" are on the way. For instance, cochlear implants using an array of electrodes to directly stimulate the auditory nerve are used by more than 100,000 people who are profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing. It is interesting to note that an emerging movement of transhumanists encourages augmentation as a natural path of

evolution and advocates tighter integration of humans and machines.

Augmentation extends beyond the physical to the cognitive realm as well. The anti-narcolepsy drug Provigil, for instance, has been in use since the early 2000s to help soldiers stay awake and alert for as much as 40 hours straight. On a less intense but more widespread scale, there are many anecdotal accounts of students using drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall to boost their mental stamina and focus when studying and test taking.

Professional sports have provided a preview of coming attractions in human augmentation. The baseball steroids and human growth hormone (HGH) controversies flashed a spotlight on the issue of performance-enhancing drugs, but this is not a new phenomenon. The issue has been raised in bicycle racing, track and field, and even the Olympics. However, the intrusion into baseball, often referred to as America's national pastime, touched a nerve with the public and even brought the US Congress into the controversy. And the convincing, albeit circumstantial evidence of the impacts of those drugs was difficult to ignore, as mediocre players became superstars and rewrote record books. After the scandal broke, many performances reverted back to normal.

Implication: Organizations May Need to Develop New Policies on Augmented Workers

Augmentation challenges current perceptions of what is desirable, permissible, and "normal." The pressure to win and be number one is very strong in many cultures (certainly in the United States), and the economic stakes are often high, just as in sports. The

array of augmentation options is continuing to grow, from mechanical implants to chemical options, including genetic and nanotech-enabled approaches. The bionic man and woman are becoming a reality. I recently posted a Facebook lament about needing a mental boost and quickly received several responses, including suggestions for using Adderall (a stimulant popular among college students).

A question organizations may face is, should we encourage or prohibit the use of augmentation? More pointedly, what would we do in the face of competition employing such means? What if a competitive workforce endorses, encourages, or, in an extreme case, mandates the use of Provigil during busy seasons to enable that organization to outperform the competition?

While these may not be decisions that need to be made tomorrow, it is clear we are heading down this path. A transhumanist movement has been around for decades—could it be that we'll bifurcate into naturals and augments? It may be easier for organizations to ignore these questions, or suggest it is an individual matter, but there is potential for this becoming a competitive issue that organizations may have to confront, and waiting for government intervention may be too late—think of all the athletes who “lost out” to their colleagues who pushed the envelope and literally took the jobs of the nonaugmented.

2. EMERGING MARKETS REWRITE THE RULES OF WORK AND WORK CULTURE

The rise of emerging markets has gained lots of attention. Their size and growth rates, projecting forward and barring disaster, add up to greater economic and, eventually, political

power. It's simply a numbers game. As they increase their economic clout, they are going to want to shift the economic rules of the game to being more along the lines of their interests—much as today's powerful nations developed the current rules of the economic game that favor their interests. The emerging markets will, of course, have different outlooks and priorities than those of the dominant powers of the past.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics hinted at the emerging markets' demonstration of power. They showcased China's development and modernization. The over-the-top pageantry and pomp and circumstance shouted out to the rest of the world, “We have arrived and taken

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our place among the leading nations of the world.” At the same time, Chinese corporate brands were starting to shed their low-value reputation. For instance, Haier is becoming a significant player on the global scene in white goods. Similarly, India's Tata is becoming a serious player in the global automotive industry, symbolized in part by their acquisition of the iconic Jaguar and Land Rover brands.

Work culture will eventually be influenced by the growing power of these emerging-market organizations and brands. Put simply, whereas in the past the emerging-market culture had to adapt to the affluent-nation culture, increasingly it will be the other way around. An example might be how US workers had to adapt to Japanese automakers that set up plants in several US locations. The interesting question will be what kinds of cultural practices

the emerging markets will bring with them as they expand across the globe.

Implication: Organizations Will Have to Adapt to the Cultural Requirements of the New Market Powers

This raises an important question for organizations of how to strategically engage with emerging-market competitors—should we fight for maintaining the old rules that favor the affluent nations or accept the changes as inevitable and devise strategies for the new playing field? Perhaps the most favorable outcome for the affluent nations is that emerging markets peacefully integrate into the existing system or, alternatively, remake it but slowly enough to allow

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time for adjustment. More daunting scenarios could involve nations in conflict, or potentially a breakdown of the global economic system and a long-term stalemate.

The opportunity may be in proactively developing the cultural understanding of different work practices, so they are not such a shock if introduced. It may even be that the study and integration of these practices leads to greater productivity. Being proactive could turn what may seem a threat into a positive opportunity.

3. INTELLIGENCE SHOWS UP IN UNUSUAL PLACES

Greater machine-based intelligence is clearly on the way. It enables a division of labor in

which more of the burden of decision making is shifted from people to software. This can be seen as primarily a good thing, although many are likely to be frightened by this prospect—in that the automation enables one to off-load routine decisions. So many daily decisions really don't require much thought and are largely an inconvenience. Individuals who are comfortable with information technology are likely to be happy to off-load such decisions, and over time, assuming the technology performs well enough, they will trust the technology with increasingly more important decisions.

But where will this intelligence "reside"? One argument is that building intelligence into the physical infrastructure is the most cost-effective and productive route. New information technologies and new materials are enabling the built environment to be smarter. The use of radio-frequency identification (RFID), wireless chips with IP addresses, will give almost every object rudimentary intelligence and connectivity to the Internet, extending control of systems and infrastructure. Ambient intelligence will make this increasingly user-friendly—red light means sell your stocks, green light means time to buy. The emphasis of smart infrastructure, if it is to be accepted in the workplace, will have to shift from attempts to control and monitor for purposes of surveillance, performance, and security to more of a tool for employee empowerment and enhancement.

It could be, however, that these same purposes could be accomplished by other means. Another argument is that buildings could be more like docking stations. Instead of having the intelligence built in, the intelligence is primarily accessed via portable devices. Further off, but perhaps not too far off, is having

the intelligence either worn on or implanted in the individual.

Implication: Organizations Will Face New Challenges in Integrating “Smartness”

For organizations involved in the production of goods and services directly related to intelligence, this is obviously a huge issue, but most organizations will have to address this to lesser degrees. For instance, an organization considering a move to a new space, or perhaps building a new space, faces the question of whether the company should invest in smart infrastructure with lots of sensors and built-in processing and activation capabilities, and potentially save lots of money and provide a major productivity boost. If all that’s really needed is something more akin to a docking station approach, the company may require no investment at all, because workers will bring their own portable devices, wearables, or implants.

There is little question that workplaces will be leveraging “smartness” to a greater extent. Organizations and workers will be shifting more and more decision making to their intelligent partners, whether artificial intelligence, virtual worlds, laptops/pads, smartphone apps, or onboard intelligence such as wearables or implants. What wins out depends to a degree on interface questions—what is easiest, user-friendly, and productive? The fact that the best solution doesn’t always win makes for a real interesting future.

This surprise will only happen as fast as the workforce allows. A key factor is the degree of trust that will be placed in the intelligence/automation. With a high degree of trust, workers can off-load more routine decisions and focus on more value-added activities. Without that trust, the evolution of this surprise will slow significantly.

4. WORK NOW, GET PAID LATER . . . MAYBE

In an age of information sharing, bootleg copying, free Internet downloads, mash-ups, and creative use of video clips, music, and sound bites, there are many challenges to traditional precedents of ownership of intellectual property. With this creative content alteration, determining ownership of intellectual property becomes a puzzle. In addition, the use of the same material in multiple platforms—film, audio, TV, Internet, mobiles, and the like—begs questions of intellectual property ownership and is increasingly

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becoming the focus of battles over artistic royalties.

Various concepts have been tossed around to characterize the next economy, such as the service economy, relationship economy, attention economy, and so on. The gift economy may turn out to be the most accurate. The key driver is increasing uncertainty over how to determine value when “information wants to be free.”

Open-source innovation (an approach to developing a product that taps public collaboration, contributions, and peer review and makes the results publicly available) is an example of this surprise that has been in operation for many years. It started with software—Linux being a well-known example—and has spread to a wide range of areas (Wikipedia is perhaps the most prominent example in operation), including even open-source prosthetics.

Shifts in consumer values point to a greater desire for consumers to participate in the design and sometimes production of the goods and services that are meaningful to them. These consumers feel that the products and services that they buy or invest their time in are expressions of their identity (e.g., one buys a hybrid vehicle to demonstrate environmental values).

These developments all point to an economy in which the assignment of value to products and services becomes fuzzy, which in turn suggests in the future that the same fuzziness will apply to paying talent for the creation of that value. Determining the value itself is tricky, and in cases of cocreation, who gets what, and if an offering is based on a donation model, that too suggests a high

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degree of uncertainty about how talent will be compensated for their contributions.

Implication: Payment for Work May Be Directly Tied to Project Success Instead of Hours on the Job

Although the above may seem a bit far off, in the shorter term one can expect greater scrutiny of just what value each individual is providing. It may be that organizations see customer service, often provided by talent, as its key source of value. Organizations recognize that their unique value—what they own that can't be lost in the free-information age—centers on the relationships between their employees and consumers. Customer

service and the experience economy provide solid revenue models because they allow organizations to offer what no consumer-generated deliverable can.

More provocatively, can the organization push the envelope and assume a thought leadership role in terms of assessing value in its industry? And even more provocatively than that, which organization has developed a level of trust with its customers such that it's willing to run the Radiohead experiment and let the customer decide the value of the products or services?

5. TIME- OR PROJECT-BASED EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS BEGIN TO MAINSTREAM

Imagine this headline in a prominent (one hopes) futurist publication: "Hines Inks 2-Year Deal with Company X." While not every contract signing will warrant a headline, the custom nature of future contracts will be increasingly prevalent. Perhaps the most relevant model here is a Hollywood production, where teams of producers, writers, production people, actors, and other talent come together ad hoc to do a movie and then go their separate ways, often to reunite when a new project comes along. Professional sports provide another example, where the talent is signed for a specific number of years, rather than the open-ended contracts that characterize most business arrangements.

Tom Peters captured the spirit of the shift to project-based work with his story on the Wow Project in *Fast Company* a decade ago, stating, "All white-collar work is project work."² The advantage for both individuals and organizations is flexibility: organizations will be able to assemble and disassemble project teams rapidly and cost-effectively, and

individuals will be able to pick and choose projects of interest.

An interesting by-product of the need to put together teams rapidly and cost-effectively is that an individual who knows others who can be added to a team is more valuable than the individual who is, well, just an individual. This suggests a future practice in which organizations recruit networks instead of individuals: a standard feature of an individual's résumé will include their relevant professional colleagues who might join the team. One might even have tiers of colleagues—tier-one colleagues have worked with you previously and will join you on projects (unless otherwise detained); tier-two colleagues might be "probables"; tier-threes, "possibles"; and so on. On the flip side, another strategy for individuals will be to get higher up on the tiers of other influential talent.

Implication: Organizations Will Need to Rethink Hiring and Firing Approaches

This arrangement provides flexibility for the organization. The organization pays for talent only when it's needed (albeit there are some advantages to having people on staff and readily available as opposed to having to go out and find talent in a pinch). It also provides flexibility for talent, who will be expected to have multiple jobs/careers and will value the ability to have greater control over their time and career.

This arrangement will also require more flexible and rapid hiring and integration processes. It can't take a month's worth of paperwork, training, and welcome-to-the-organization seminars. Talent, and networks of talent, will need to be integrated quickly and effectively for this model to work.

6. FAIRNESS BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE

By now, it is a truism that a knowledge-based organization is only as good as its talent. Alongside that, there appears to be more demand for this talent than available talent. Although this may correct or recalibrate over time, for now it places a high premium on getting the right talent. In turn, the talent will be aware of their bargaining power and use it. In the job fair of the future, instead of organizations sitting behind the table being visited by hopeful prospects, the talented students could be behind the table listening to offers from organizations.

Organizations will have to personalize their appeals to get the talent. They may

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need to give coveted talent the option for a summer sabbatical or the ability to work from home or to only work on nonprofit accounts or to . . . fill in the blank. In return, the talent may be willing to sacrifice pay for these kinds of benefits. This customization makes it nearly impossible to have policies that apply across the board equally to all in terms of human resources and management. Each case presents a unique set of circumstances, and this presents fairness issues.

Talent will seek to customize and personalize their workspaces, tools, and the way they work. As home and virtual work become increasingly routine, talent will be accustomed to greater personalization of their space and will be capable of doing so without compromising compatibility or hampering

teamwork. Similarly, they will expect to have greater freedom to choose their work hours, and as long as they deliver the results, they will expect to be able to choose the “how” as well.

Implication: Organizations Will Have to Balance Customizing Work with Fairness

One strategy is to redefine what fairness means. The current sense of it—policies that apply equally to everybody in all situations across the board—is too rigid. Fairness could be redefined from “equal treatment” to having the contributions of talent meet rewards as closely as possible. This gets highly subjective, but in the knowledge-economy world where so much is intangible, this is not an unusual circumstance. If a new recruit is

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given certain perks that are not offered to everyone else, then that talent may be held to a higher standard of value creation, or that talent may need to sacrifice a benefit in another area. So the goal is to synch up contributions (added value) with rewards.

7. WORKERS PREFER WORKING TO LIVE INSTEAD OF LIVING TO WORK

This surprise—in essence, saying that work becomes less important—is a provocative one in the sense that it challenges a fundamental archetype of the modern world about the importance of work as an essential measure of one’s self-worth and contribution to society. But there is some evidence of this happening

already, particularly in the affluent nations with more developed social support networks. Scandinavia provides a model of a complex and generous package of social programs for its citizens for part of their livelihood; social assistance, including public assistance; subsidized or free child care; extended parental leave; and public health all substitute for income.

Although a lot has been said about the coming of voluntary simplicity, it is emerging not in its pure form, but rather it has morphed into what might be called “enoughness”³—that is, a sense of having enough, accepting the need for limits, and making some serious changes in one’s priorities. Whereas voluntary simplicity suggests a benevolent, altruistic adoption of a simpler lifestyle, enoughness gets to a similar end point, but only partly from choice, as necessity in the form of the Great Recession is mixed into the equation. There is a sense of one “having enough” or being fed up with the status quo. There is an acceptance and embrace of the need for limits. There is a sense of life being out of control and the subsequent need to take back control of one’s life. Work or overworking, of course, is one of those areas that will come under increased scrutiny.

At the same time, emerging value shifts suggest greater attention to doing “interesting and meaningful work.” Money is still important, but it is not necessarily the most important factor in deciding what work to do and who to do it with. Surveys and anecdotal evidence suggest that the opportunity to work with “cool and interesting” people is another increasingly important factor alongside meaningful work.

Enoughness also suggests less emphasis on material-goods consumption. Alongside this is a potential enabler for work being less critical: new models of consumption that raise

questions about ownership versus use. Fractional ownership models are emerging for more and more goods and services, from vacation timeshares to private jets to even nightly rentals of high-end fashion items. These services allow both high-end luxuries and basic consumer goods to be shared on a fractional or subscription basis, giving consumers better access to products for lower overall costs. Everything from movies and music to handbags and vehicles can be acquired for a small marginal cost and an ongoing monthly fee.

Implication: Organizations Will Have to Adjust to a Workforce Less Willing to Put Work First

The typical tools or perks, such as more money or the lure of a promotion, that have been historically used to induce people to go beyond the call of normal duty will be less likely to work. As shifts in values among current talent (especially among emerging generations) point to different priorities, the prospect of working lots of extra hours, or whatever the "sacrifice" might be, will not be seen as worth the costs to one's well-being or perhaps sense of work-life balance.

New priorities suggest that more creative approaches will be needed to induce talent to contribute more than they would normally like. A request that encroaches on work-life balance, for example, is likely to require a steep quid pro quo. The talent may make the short-term sacrifice but will expect a significant payback on the flip side.

8. WORK INCREASINGLY BECOMES A THING YOU DO INSTEAD OF A PLACE YOU GO

New technologies allow individuals to work from many different locations, view media

from other locations, and generally break free from geographic constraints on products and services. Major advances in complex event, contextual, and semantic analysis are among the tools enabling talent to literally work 24/7 with full access to automated analysis tools and near-real communications with team members across the globe. New technologies, including virtual-world applications and contextual and semantic software, will help talent to gather information and communicate in new and more effective ways. Private virtual office space of the kind currently being developed by IBM and Linden Labs is beginning to demonstrate its promise.

Virtual communications will become so realistic that virtual teaming will become the

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most common method for managing workflows. The very idea of location or place becomes subordinate to virtual-reality technology, which can accurately re-create conditions that allow users to interact in an immersive fashion with other users almost anywhere in the modern world. This heightened level of connectivity allows business travelers to settle abroad for extended periods, keeping in touch with home in a realistic fashion that helps to negate feelings of distance and disconnection from friends and coworkers. Interaction on a global scale becomes so commonplace that cultural studies courses become standard for business students and small-business owners

intent on successfully navigating the global knowledge economy.

Advanced information technologies are enabling people to live more spontaneously in the moment, as, for example, GPS for navigation and smartphones enable them to instantly coordinate with family, friends, and colleagues instead of having to making plans well in advance. E-commerce makes shopping accessible at any place and any time. Location-based marketing can reach out to nearby shoppers using GPS-enabled mobile phones and other devices.

These technological advances enable people to get information whenever and wherever they want it. Television network schedules, for instance, are facing stiff competition from DVRs and on-demand alternatives. Newspapers and magazines face increasing

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pressure from real-time web-based news updates that have challenged their business model. One can envision them going completely digital, abandoning daily publication. These technical capabilities and the increasing integration of the economy and work on a global basis combine to put pressure on the traditional 9–5 schedule. These changes are coming together to create an on-demand culture, which in turn suggests an on-demand approach to work. It is a set of activities to be done, increasingly independent of traditional times and places.

Implication: Organizations Need to Develop New Frameworks for Assigning Workflows That Seamlessly Integrate the Virtual and the Real

Virtual and “real” work need to be seamlessly integrated to avoid information overload. This will compel organizations to develop new frameworks for handling the workflow between the virtual and real. At a more basic level, it challenges the organization’s virtual IQ. How capable is the organization of dealing with virtual work, including the use of virtual worlds as workspaces? It may be advisable to run small experiments with projects using a virtual-world interface, as a way to identify the challenges that will eventually face the organization on a larger scale.

It may also be possible to use reverse mentoring, in which younger people with highly developed IT and virtual skills gain work experience in return for mentoring older workers in the ins and outs of using those leading-edge approaches. This win-win enables an organization to get what it needs in a cost-effective manner while keeping the core workforce “lean and mean.”

9. EMPLOYER-PROVIDED TRAINING DISAPPEARS

Talent will have to be creative in obtaining the skills they need to succeed at work. Organizations are increasingly reluctant to invest large amounts of money in getting new talent up to speed. The expectations for having the skills and capabilities are still there, but they are expected to be obtained elsewhere. An analogous shift might be in the nature of retirement plans; where organizations once provided pensions, they have shifted the burden to the

employees to save on their own with 401(k)s, albeit with some providing matching funds.

Part of this is a fairly natural evolution alongside the other changes taking place. As organizations and employees move to fewer long-term commitments, organizations can rightly make the case, "why should I pay to train a person who will only be here a short time before moving on to the next job?" Internships and volunteer work are likely to be increasingly popular. Volunteer work, in particular, offers the dual benefit of making a positive difference that fits with emerging value shifts.

Another potential avenue is that the training comes via intelligent technology. Breakthroughs in performance measurement technology allow scientific, quantifiable assessments of individual job performance—and can provide assistance to talent in suggesting ways to improve performance. Application of these accurate new tools allows organizations to improve performance, give freedom to talent to do things their way, and avoid the pitfalls of micromanagement. These assessment tools to improve their own skills provide them with the nonmonetary benefits they seek—greater efficiency and job satisfaction.

Implication: Organizations May Become Skills Clearinghouses Rather Than Training Providers

Creative means will be required to find practical and cost-effective ways to provide the training if it can no longer be provided in-house. One potential outcome is that human resources departments or functions assume a broker role of identifying suitable people or places from which to get training. It could start simply by suggesting to prospective talent where they can obtain training that

would either be required or highly beneficial to their prospects for joining the organization: "So-and-so provides training on virtual-reality augmentation that we find is perfect for the needs of the project we anticipate you working on, if we were to take you on."

It could potentially evolve to a third-party certification arrangement and could benefit the organization and the organizations providing the training in a win-win way: "Our training is endorsed by Organization XYZ," and perhaps anyone that Organization XYZ recommends for training gets a discount as a result.

10. NEARSOURCING WILL BECOME PREFERABLE TO OUTSOURCING

A localization trend is emerging as individuals seek to reconnect with their family,

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friends, community, and even their own lives. Related to "enoughness" mentioned earlier, there is the sense of having sacrificed the "important things in life" in the quest for the almighty dollar. At a basic level, it can be as simple as getting to know one's neighbors and getting involved in community affairs. On a different plane, there is also a brewing resentment against large organizations, as they are often seen, rightly or wrongly, as steamrolling local cultures. Part of the reaction against this is captured in the emergence of local foods, such as weekly farmers' markets and the flourishing of microbreweries. Many cities have adopted "smart-growth"

strategies that emphasize “livability” or people-friendliness. These include amenities such as walkable commercial areas, green areas, and bike paths. These strategies may turn out to be a useful development for organizations seeking talent, as quality-of-life considerations become an increasingly important decision criterion.

In the business world, cost reasons are drivers for some relocalization of manufacturing. Across the supply chain, manufacturers and retailers are attempting to cut their inventories and have adopted just-in-time delivery systems to minimize inventory costs. For goods that must be shipped by water, overseas manufacturing operations introduce weeks-long lags in responsiveness in the supply chain. Domestic and regional manufacturing and supply chains have response times that can be measured in days—even in hours at colocated facilities. Greater responsiveness in the supply chain makes it possible to

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increase the cycle times between manufacture and sale.

This surprise could take a nasty turn, as an undercurrent of protectionism has reappeared on the scene due to the Great Recession. The 2009 economic stimulus bill contained “buy-American” provisions that state and local recipients will have to follow in contracting and purchasing. As a result, several US trading partners have begun contemplating imposing retaliatory tariffs on US products. China has also imposed “buy-Chinese” provisions on billions of their own stimulus

spending. The United States has also imposed defensive tariffs on inexpensive auto tires from China, provoking the ire of the Chinese government. Another emerging dimension of protectionism is the nexus between climate-change interventions and trade policy. Policymakers in Washington, DC, are contemplating the idea of enacting a “carbon tariff” as part of the international efforts to address CO₂ emissions. The carbon tariffs would impose scaled tariffs on products that are imported from countries with high emissions.

Implication: Organizations Will Need to Strengthen Local Ties to the Communities Within Which They Do Business

Organizations may face a future in which local organizations require a license to operate in which certain conditions for being allowed to operate in the local community must be met. At a minimum, there are likely to be some conditions for providing for the benefit of the community. There will be a need for some type of return for the community that goes beyond just providing jobs. Communities that provide a high quality of life will attract the talent who in turn make it a desirable place for a business to locate; thus, they will have some leverage on organizations to invest more in the success of the community.

This will require skills in community outreach and building successful partnerships at a local level. For large global companies, this could be a very important capability, as many communities will be inherently suspicious of such organizations—worried that they will drive out local businessowners. Thus, skills in understanding local needs, cultures, and influential people and groups will be at a premium in these situations.

11. WORK IN THE HAPPINESS SOCIETY CHANGES METRICS

The rise of postmodern values—with an emphasis on authenticity, community, sustainability, self-expression, and well-being—indicates a move to a happiness society, in which the metrics for success shift from economic production to happiness or well-being. As former Labor Secretary Robert Reich once asked, “Do we want to be an economy or a society?” Changing values suggest the momentum is toward a society; that is, paying greater attention to social concerns vis-à-vis economic growth. (Europeans, of course, may not understand this issue, as they have largely opted for being societies.) The ongoing shift from modern to postmodern values involves significant differences. Modern values emphasize economic achievement and material goods accumulation, whereas postmodern values emphasize well-being and a greater emphasis on finding meaning in life and in experiences rather than goods.

Postmodern values holders are skeptical of the link between material acquisition and happiness—for them, money does not buy happiness. They place great value on relationships. They feel every encounter should be a positive experience. They want a “real” voice in decisions affecting them and have a general orientation to be active participants rather than passive recipients. They are willing to tolerate differences: “you do your thing, I’ll do mine, and as long as we don’t harm one another, it’s all good.”

Where moderns wanted biggest and best, postmoderns want the authentic and unique. Financial security is important but it is not the sole measure. They are happy with having enough, seeing money as a means rather than an end—it is necessary, but real happiness lies

elsewhere. Many organizations have grasped this already in trying to create workplaces and work cultures that go beyond a single-minded focus on making money but provide a comfortable work environment and focus on doing meaningful work. This kind of approach will resonate with the postmodern talent who will be willing to sacrifice some salary in exchange for a higher quality of life and appropriate work culture.

One potential offshoot of this surprise is that knowledge work becomes perceived as less meaningful than work that provides more immediate and direct benefits. It may be that the trades and crafts are seen as making a real difference in people’s lives and become more socially valued. Whereas now going to college is seen as preferable to going to trade school, it may be that the equation

The rise of postmodern values—with an emphasis on authenticity, community, sustainability, self-expression, and well-being—indicates a move to a happiness society, in which the metrics for success shift from economic production to happiness or well-being.

reverses, or that the two are seen on more equal footing.

Implication: Organizations Will Be Faced with Demands for Providing Happiness—Not Just a Paycheck

The organization may need to do some sort of cultural audit to assess the current level of “happiness.” Each organization has its own culture and will likely have its own sense of what happiness is. For some it may be work-life balance, for others it may be the ability to make lots of money, and for others it could be the ability to make a tangible positive difference in

people's lives. Whatever the particulars, it will become more important to consider these factors and work to promote them.

It is not a case where everyone needs to share the same interests; rather, it's about developing sensitivity to needs beyond financial compensation. As with other surprises, it comes down to the need for attracting scarce talent in a future in which talent makes the difference.

12. MEET THE NEW BOSS

Generational shifts are poised to have a big impact on the workplace. Boomers are approaching retirement age, and even though many, if not most, will continue to work, they will be moving out of positions of leadership. There will be adjustment

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issues as Gen Xers and Gen Yers ascend to leadership and bring their different priorities with them.

Boomers' considerable managerial expertise is useful, but in many cases they lag Gen X and Gen Y in terms of technological skill and comfort. Obviously, this does not apply across the board—many boomers are very technologically capable, but Gen X and especially Gen Y have the advantage of having grown up immersed in new technologies, whereas they are a "second language" for boomers. These new leaders will be much more comfortable with improvements in tools for remote work and

remote collaboration. They will use online and mobile social networking to keep in touch with the world (e.g., via Loopt, Facebook, Twitter, and other status updaters, location trackers, and real-time photo feeds). In many cases, organizations have resisted pursuing the technological frontier because the leadership was uncomfortable with it—those situations will change as new generations take over.

Another change is that Xers and Yers will strive for work-life balance to a far greater extent than boomers. They will expect flexibility, telecommuting options, and nontraditional compensation in their benefits packages. An interesting observation is that many boomers, on hearing such a statement, will often chuckle and note that the "real world" will intrude on such dreams, and emerging generations will follow the boomer pattern. Possibly, but the data on emerging values shifts and generational preferences suggests that things will be different.

The Xers and Yers are hard workers, but they value different aspects of work life. For instance, while salary is a very important factor in their jobs, they also highly value flexibility—they want to work and think on their own schedules. Businesses and managers who try to understand and adjust to their work habits and values will likely reap the rewards of amplified productivity and creativity from these colleagues.

One challenge, in particular with Gen Y, is their impatience to succeed. They have an independent drive to succeed with little supervision or guidance. They feel they are ready to lead now and are confident in their ability to make things happen and change the world. This could create friction with leaders who spent years working up the ladder—they may view them as upstarts unwilling to pay their dues.

Implication: Organizations Will Need to Manage the Potential for Intergenerational Conflict

Succession planning will become an increasingly necessary capability for organizations, particularly as boomers begin stepping down from positions of leadership. Gen Xers will expect it's their turn, but Gen Yers will feel they are ready as well. It is not unreasonable to see multiple generations at odds in the same organization! Succession planners will have their hands full managing these expectations. Having diverse representation and input from each of the generations is helpful in terms of providing a wider range of perspectives as well as being representative of the customer landscape.

CONCLUSION

These dozen surprises are already showing up on a small scale. It is unlikely that organizations would be equally surprised by each.

Although a piecemeal emergence may seem comforting, as noted earlier, there is a reinforcing relationship among many of them such that a critical mass may be reached and trigger a more sudden transformation.

Organizations are advised to begin thinking through the implications of these surprises and what they might mean. For those having a high degree of impact, it is not too early to begin planning a strategic response. By preparing now, not only will surprise be avoided, but a potential competitive advantage could also be gained by aligning the organization with the emerging future directions.

NOTES

1. Credit to former IHG Marketing VP Mark Wells for coining this phrase.
2. Peters, T. (1999, April 30). The wow project. Fast Company. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/24/wowproj.html>.
3. Credit to Association of Professional Futurists colleague Marcus Barber for bringing this concept to my attention.

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