



# **Work Without Limits Summit 2019**

## **Executive Trends Report**



## The future of work is already here... and it's flexible

For years, it was predicted that the future of work will be flexible. Work will be done remotely. Offices will shrink as work becomes increasingly decentralized. Skills will evolve so rapidly that job descriptions will lose their importance. Companies will embrace flexible teams that resemble movie crews to increase productivity and drive projects forward.

This isn't the future; it's happening now.

And this isn't the first time innovation has caused disruption. In the 1800s, gas powered vehicles were introduced, disrupting the transportation industry. These changes required some getting used to. That's why in 1899, Uriah Smith created the 'Horsey Horseless,' an automobile that had the appearance of a horse-drawn vehicle, making it easier for people to embrace the changes.

Much like the introduction of the automobile, the concept of a flexible workforce may feel completely new and a bit scary. It requires a new framework, and different set of talent and tools to support.

Getting businesses to adopt to new ways of working requires a shift in mindset. It requires a willingness to let go of what you know. Or what Barry O'Reilly, business advisor to Fortune 500s, calls "unlearning." He observed that those who excel at unlearning have a greater chance of success as the workforce transforms.

During Upwork's **Work Without Limits™ Executive Summit**, business leaders from some of the world's largest companies shared how they're reinvigorating work, not by focusing on what's different but rather by being optimally distinct, offering the right balance between similarities and differences. While flexible talent models aren't identical to what came before, they aren't radically different either. It's a combination of new and old.

So, how do you create an environment that's *optimally distinct*?

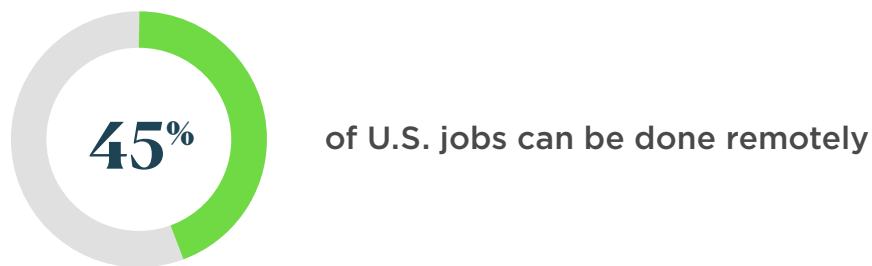


**“The inhibitor to innovation is not the ability to learn new things but the inability to unlearn mindsets, behaviors and methods that were once effective but now limit success.**

Barry O'Reilly, best-selling author, entrepreneur, business advisor

# Embrace a Distributed Mindset

Before teams can operate differently, they must choose to think differently. This begins with understanding that work is no longer a place. Collaboration technologies like Microsoft 365, Slack, Google Hangouts, and Atlassian make it possible to work anywhere.



So, if where work gets done doesn't matter, why restrict workers to a physical office?

It's time to take the work to the worker.

## Going remote benefits everyone

During the session Rethinking the Office of the Future, panelists unanimously agreed that the future revolves around remote work. Organizations are providing employees remote work options and increasing amounts of work offered to independent talent and agencies as workers prioritize work-life freedom.

Organizations may not have a choice as the most talented people are calling the shots. The tight labor market and ease in finding work online empowers top talent to shape their lives rather than conform to standard 9-to-5 dictates.

But enabling greater flexibility is a win for companies too. With a record number of job openings and unemployment rates at an all-time low, distributed team models are an effective way for organizations to address talent scarcity and expand capabilities.

Providing people greater flexibility also aids in attracting and retaining talent. Research, including a 2-year Stanford University study, found that remote employees are happier, less stressed, more productive, and less likely to leave.

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## A distributed mindset takes intention

Building a high-performing remote team takes intention, purpose and thoughtfulness. It requires a flexible structure that enables distributed teams to work together regardless of their location. This means everything from how work is parsed out, projects are delivered, and teams communicate must be carefully considered from a distributed-first organizational mindset.

During the session Rethinking the Office of the Future, panelists from some of the world's largest brands discussed how they successfully operate in a distributed-first culture. Below are highlights from the discussion:

### KNOW YOUR CADENCE OF COMMUNICATION

Communicate often to keep people involved and engaged. It's easy to feel isolated when working remotely, so be purposeful in how you think about cadence.

When deciding the pace for your business, Steph Yiu, head of support at WordPress VIP, suggests thinking about how often your leadership team gets together. How often your management team works together. Your frequency of one-on-ones and how you distribute and disseminate information from every direction.

### LOOK FOR PEOPLE BEYOND YOUR LOCAL MARKET

Worldwide, there is a huge pool of people who can provide the skills you need and within budget. "If you're only going into one market, especially one of the hotter markets, you're competing against a lot more players. But if you allow yourself to go where the talent is and where they want to live, you ultimately get access to a lot broader base of talent. It also lets people be much more flexible about their lives," says Mark Frein, Chief People Officer at InVision.



**“ Why work with remote employees?  
If you allow yourself to go to where  
the talent is, it allows you to be  
more flexible.**

Mark Frein, Chief People Officer, InVision

Workers at every level desire flexibility and freedom. Frein explained how remote work provides work-life balance as he escapes the scorching Texas heat (where he's based) and travels with his family while his children are on summer vacation.

### **HAVE THE RIGHT SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGIES IN PLACE FOR COMMUNICATION**

Sometimes, you can wait for an answer, other times, you need an answer ASAP. Make sure your tools provide various forms of communication from asynchronous (e.g., email, Google Docs) to real-time communication (e.g., Slack, Skype).

Be cognizant of how tools include everyone. For example, if you're in a remote meeting where everyone's in a room and you're on an audio call, it's difficult to feel part of the conversation. If you have a video call where everyone's in a room and you're seeing them from a tiny camera at the end of a long table, it's not enough either. Scott Wharton, VP and GM at Logitech, says "Choose tools where you don't need to be in the office to level the playing field because everybody's got the same capabilities."

### **CONTINUE TO EXPERIMENT AND ITERATE**

One challenge with remote work is knowing how much effort is enough to keep everyone informed, engaged, and on track. InVision makes it a daily practice to experiment and iterate in search of balance and to avoid creating too much noise in the system. Such as deciding how often they should meet. "Don't get locked into doing something to support remote just because it worked a year ago. As the company grows, you have to keep experimenting to find solutions that make sense," says Frein.



**“When you have a distributed team, it’s important to have a single source of truth. It makes a huge difference for people in the office and even more for people who are distributed. A lot of information can be lost for them if you don’t do it that way.”**

Stephane Kasriel, CEO, Upwork

## Overcoming remote team challenges

Beyond different processes and procedures, leaders from enterprise organizations spotlight other important considerations when adopting a distributed work model.

### CHALLENGE: GETTING TOO TRANSACTIONAL AND FORGETTING EMPATHY



“InVision intentionally reminds its employees to connect with remote talent. It’s easy to start off a message saying ‘Hey, I need \_\_\_\_\_.’ But you wouldn’t walk up to somebody in the office and just start asking for a deliverable. You’d say something like good morning first. Those rituals are important when interacting with someone in person. It’s just as important to continue practicing those rituals with remote workers to keep the emotionality from breaking down.”

Mark Frein, Chief People Officer, InVision

### CHALLENGE: REMAINING ALIGNED AS THE COMPANY GROWS



“Alignment is a tough challenge when everyone is scattered all over the world. At WordPress, meet-ups are central to how we operate. Every team meets up at least once a year. The meetups are for learning more about each other, cross-team collaboration, and alignment. When planning each event, we consider the core concepts that we want our team to understand from us that they can take back to their office and use that day. We think of how we can help them understand the core concepts from wherever they work because they’re not walking into a building where they can get that same feeling every day.”

Steph Yiu, Head of Support, WordPress VIP

### CHALLENGE: MAINTAINING THE COMPANY’S CULTURE



“One of the things that I’ve always found to be challenging, and exciting as we grow, is creating and keeping our culture. Especially as people have less in-person interactions. When we’re having those in-person moments, I think about what challenges we have together and what learning we can share. I also think about how we’re creating and really feeling the culture that we want our teams to feel throughout the world.”

Megan Dodds, General Manager-Midwest, WeWork

# Recognize the Need for Continuous Reskilling

Many legacy practices are designed to solve two universal workforce challenges:

- 1) accessing needed skills;
- 2) getting quality work done faster.

But as technology evolves, it's changing how we work, the jobs we do, and who does them. To succeed, organizations must move nimbly, adapting to an ever-changing environment.

Consequently, legacy practices—born from the industrial age where consistency and routine ruled—are rapidly shifting from being an asset to a liability. So says Ravin Jesuthasan, author and managing director at Willis Towers Watson. After researching over 130 large corporations, he noted for his book; *Reinventing Jobs* (Jesuthasan and Boudreau, HBR 2018).

Jesuthasan kicked off the Solving Future Skills with that intriguing observation. As if to demonstrate his point, panelists from forward-thinking organizations shared their contemporary approaches to resolving workforce challenges today.



**“Once the bedrock of competitive advantage, legacy—whether mindset or infrastructure—is increasingly becoming the obstacle to sustainable automation and the future of work.**

Ravin Jesuthasan, Managing Director,  
Willis Towers Watson

Here are their top takeaways:

## Redefine the job description

As new trends from blockchain to AI gain momentum, skills are becoming more specialized, jobs are being reinvented, and new occupations are emerging. Adding to the seismic shift, the workforce is more agile, and teams don't look like they once did. To compete in this rapidly changing market, companies need to scrap the traditional method of searching for talent to fit a specific job description or title. Instead, companies must approach hiring as accessing the skills needed for specific projects.

**“If you're hiring for yesterday's job description, you're already at a loss.”**

— Davida Sharpe, Director of People, Processes & Projects, Center for Creative Leadership.

Flexera is one of a growing number of companies liberating themselves from the myopia of job descriptions. The company focuses on the skills it needs to get where it wants to go.

## Re-engineering work

Work isn't done only by employees anymore. Technological advances enable companies to deconstruct jobs then distribute work to the most skilled resource(s), wherever they're located worldwide. Thereby cutting out intermediaries to save time and costs.

This flexible talent model provides more choices as you can hire an employee and develop them for a job. Or outsource the work to an agency, partner, or flexible talent, or leverage technology such as AI and automation. To find the optimal mix of humans and machines, business leaders must become skilled at orchestrating a distributed work ecosystem.



**“We're really thinking about the roles that we're hiring for, and what are the specific things we need from that role and breaking it into sections as opposed to thinking of the traditional job description.”**

Elizabeth Lages, SVP of People, Flexera

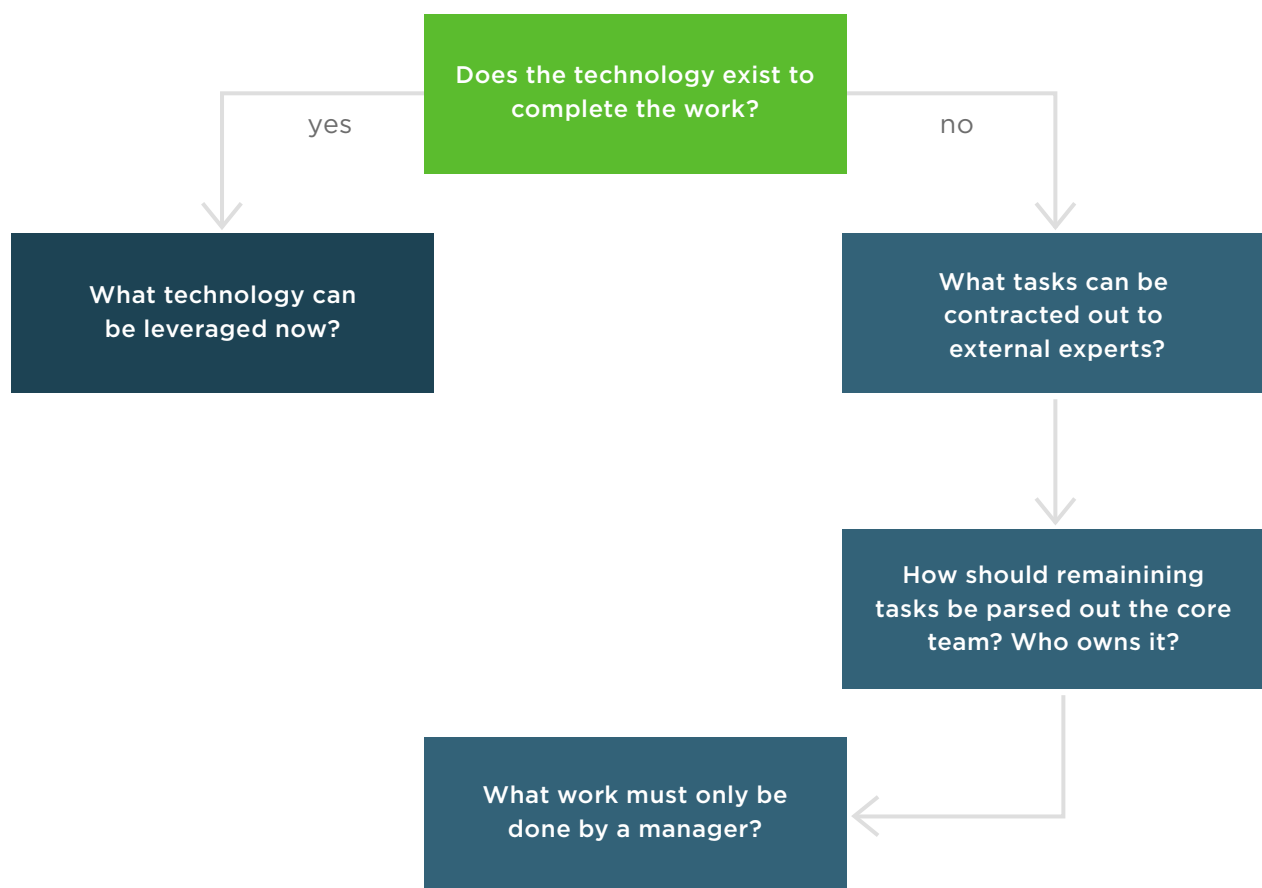


Dyan Finkhousen, Founder & CEO of Shoshin Works - Future of Work Consultancy, spent years optimizing how enterprise organizations and their clients work with flexible talent. She teaches that in creating an adaptive workforce, you're not just managing or leveraging talent resources. You're designing teams, workflows and operations to intentionally drive productivity and growth.

Successful teams prioritize resources by first leveraging technology, then seeing which flexible and specialist resources they can pull in to do the work—leaving a much leaner body of work that needs to be executed by employees. By inverting the resourcing funnel in this way, the capacity of the employee team is liberated and can be devoted to activities that represent the unique and proprietary gifts of the organization. Specifically—the role of the employee can be elevated to one that is uniquely positioned to understand the needs of the clients they serve, and then coordinate the prioritization, allocation and integration of work within the advanced tech and talent model at their disposal.

## Deciding who should do the work

When creating an adaptive workforce, builds teams to drive efficiency and productivity.



Source: Dyan Finkhousan, Work Without Limits™ Executive Summit 2019

## Reconstructing teams

Traditional job hierarchies are fading as work is increasingly completed by flexible teams who come together, then disband after the work is done. Much like how movie crews bring an ideal cast together for a movie, then disband after the shoot ends.

“Groups tend to make better and faster decisions than individuals. This lends credence to the theory that networked systems are not only more equitable but also more productive.”  
— Steve Hatfield, Principal, Deloitte Consulting LLP.

### Not “binary” anymore: the employment relationship is changing

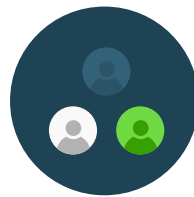
A plurality of works is already here...



**Traditional Employees**



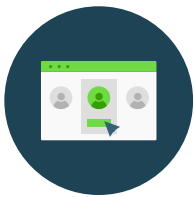
**Outsourcing**



**Free Agents**



**Alliances**



**Talent Platforms**



**Volunteers**



**Robotics**



**Artificial Intelligence**

Source: Ravin Jesuthasan, CFA, Solving Future Skills Challenges, 2019

## Developing a culture of continuous reskilling

Technology is evolving so rapidly that the generations-old belief of learning, doing, then retiring isn't enough anymore. Many of the jobs in demand today, such as data analyst and app developer, didn't exist 10 years ago. And it's likely that what will be popular 10 years from now, don't exist today.

To maintain growth in an ever-changing environment, adaptive businesses encourage workers to be in the habit of continuous learning. Note that continuous learning is as much knowing what to unlearn as it is knowing the skills needed to remain relevant.

**“Embrace the idea that learning isn't fixed; we're always growing and training.”**

— Christine Raestch, VP of People, Duolingo.

Duolingo views reskilling is a partnership between the company and employee. The company provides resources for some skills and aids employees in identifying what they want to develop. But the ownership to reskill is put in the employee's hands. Each person receives a personal budget that can be used towards anything, from learning how to meditate to learning a new software language.



**Younger generations believe individuals should be responsible for their own reskilling**



**Flexible talent are 3x more likely to invest in reskilling vs. full-time employees**

# Think Beyond the Gig

When business leaders talk about the new talent model, flexible workers (namely freelancers) often dominate the conversation. Leaders imagine these individuals as subject matter experts or technical gurus to call for one-time projects and short-term “gigs.”

As organizations work with flexible talent more, they’re seeing new ways to leverage the workforce, which includes contracting flexible agencies to support large-scale projects and turn projects around faster and more cost-effectively than traditional agencies.

At this year’s event, Upwork’s VP of Product, Bonnie Sherman unveiled a new Agency Experience that uses the latest technology to help businesses find and work with agencies more easily.



## THE NEW AGENCY ALTERNATIVE

When you need a team of specialists, it may make more sense to work with a flexible agency instead of individual talent. These nimble agencies are becoming a popular solution for many of the world's most recognized brands. As boutique firms provide all the traditional agency capabilities with the fast turnaround, cost-efficiency, and flexibility of freelancers.

During the Evolving the Agency Landscape with Flexible Talent session, flexible agency owners share why they're preferred by small- to large-sized organizations. Here are a few highlights:

**Q:** **What's the advantage of working with a small boutique rather than a large agency?**

**A:** **Amber Foxworth, VII Digital.** "In my experience, clients want better service and customization. We're very responsive, and because we're a small team, you get to know nearly all of us and we answer when you call. Our size also enables us to be more flexible. When clients want to adjust a proposal or make changes during a project, we can do it very quickly. Which makes it easier for the client to make decisions, so we can get work done sooner."

**Q:** **Why start your own agency rather than work in-house at a large company?**

**A:** **Joann Kuczek, Milk Bar Design.** "It was a natural step after working in the field of design for over 10 years and going back to grad school. It's rewarding in many ways: That I can assemble my own team and really work with them in partnerships, talk and collaborate directly with clients, nurture their brands as if they were my own. I'm in charge of everything that it takes to bring a brand to life, then grow that brand, and then shift it in different directions—it's extremely fun."

**Q:** **How do you get the work done well when you work remotely and don't meet the client?**

**A:** **Stan Long, VideoBranch.** "After we make the initial connection, I set up a discovery call where I ask a lot of questions then basically shut up and listen. I try to hear what their goals are and what the project looks like in their mind. I take the information back to my team, we'll discuss it then offer the client a plan with a few options. After that, the project begins and we set up milestones. We make the process simple so people can get back to doing what they do so well. You tell me what you need, and it's done."

## Adoption isn't disruption—it's an evolution

Hiring isn't about finding full-time employees anymore. The world is changing so fast that the person you hired three months ago may not be the person you need for the next six weeks. Today, hiring is about efficiently accessing the right skills at the right time for the right job.

In the beginning, your organization may view adopting a distributed team model as disruptive. But as people become more comfortable working with remote talent, they'll see that the model is a natural evolution to how work gets done. Like how Dick Fosbury transformed high jumping.

Dick Fosbury was a sophomore in high school and passionate about high jumping, but he couldn't clear the bar to make his high school team. At that time, everyone went over the bar facing forward so they could land on their feet. But around that time, high jumpers changed from landing in sawdust, sand, or wood chips to landing on a foam pad. Fosbury realized a new base technology meant he could do things differently. He figured out how to jump over the bar backwards and land safely on his back. His unconventional technique was dubbed the Fosbury Flop. People ridiculed him, his coach asked him to stop, but he continued to cross the bar backward while others continued facing forward. Three years later in 1968, Fosbury set a new Olympic record and won the gold medal.

At first, people viewed Fosbury's method as disruptive. When they saw the results it created, more began adopting it. They learned to leverage the new technology—the foam pad. Now, hardly anyone in the sport goes over the bar facing forward.



**“We’re sitting at a really pivotal moment. How do you shift your mindset from being that front orientation—the way things have always been done, the way my company does it, my culture does it, the way my fellow employees do it—to tweak things just a little bit and go over backwards?”**

John Winsor, CEO, Open Assembly

## Setting forth change

John Winsor, CEO and Founder of Open Assembly, views adopting a new workforce model as a journey. The path begins with learning new tools, laying a foundation through experimentation, then building upon successes before scaling. Using this phased approach, you can work out details early on, which will help teams scale the program smoothly. It also allows you to engage critical support at the right time and in a targeted way.

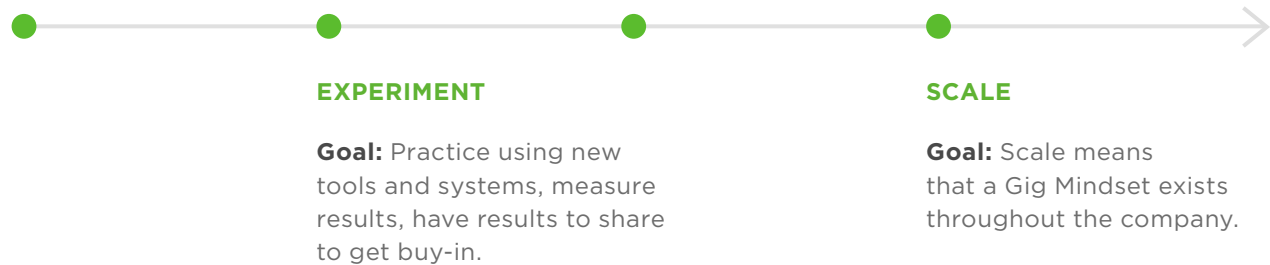
### STEPS IN THE ADOPTION JOURNEY

#### LEARN

**Goal:** The learn phase is about education, culture, and communication. Create a coalition of the curious and the willing.

#### BUILD

**Goal:** Establish a Gig practice within the company with a specific identity, a structure, and measureable outcomes.



Source: John Winsor, Crossing the Agency Chasm to Accelerate Adoption, 2019



## Adoption advice from the changemakers

In the panel discussion, Meet the Changemakers, this year's industry innovators share how they created flexible talent programs to scale adoption in their enterprise organization. And how they multiplied flexible talent usage across their organizations to boost efficiencies.

### ADAM HOFMANN, VP OF MARKETING AT SINGULARITY UNIVERSITY



“When you have something new, the organization usually doesn’t want to change. You must force it to change. So, you’ve got to put things in place to shift mindsets and gain support. It’s a great reminder that something that had become so second nature to me—to go and solve my problems by finding freelancers and agencies—wasn’t obvious to everybody else.”

**Hofmann’s advice:** Involve key stakeholders early on (i.e., IT, marketing, product development, legal). Collaborate to address their concerns and design the program components. Their input will help you gain program support and create a model that reduces risk as it scales.

### DYAN FINKHOUSEN, FUTURE OF WORK ADVISOR AND BUSINESS CONSULTANT



“When you get teams pointed in the right direction and help them realize that they can be more successful with a broader toolkit, you see two main changes: you have a change in method and a change in mindset.”

**Finkhousen’s advice:** Balance your expertise with a beginner’s mindset. Commit to setting aside preconceived notions and embrace new models with curiosity. Look at work as a portfolio of tasks and missions. From that framework, be humble and ask who is best to complete the task. When deciding, prioritize technology, then external talent, followed by employees.

### PETER LOFORTE, GM AT MICROSOFT 365



“I think companies that are going to be around 10 years from now have to be focused on a very flexible talent pool ranging from full-time employees to freelancers. And their internal HR systems must support and enable that. HR systems should allow companies to deploy resources on a set of dynamic projects very quickly. I’m taking for granted that’s going to happen. Because the companies that can’t do that, they won’t be around.”

**Loforte’s advice:** Build a flexible bench of talent and create systems and processes that support working with them.

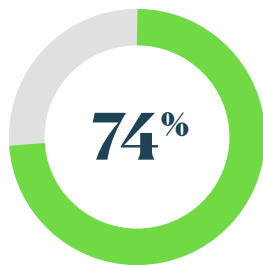


# Empower Younger Generations

It's predicted that millennials and Gen Z will make up **59%** of the workforce within the next year. Labeled as lazy with “snowflake” tendencies, these younger gen workers are accused of demanding too much freedom over when, where, and how they work.

Yet, their penchant for busting paradigms are inspiring new ways for individuals to generate optimal business and social impact. To start, younger gen workers are already embracing agile work practices and distributed team models.

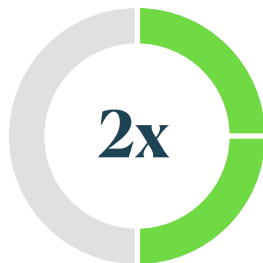
## HOW THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK



Have remote team members



More likely than Baby Boomers  
to take the onus for reskilling



More likely than Baby Boomers  
to develop a flexible talent and  
remote workforce strategies

Source: Upwork, Future Workforce Report 2019

## **Tips from millennials on retaining younger gen workers**

Next generation business leaders remove the mystery out of engaging and retaining a misunderstood workforce. In the session, How Younger Generations Are Shaping the Future of Work, a panel of millennial managers discuss how their generation is creating foundational changes in how people work together.

### **GIVE A REASON WHY**

“People may think we’re disrespectful because we question things. We question because we need to know why something exists. If we agree with the reason, we’ll do it. If we don’t agree, we’ll look for a different way.”

— Ahmad Hares, Product Manager, SunPower

### **BE TRANSPARENT AND COMMUNICATE OFTEN**

“We want constant communication so that we know we’re doing the right thing at work. We’re accustomed to having information at our fingertips, so we feel uncomfortable when we don’t get regular feedback.”

— Cooper Dixon, OnDemand Talent Brand Manager, Procter & Gamble

### **EXPLAIN THE WORK’S PURPOSE**

“Before I take on anything, I want to see that there is a clear path to impact. And when the impact is made, I know what will happen next. If I spend 80% of my life at work, I want to make sure I’m doing something that makes a difference.”

— Matthew Mottola, Product Manager, Microsoft

### **OFFER FLEXIBILITY OVER WHERE, WHEN, AND HOW WORK GETS DONE**

“Give us the what, tell us the why, but don’t tell us the how. If you do know the how, ask us questions to help us bring it out. Trust us to figure things out.”

— Matthew Mottola, Product Manager, Microsoft

“Know that work doesn’t always happen at your desk. If you’re in the product world & you’re getting out there to see how people are really using a product, you’re still working.”

— Ahmad Hares, Product Manager, SunPower

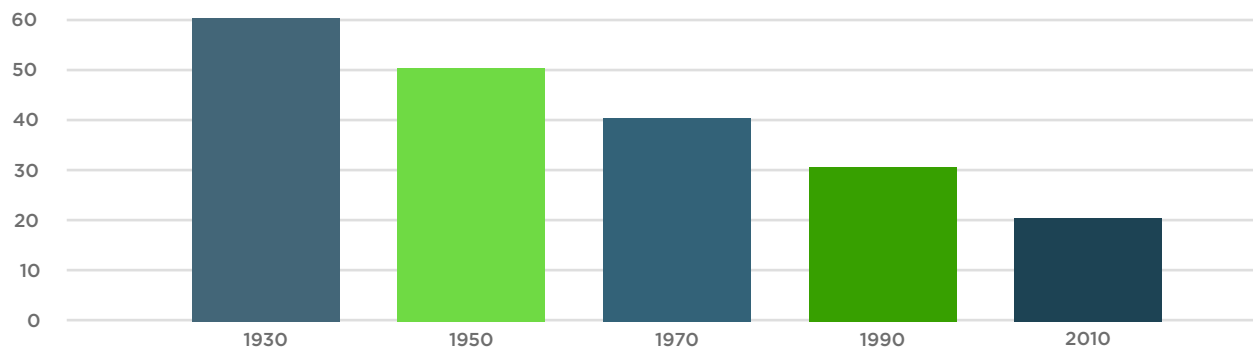
“Let me own my time. Everyone varies on when they do their best brainstorming or transactional tasks.”

— Cooper Dixon, OnDemand Talent Brand Manager, Procter & Gamble

# Embracing Change

Of the Fortune 500 companies that existed in the 1950s, fewer than **60** remain today. The ones that fell off the list either shrank, merged, or disappeared. Companies remained on the list did so because they embraced change rather than resisted it.

## THE AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF THE F500 IS DECLINING



Less than 12% of the original F500 are still on the list today.

Source: Upwork Work Without Limits™ Executive Summit, 2019

Embracing change requires that you see work with a beginners' mindset in that you don't have all the answers and you're willing to consider other options. Commit to setting aside preconceived notions and looking outside your organization for solutions. Examine new models of work with curiosity, openness, and optimism.

What holds most people back is fear. Many of us are so tied to our jobs and how things have always been done. But we're more than our titles. We can make a greater impact by serving as an orchestra conductor, arranging teams of experts as needed to create amazing work together.

When you adopt a distributed work model, you leverage workforce changes rather than become a victim of them. From this position, you can increase efficiencies and productivity as workforce trends take future twists and turns.

You know what to do, so why not tap into the possibilities that are waiting for you now?

# About Upwork

Upwork is the largest global freelancing website that helps companies get more done by connecting with freelancers across thousands of skills, from mobile app development to customer support. Upwork makes it fast, simple, and cost-effective to find, engage, and collaborate with top talent worldwide.

For more details, [visit Upwork today](#).