

ClickShare



Enabling the agile employee

Workforce is a term perhaps more suited to the days of mainly physical or factory labor, but it applies now to all employees: all thinkers, doers, producers, innovators, team members, skilled partners – anyone you employ to drive the output and success of your enterprise. The way the workforce sees work is changing, however, and businesses can learn a lot about adapting for the modern consumer by recognizing how to work with, rather than at odds with, their workforce.



Who are today's workers

The makeup of the workforce is evolving. By 2020, Millennials and Generation Z – people born from the 1980s onwards – will comprise nearly 60% of the workforce. Businesses need to strike a balance between attracting and retaining the best young talent and making sure they don't alienate their Generation X leaders. Finding this employee-experience 'sweet spot' will enable them to thrive and truly harness the power of shared knowledge across the generations.

The forces at work on the workforce

There are many trends shaping the workforce. The most important of these are the shift to remote or flexible working and the '*gig economy*'. According to Forbes, 43% of Americans spend some time working remotely, while 82% of millennials in the US say they feel more loyal to their employer if they have the freedom to work flexibly, in a

way that suits them. After all, digital technology now means there's no need to be in the same room to have face-to-face meetings.

At the same time, freelance employment is on the rise. In 2017, Intuit CEO Brad Smith said, "*the gig economy... is now estimated to be about 34% of the Workforce [in the US] and expected to be 43% by the year 2020.*" The workforce is also spending less and less time in traditional workplaces.



The power of shared knowledge

So, what do these new drivers mean for the employer? On a practical level, accommodating flexible working and having the agility to bring in short-term, project-specific talent brings immediate advantages. Remote working is a relatively inexpensive employee benefit to provide.

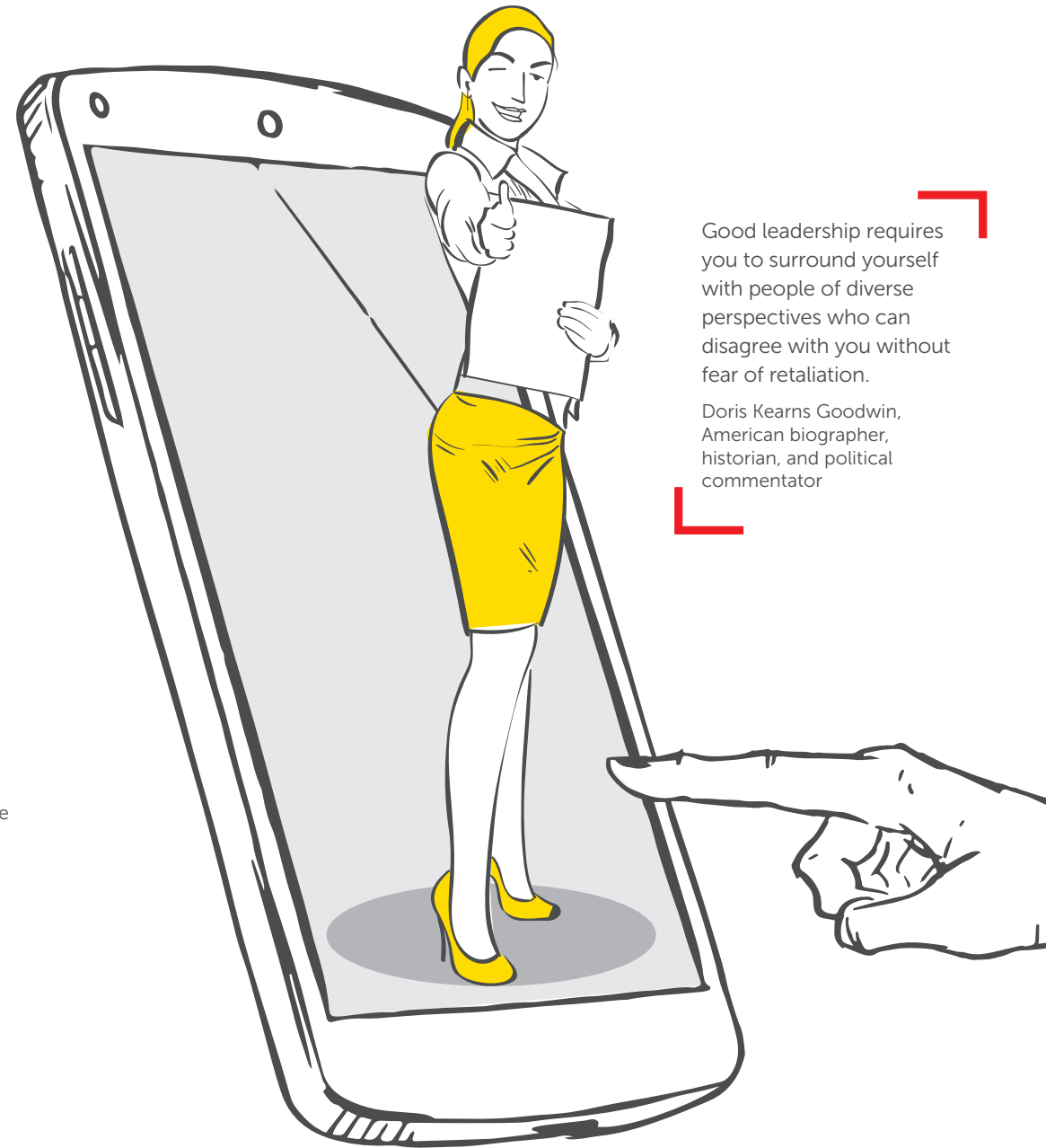
Contract workers are well suited to a variety of scenarios and functions, especially if they have scarce skills and are needed for short but intense transformation periods. Gig workers can also bring fresh enthusiasm and ideas to roles. According to Forbes, *“many are at the top of their fields and have chosen project work for its flexibility, challenge and exposure.”*

However, *“No business can run with just short-term hires; it’s vital to have consistency around company vision and how departments can deliver”* (Forbes). Teams still need leaders to be effective. But the decentralization of

workers through a freeing up of workstyles does mean a levelling of traditional hierarchies. And this can be radically beneficial.

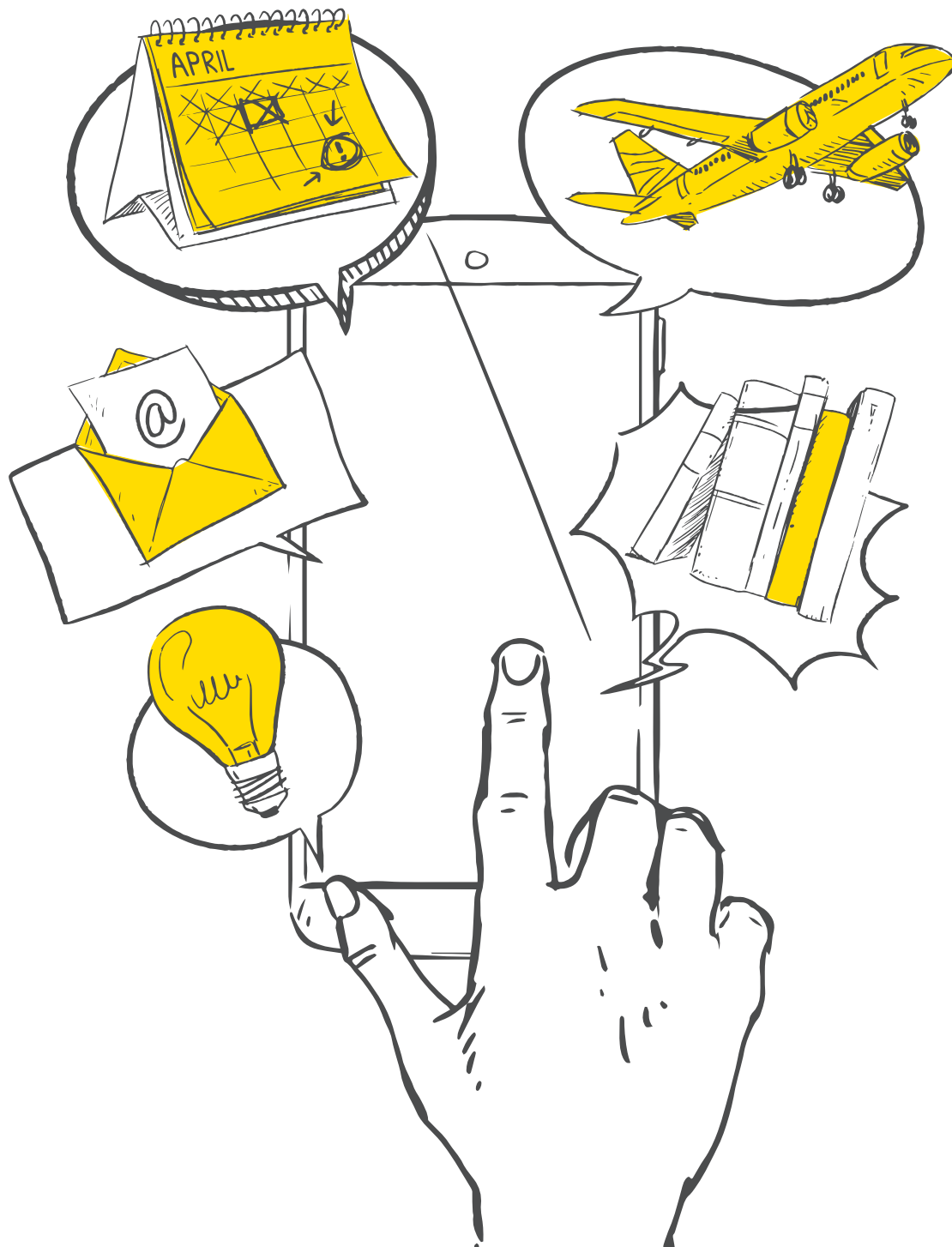
Research at Stanford University, the University of Amsterdam and Drexel University has revealed that egalitarian tendencies actively ignite employee cooperation, knowledge sharing and, consequently, performance. At major US law firm Perkins Cole, *“employees rave about the egalitarian approach”*, according to Fortune. They commend the fact that *“decisions [are] usually made by consensus rather than in a top-down fashion”*.

Leadership teams are recognizing that traditional management structures are on the way out and that an increasing number of workers are most productive and profitable when given greater autonomy. Many are adopting a mindset that views all employees – temporary, permanent, Generation Z, Generation X – as capable decision-makers, and which values individual and collective excellence as well as corporate structure.



Good leadership requires you to surround yourself with people of diverse perspectives who can disagree with you without fear of retaliation.

Doris Kearns Goodwin, American biographer, historian, and political commentator



Mediating a new mindset

So how can businesses both activate and take advantage of this agile and more egalitarian working environment? It comes down to two things: a collaborative mindset throughout the organization, and the tools to make co-creation possible.

Mindset shouldn't be a problem with the evolving workforce. By 2020, 59% of the global workforce will be comprised of 'natural collaborators' – Millennials and Generation Z employees who've grown up with online sharing technologies like Google docs, online gaming, social media, cloud-based apps and more. Their expectations are driven by their digital lifestyles. They're able self-managers, they prefer to share responsibility and they use technology that contributes to their personal growth. As agile workers, they can be expected to find the most efficient ways of working together, from small single-project teams to start-up style innovation hubs within larger businesses.

In terms of technology and tools, there are differences in how the generations are influencing the way businesses evolve. The first time that a member of Generation Z might send an email could easily be when they begin their career. Instead, they're more used to face-to-face communication tools such as Facetime, Skype, Snapchat, or Instagram. They don't email, and rarely text. They respond to short, informal, 'stand-up' meetings and consider the 'huddle space' their natural territory – not the boardroom.

Millennials, meanwhile, are perfectly at home using text and conferencing technologies. Bear in mind the oldest of this generation remember dial-up internet.

Add to the mix your Generation X Workforce, whom you can't afford to ignore or alienate as a good percentage of them will be in senior roles. The good news is, Generation X are perfectly comfortable adopting the latest technology, even if they haven't grown up using it.

Gen X was viewed [by 80% of survey respondents] as the generation best equipped to manage in current economic conditions, as well as in 2020.

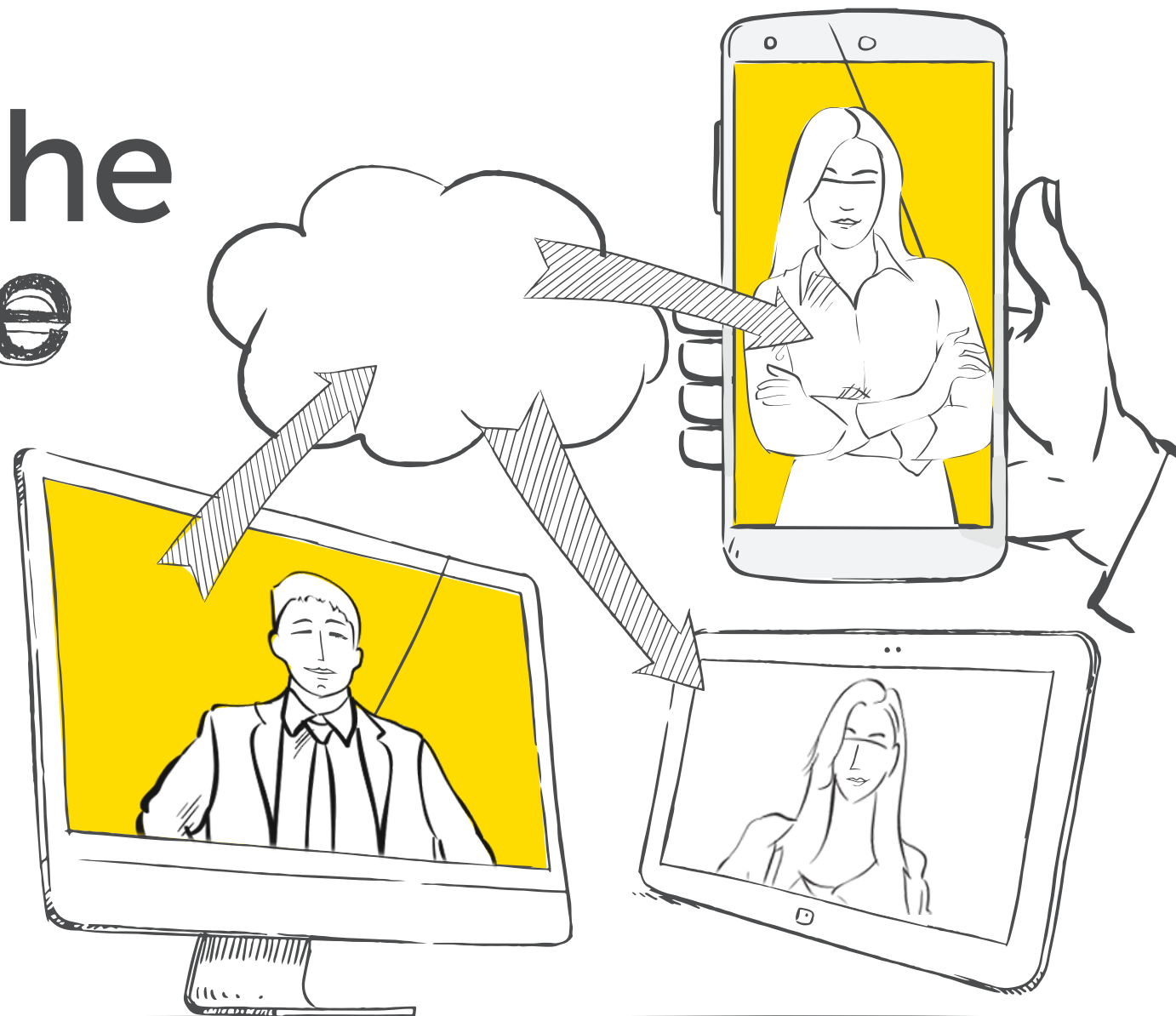
Ernst & Young

The right tools for the workforce

Businesses must provide tools that offer the very best user experience for everyone. The workforce is familiar with technology in different but equally compelling ways across the generations.

'Tools' can also include environments that promote cross-generational collaboration such as huddle spaces and communal areas. Ideally, these should have managed 'bring your own device' (BYOD) capabilities and 'plug-in-and-play' simplicity. Digitally-native staff are often more comfortable with the user-experience offered by their own devices and, if security protocols are adhered to, such capabilities can enable valuable collaboration with others, such as visiting clients as well as co-workers.

Ultimately, helping the workforce work together is the key to future-proofing your business and becoming undisruptable. Employees are increasingly used to seamless tech experiences in their personal lives and expect them everywhere they interact or have an impact. Just as they would do with technology providers outside work, if they don't get the experience they want they will look for it elsewhere.



Manage a cross-generational workforce

The workforce is made up of a diverse range of individuals with a variety of demands that influence the way businesses work. As harnessing the power of shared knowledge becomes a priority, organizations are now focusing on the key areas that matter more to workers: inclusion, flexibility, individualism, entrepreneurship, well-being, purpose and personal development.

Equip your business to attract and engage the evolving workforce with the following actions.



review how you recruit and retain staff

Are you offering enough in terms of connective technology, workstyle flexibility and opportunities for development? Today's HR departments are having to work harder to meet the evolving needs and expectations of the best talent. If you don't provide what the most talented workers expect, they'll go elsewhere.



support and empower everyone

Sophisticated technology is now commonplace in organizations. Invest in ongoing skills-development to keep everyone up to speed, especially team leaders who aren't digital natives. Make use of online 'micro-learning' programs rather than day-long courses. Education in manageable, bite-size chunks like this is effective, helps employees achieve individual goals and takes less time.



encourage cross-generational mentoring

To engage, develop and retain top talent, pair employees from different age groups and different positions within the company. Benefits can work both ways: more experienced employees in senior positions get insight into the lives and workstyles of younger generations, and new workers get visibility into managerial and company-wide perspectives.



think of your people as more than workers

They're your partners and customers, too. The boundaries between employees, supply-chain partners and consumers are blurring. Promote productive collaboration and conversation between stakeholders by making sharing easy through technology, communal areas and huddle spaces.



enable BYOD integration

Ease innovation, collaboration and workstyle freedoms by making it possible for workers to securely bring their own devices into the workplace, knowing their data and yours is protected.



work on your user experience

As a guiding principle, try to think of your Workforce as your 'users' (as well as your partners and customers), and your business as the technology they are 'using'. As with technology, a seamless, purposeful, integrated 'user experience' between workforce and business is vital if your enterprise is to succeed.

Tap into our reports in the other areas of business that are transforming the way we work – the Workspace, Workplace and Workstyle.

Download our full comprehensive report 'The Four Ws'



Sources

- Forbes 'Workplace Exclusivity Is Dying, But It Might Not Matter'
- Harvard Business Review 'What Peter Drucker Knew About 2020'
- Stanford Business 'Rethinking Hierarchy In The Workplace'
- Forbes 'The Millennial Expectation Of Technology In The Workplace'
- Forbes 'You've Got Millennial Employees All Wrong: Here Are The Four Things You Need To Know Now'
- Forbes '8 Ways Generation Z Will Differ From Millennials In The Workplace'
- Forbes 'This Is What Generation Z Wants From the Workplace'
- FCW 'Is BYOD Really That Important To Millennials'
- OgilvyRed's Think series – 'The future of work'