

## FRAMING THE FUTURE OF WORK: WHERE PEOPLE, IDEAS AND TECHNOLOGY CONVERGE

By Sarah Wittlieb

According to a recent global Gallop survey (Jan, 2021): 15% of employees are engaged at work. While this has a lot to do with the pandemic, it has huge implications for the future of work. Gallop describes the “engaged” to be “those who are enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace”. Work is typically defined as the job we do. And — while this will change a lot in an intelligent data-driven economy, the workplace is by far the harder of the two to define. That’s because it’s a more subjective construct. So, it’s not surprising that a megatrend like New Work has emerged to try and quantify it. But this is no buzz word: [New Work is going to change everything about our daily routine: not just in terms of the place we go to work, but the way we go to work, with whom, how we innovate at work and why we even go.](#) And the concept is certainly not the result of any pandemic. The term was coined by Frithjof Bergmann, an Austro-American philosopher in the 1950s and now describes a new way of working in today’s global and digital society. It’s based on fascinating research about the individual need for freedom in the context of work and community. So (1) what is the future of work? And (2) how will this dynamic foster innovation? Well, if you want to consider the future, first consider the past.

### Past work: the control effect

In the industrial era, when people moved away from agricultural labor, and headed to factories and huge manufacturing plants in the cities a very different “work” environment existed. The work force were low-paid and often unskilled. Factory owners would sit up on the upper floor and watch the workforce below them. With the introduction of mass production, huge collectives of workers manned assembly lines responsible for individual components. There was little communication required. The environment was hierarchical. Workers were not expected to be innovative. And ultimately, the individual was “invisible” within the collective.

Then came the post-industrial era. By now cities were over-run. Simple automation and then complex digital transformation saw computers and servers in what were now – offices. Bosses now sat in glassed area, assembly lines were often robotic, and white-collar workers continued to focus on their “own” specific disciplines which created silos. While virtual teams supported global operations, and flexi-time & open-plan concepts existed, creativity

failed to thrive. Ultimately, the individual was encouraged to be “integrated” into the collective. But the collective was the main focus.

Then came the pandemic. For many industries such as hospitality, events and travel – this was to be the biggest crisis in history. But it also triggered a major global aha moment. Some realized you could actually do everything online. Productivity didn’t drop. Others it revealed technical vulnerabilities with software licenses bound to physical machines. Data locked away on mainframes. And legal files in physical halls of records.

At this critical time, two seismic shifts occurred that would direct the course of New Work forever:

**Firstly, the crisis pushed individuals over an existential tipping point.** For many this would be triggered by losing their jobs. For others it resulted in a period of deep reflection about life, fulfillment and a heightened sense of self within a community. In March 2020, a BILT study found that 80% of “working adult Internet users were satisfied with their home office situation.” Yet by end of the year this had shifted dramatically in favor of hybrid models. Employees—as social beings—were on waiting lists to go into work. Families moved to be closer to grandparents. Companies sponsored mindfulness courses. The personal health industry boomed. And the individual experienced a renaissance.

**Secondly, unexpectedly, the crisis pushed many companies over the technology tipping point.** Business transformation surged and digitalization experienced an astounding rate of acceleration. According to a McKinsey survey in 2021, globally about 55% of products and/or services were fully or partially digitalized as of July 2020 compared to 35% in December 2019. In 2017 nearly half of executives ranked cost savings as one of the most important priorities for their digital strategies. In 2020, that figure was at 10 percent. Companies realized the broader potential of technology and started to grasp the importance of culture in digital transformation. The formerly “it” role as Chief Digital Officer was now the Chief Change Officer. And those that executed successful responses to the crisis cited “speed in experimenting and innovating” and “collaboration” as major success factors.

**So here we are now in 2021: And a new era in digitalization has emerged defined by accelerated innovation. Work environments have become more “inclusive” cultivating a “collective of one”. And yet its widely recognized that no individual or company can succeed on their own.**

So what’s the future of work? Again, a quick look at what has been: In 2006

Google Zurich launched a playful work environment with the focus on the usage of creative spaces. wework broke onto the market in 2010 with its co-working concept aimed primarily at start-ups. In 2011 KPMG set up innovation labs like Ignition in London's Canary Warf to address co-innovation. Business parks popped up all over Europe to encourage same-sector clustering. Apple then Microsoft addressed mass work / life blend at huge campus sites. And in 2020 Singapore was ranked as the top smart city in the world – using data to manage traffic to work, healthier citizenship and smart office buildings. All these developments have been exciting to watch. But they all lack one essential ingredient: cross-industry collaboration at critical mass. And yet – here lies the answer to this question because — exactly this is the future of work.

## Future work: the frame effect

It's nearly 6 years ago now, since the concept of LabCampus was born. Now, one year after building has started, an innovation cosmos is literally breaking new ground at the site of Munich airport. Many consider it to be a lighthouse project and it's already attracted the attention of MIT Senseable City Lab – who have partnered with the company to bring in their expertise and advise as it takes shape. Three things will make LabCampus quite unique:

**CONNECT:** Firstly, and possibly most critically, this unique cosmos has been designed to frame the innovative culture and community within it—connecting them all up with a thin line. The campus isn't there to make companies innovative – its role is to offer optimal conditions in terms of space, services and environment for companies to connect and do the rest themselves. Here, community managers view their roles as curators and initiators. They attract partners and external experts in response to demand. But ultimately innovation happens bottom up.

**CREATE:** Secondly, it identifies with a strong purpose to spark the innovation of tomorrow by encouraging global players, hidden champions, R&D divisions, and talented newcomers across all different industries and sectors to, share knowledge, collaborate and co-create. The goal being to impact company, regional and even national economic success.

**COLLABORATE:** Finally, the campus is being built from the ground up to encapsulate the future work zeitgeist. On campus, infinite possibilities will exist for every "one" to shape the life they want on their own, but to contribute to collective achievement. At a social level, sub-communities will form around interest topics such as hospitality, events, sport and entertainment—

boosting work life blend, engagement at work, employer branding and staff retention. At company level, this will manifest itself in AI think tanks, carve-outs, spin-offs, clustering, and cross-industry innovation projects.

Which leads to question 2. How, specifically, will this environment foster innovation?

- (1) **Room for innovation:** Innovation demands space. With the possibility to explore multiple squares, parks, restaurants and discover hidden maker spaces, cafes, terraces, this is a large environment—the size of 70 football fields—designed to inspire. And open innovation demands it. Indications are that the future isn't just urban. Hybrid telecommuting models will see more people locating outside of cities. And with cross-industry innovation happening at scale out of town, this, in turn, demands yet more space for short- and longer stay accommodation of international visitors.
- (2) **Cutting-edge facilities:** Innovation requires prototyping areas where companies can test and even exhibit their innovations. Academies for AI & Blockchain training. Security hubs for cyber security contingency planning. In this case, to foster innovation, buildings and amenities need to be perfectly aligned to future demand.
- (3) **Spatial design:** Innovation is by design. Aesthetic can impact how people think, where people want to work and even how productive they are. Company offices of the future will need to cater to multiple styles and tastes, with the potential to move around modular components. So, providing multiple layout options is essential. Humans are social beings. And with an increased demand for “physical” experiences, community spaces will be buzzing. Take the main lobby in LAB 48 for example. Capacity capture models of the future demand that spaces fulfil multiple purposes. So, in the future, visitors won't just be welcomed here. They'll be hosted here. With the foyer design and a complex step structure – enabling pop-up meetings and informal hangouts.
- (4) **Community management:** Innovation demands diversity of thought and expertise. To foster this, takes a dedicated team committed to establishing a melting pot of residents and partners and ultimately, a thriving ecosystem. No one industry should be over-represented, and 5-yr minimum leases should ensure healthy turnover. International

companies, European companies, German and regional companies should mix. Old and young.

- (5) **Innovation services:** Innovation requires support. Futureproofing a company is not easy. From ideation, human-centric design, crowdsourcing, trend scouting, patent advice, to talent acquisition, new work environments must ensure proximity to an ecosystem of partners able to provide a number of expert innovation services and accelerate time to market. Services like the Terminal Testlab—to test products and services, will be critical to speedy deployment.

New work is one of the most exciting trends defining the future of our social, economic and cultural development. But it requires a complex understanding of human motivational-, enterprise- and innovation theory to even be able to start predicting what form it will take. One thing is inevitable, no individual or company can exceed on their own. No-one knows exactly what the future will bring. But we can seek to frame it now and let the innovators of today come together to shape it for tomorrow.

## The frame logo

Airports have been doing it for decades: framing environments where, in the case of Munich, 200,000 independent visitors can go their own way without chaos breaking out. This is the system of managing the increasingly relevant “collective of one”. At LabCampus an innovative cosmos is under creation which will do the same for cross-industry collaboration. Here, infinite possibilities exist for residents to connect, create and collaborate within a subtle framework designed to curate not control. This is represented in its logo CI.



An innovation cosmos is currently being created at the LabCampus, which will do just that for cross-industry cooperation: Here, the residents have countless opportunities to network, collaborate and develop new products and services together. Within a subtle framework that is designed to curate rather than control – represented in the corporate design as a central design element that symbolically opens and defines new spaces.