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## Reflections on the Changing Workplace

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*Dr. Seuss:*  
“ . . . You can get so confused  
that you'll start in to race  
down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace  
and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,  
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.  
The Waiting Place. . . ”

WE BELIEVE THAT the biggest changes that have resulted from the pandemic and other events of the last several years affect both the content of our work and the context of our relationships at work and at home. In this chapter, we highlight in abbreviated form some of what we consider to be major changes and trends influencing our work life over that last decade or so.

The list of transformations in the nature of work is long and likely to continue to grow longer as we move further into the 21st century. Debates proliferate as well about these changes, oscillating between the angst associated with job losses and exploitative digital sweatshops as contrasted with the promise of increased flexibility and the shaping of new, more creative jobs. The list of changes—before the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the rate of change—includes, for example, the development of new forms of organization such as telework and virtual teams; the growth of artificial intelligence, robotics and automation; the proliferation of freelancing and contracting; the remaking of the traditional corporation and the slow demise of the bureaucratic or psychological contract in which employees traded off labor for employment security; and the spread of digital crowdsourcing platforms and open models of production and sourcing of ideas.

We've organized these types of changes under three generic headings: *New Ways of Working*; *New Organizational Realities*; and *Global Turbulence*. Under each of the categories are particular changes that we see as ubiquitous, significant, and consequential. We want you to think about their impact on you specifically.

Some of these changes may have touched you directly and some not. Some of these shifts are a consequence of the two-plus years of the Covid-19 pandemic, and some are the result of longer-term global, societal, organizational, and market changes. Some seem certain, powerful, and likely to alter the career landscape for many, if not all, of us. Others seem less so.

What will last in what we have described in the Preface as a VUCA world is impossible to know. Yet it is well worth considering some of these apparent changes identifiable today as a way of thinking about your career to date and preparing as best you can for an always unknown future.

**Our first suggestion for you is to reflect  
on the following twenty changes**

As you reflect on these changes, make some notes for yourself of what the actual *major* changes were for you in your particular situation and just how they affected or influenced you and those close to you. You will later look back at your assessment of these changes and examine the implications they have had for you and your career.

## Changes in Work

### Upheavals, Adaptations, Permanent Shifts?

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#### New Ways of Working

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| <b>The “Great Resignation”</b>           | The Covid-related “Great Resignation” led scores of employees to quit their current jobs to look for and find positions that offered more attractive work conditions and prospects.  |
| <b>Smaller Teams, Mounting Workloads</b> | Cost cutting and reduction in the labor force increased the responsibilities and workloads of those employees who remain in the organization.  |
| <b>Gig Economy</b>                       | Part-time, contract, and transient work accelerated during the Covid-19 period and continues to grow partly because workers now expect more control over the location, timing, and conditions of their employment.                           |
| <b>Distance Has Eroded Trust</b>         | Openness and trust in the workplace often decline when employees work remotely at a significant physical distance from one another.  |
| <b>Here Today, Gone Tomorrow</b>         | As the time employees spend in any one organization shrinks, the value of organization-specific knowledge and skills is diminished, if not lost completely.  |
| <b>Fuzzy Job Ladders</b>                 | Fewer corporate careers are of the “up or out” variety and are increasingly played out as a combination of climbs, lateral moves within or across organizations, periods spent out of the workforce, and even planned or unplanned descents. |

<b>Distance Has Undermined Support</b>	One of the important roles often played by teams and groups in organizations is to provide support for its members (psychological safety). Yet with the widespread adoption of remote work, face-to-face support may wither.
<b>Footloose and Fancy Free</b>	Geographic moves made for a variety of reasons—for work, for love, for opportunity and adventure, for affordability, for a healthier environment, for better weather—are increasing for those who can afford it, but this often means loosening the ties we maintain with friends and family who remain in place.

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## New Organizational Realities

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<b>Job Loss Blues</b>	Many of the jobs that were put on hold or vanished during the height of the pandemic are not coming back since organizations have learned that they can do without such job roles.
<b>Distributed Work, Local Control</b>	As jobs grow more flexible and variable, work schedules and job assignments are increasingly being set by local teams or groups, based on their collective responsibilities and the individual needs of their members.
<b>Never Smart Enough</b>	The fast pace of technological change has turned many of us into perpetual learners, our knowledge constantly requiring upgrades.
<b>Need for Speed</b>	Flatter, team-based, increasingly lean and nimble organizations are on the rise as a means for surviving in a highly competitive and constantly changing marketplace.

<b>Who's the Boss?</b>	Hierarchical authority declines as the competence and understanding of subordinates increases; skilled operators, technicians, frontline workers, and many others often know their jobs better than their supervisors or managers.
<b>Twenty-Four Seven</b>	It is difficult to set and enforce specific on and off hours for virtual work such that employees face job demands that seemingly never let up.
<b>Hyper-Specialization</b>	Jobs are demanding more in terms of skills and knowledge than in the past as the technologies that underlie work are growing more complex.

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## **Global Turbulence**

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<b>Global Village Competition</b>	Work that could be done remotely—virtual work—allowed for hiring practices that transcended geographic limits and greatly expanded labor markets.
<b>Tomorrow's Factories</b>	As work becomes increasingly digitalized, fewer people occupy operational and production roles, and more people are required in knowledge-based service and support roles.
<b>Forget Loyalty</b>	Rewards for dedication and long service are no longer expected or rewarded in many organizations and are increasingly seen as reducing motivation and violating performance-based incentive systems.

**Job Jitters**      Worries over a volatile, uncertain economy and possible job losses often result in placing higher expectations on ourselves at work and over-performing, often working overtime, to secure our positions.

**And finally . . .**

**Pandemic Dread**      With the World Health Organization's estimated death toll from coronavirus reaching 18 million (and counting), our day-to-day sense of everyday security, safety, and stability has drastically fallen.

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**Now Consider:**

**How have you been personally influenced by these changes?**

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**For example:**

I am out of work and have to start all over . . .

I have been working at home and want to continue to do so . . .

I miss the routine of office life . . .

My goals for what work should be have really changed . . .

I have a different relationship with my family and friends now . . .

I now realize that I have to go into a new line of work . . .

**So much has happened, I don't know where to begin to cope with all of these changes . . .**

*Try to list and be specific about particular changes and how they altered your previous assumptions, relationships, and ways of doing things. These reflections will prove helpful later as you consider what aspects or activities of your career to date you wish to keep, let go or evolve, and do differently in the future.*

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### **Following Your Reflections, What Actions Can You Take?**

Having thought now about how some of the changes that have occurred have affected you in general, we move on in Chapter 2 to provide a framework and a tool to more deeply understand how these changes have or have not affected specifically *your relationships* both at work and at home.

