

# Future of life

A new agenda for work

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# Future of life

## A new agenda for work

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“Be like water making its way through cracks. Do not be assertive, but adjust to the object, and you shall find a way around or through it. If nothing within you stays rigid, outward things will disclose themselves.”

– Bruce Lee



## Future of life—a new agenda for work

# Summarizing the actions for the new agenda

Our pretentious title “The Future of Life” reflects the ambition we advise you to have when you’re making your new agenda for work. The answers on how to organize work in the best possible way won’t be found in old school management theories. As all organizations are transforming into media companies, what organizations do and who they are doing it for should be redefined. The broadcasters are everywhere—the living room is an extension of the office and social media are the extension of the coffee machine. In this dynamic media environment all kinds of perks and trade offs in power and pleasures are made. But most of all it becomes clear it is not “the organization” that is separated by a medium, the broadcaster versus its clients and staff. Everyone is a broadcaster.

If anything is being mediated it is the zeitgeist. “The Future of Life” is about finding new meaning and a new way of working in turbulent times. The seven principles we present should be seen as encouragements rather than prescriptions. Dare to take these different paths, because your new competition are those companies that will find the optimal balance between work and the new habits and rituals of life.



### Employee Obsessed

Employee obsessed organizations require systems that aim for wellbeing and happiness. The trend is employee centric over customer centric. Organizations need to plan their IT transformation accordingly.

### Serendipity Proof

Serendipity proof organizations are able to provide digital “coincidences”. Transactions are not the purpose; deep human connections are the purpose. We know how transaction tools work. We need to find out how ‘presence’ tools can work for us.



### Creativity Online

Creativity can be done digitally. But we need to learn to speak the language. It takes time to learn to speak French. Take time to learn to speak creatively online. It can be done.

## A Platform for Meaning

Management as providers of meaning has been declared dead. Organizations as a platform for meaning require bottom-up support systems. There are many voices in the organization that express meaning and purpose, but little is supported by the systems we work with.

Contributed by Stephan Ummelen, co-founder of Value Driven. Visit [waardegedreven.nl](http://waardegedreven.nl)



## Asynchronous

Asynchronous work is the new transaction. Magic is needed to understand and accept what that means. Many systems already support asynchronous work. By accepting asynchronicity as the principle, more can be leveraged from existing systems.

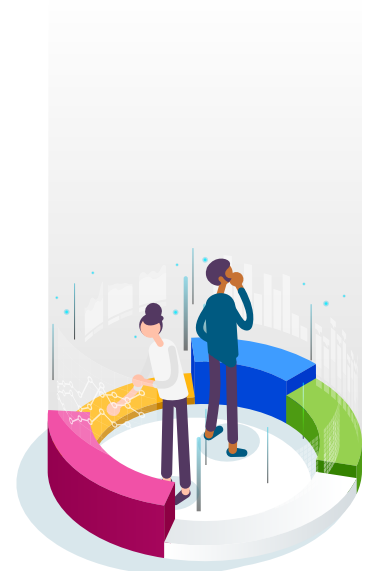
## A Media Company

Many organizations have been forced to become media companies. But as Pearl Bro showed us, it also opens up opportunities. Media is the future and it is a magical tool for building engagement and making human connections.



## Fan-based not Customer-based

The fast-growing trend of fan-based economies makes the difference between transactional and transformational organizations very explicit. Fans pull and organizations push. The CRM-systems of organizations are all push-based.



# Future of life

In 2019 Greta Thunberg, the Swedish schoolgirl who inspired a global movement to fight climate change, was named Time magazine's Person of the Year. At the end of that same year, Inc. Magazine announced that Impossible Foods, the company asking the question, "What if beef didn't come from cows?" would become "Company of the Year". And, to much surprise, The Financial Times, the stronghold of capitalism, started its "New Agenda" campaign.

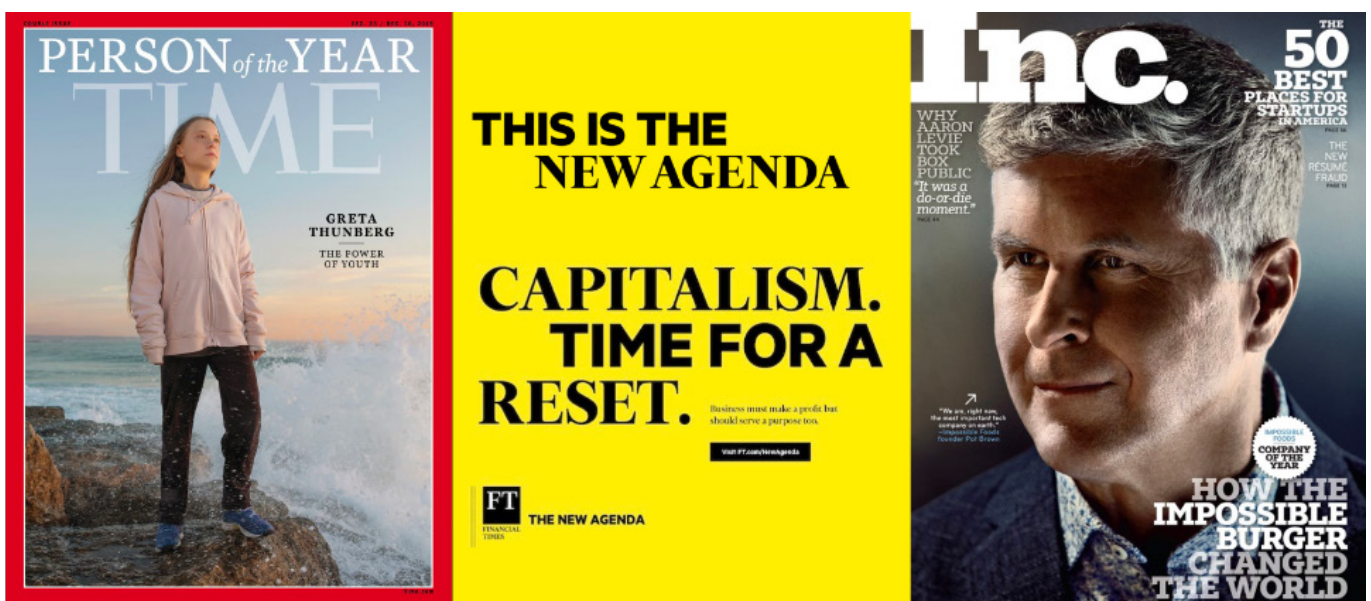
With a bright yellow banner stating "Capitalism. Time for a Reset," the campaign encouraged business leaders to challenge the past decade's economic and societal changes. "Business must make a profit but should serve a purpose too."

Then, out of nowhere, COVID-19 struck and changed the world as we knew it for good. Country after country went into lockdown and the world suffered its greatest health and humanitarian crisis since World War II. Suddenly, the future looked bleak.

## The Great Reset

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the COVID-19 crisis is affecting every facet of people's lives in every corner of the world. But tragedy need not be its only legacy. On the contrary, the pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world to create a healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous future. The WEF's vision of a "Great Reset" recognizes that what is needed for recovery goes far beyond economic reforms, or climate measures, or tackling a pandemic—it is all of these combined, and more.

All three covers call for a reset. Time chose Greta Thunberg as person of the year, Financial Times started a campaign which called for a reset of capitalism and business magazine Inc. chose Impossible Foods as company of the year.



Sources: Time Magazine (2019, December 23) [Person of the Year Time: Greta Thunberg](#), Financial Times (2020) [2020 marketing campaign of Financial Times](#), Inc. (2020) [Company of the Year: Impossible Foods](#).

It is the idea that global action needs to be underpinned by a mission to change society, to make it more inclusive and cohesive; to match environmental sustainability with social sustainability. The WEF seeks action across seven key themes: environmental sustainability; fairer economies; “tech for good”; the future of work and the need for reskilling; better business; healthy futures with fair access for all; and “beyond geopolitics”—national governments collaborating globally. The WEF says the key is reestablishing public trust, which is “being eroded, in part due to the perceived mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic”.

## **Green is the new digital; sustainable is the new profitable; purpose is the new product**

The key to designing a better future is to end our fixation with GDP and growth. Many economists nowadays would agree that GDP is incapable of connecting the economy with social and environmental outcomes that determine our wellbeing and the sustainability of our planet.

## **Future of life is the future of work**

With all the above in mind, in this whitepaper we approach the future of work from a much wider perspective than just a pre- and post-COVID comparison. COVID-19 brutally hijacked the meaning of ‘the future of work’, making it about working from home or the office. However, if we truly want a better future, we need to broaden the scope again and set a new ambitious agenda. In the following pages we describe seven principles for a New Agenda that will future-proof organizations.

As previously said, the principles are meant as encouragements to find new ways. The best path still needs to be discovered, but all seven affirm that the future of work is turning into the future of life. It’s about the future of your employees, the peers in your ecosystem, and your customers.



## The new agenda—Principle 1

# Employee obsessed

The new battle field to attract your future employees is called “Employee Experience”. You’ll want to achieve high scores in providing support for mental health, a feeling of purpose, room for self-development, commute-time, modern day perks, and the ability to work asynchronously.

### Modern days perks

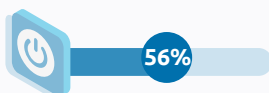
New perks are no longer just about a bigger car, a foosball table or larger office. The *future of work* becomes more entangled with *the future of life* and, with this, perks are shifting. Does everyone have to go to an ‘official’ branded office, or can they work everywhere, such as in a local hub? Are there meeting-free days? How true are the statements you make in advertisements about the achievable work-life balance? How well does your company foster and teach skills that improve cooperation with decentralized teams? And what do you offer regarding virtual or local mental health options?

Even if you have modern-day employee perks, does everyone know about them? According to research from Dropbox, when it comes to company-wide initiatives to increase the employee experience, many people simply aren’t aware of them. In its research, Dropbox often learned about initiatives like meeting-free days, official ‘focus time’, internal classes that encourage mindfulness and discourage multitasking, but less than one in five respondents were aware of any of these in their organization.

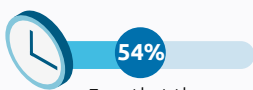
### Can you read the room?

Just as in the consumer world, employees have better information, more options, and many avenues through which to share their employee-experience. Do you know what your Employee Net Promotor Score is? Do you have a structured, ‘formal’ employee listening program with real-time continuous listening? And, perhaps more importantly, how’s your ‘informal’ employee listening program? Are you thinking in terms of Employee Journeys just as much as Customer Journeys? E.g. Research from Capgemini shows that there is a significant amount of employees with fears regarding a remote future. 56% of the questioned 5016 employees said they fear that remote work will create a pressure to remain available for work at all times. And 54% fear that remote work will shrink their network of colleagues, peers and clients.

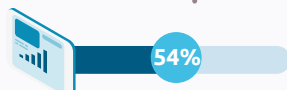
### Employee fears about remote working



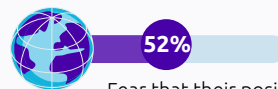
Fear that remote work will create a pressure to remain available for work all the time



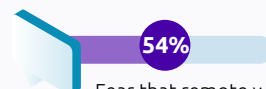
Fear that they would be penalized if their productivity drops temporarily



Fear that remote work will hamper their growth in the organization



Fear that their position will be under threat as their organization can source talent globally



Fear that remote work will shrink their network both inside and outside the organization

Source: ‘The Future of Work — From remote to hybrid’ published by Capgemini Research Institute, September-October 2020, N=5,016 employees.

## Customer Experience (CX) and Employee Experience (EX) are intertwined

Happy customers count, and so do happy employees. Shawn Achor, author of the bestseller *The Happiness Advantage*, analyzed over 200 scientific studies on happiness and concluded that happy employees “have higher levels of productivity, produce higher sales, perform better in leadership positions, receive higher performance ratings and get higher pay. They also enjoy more job security and are less likely to take sick days, to quit, or become burned out. Happy CEOs are more likely to lead teams of employees who are happy, healthy, and find their work climate conducive to high performance.”

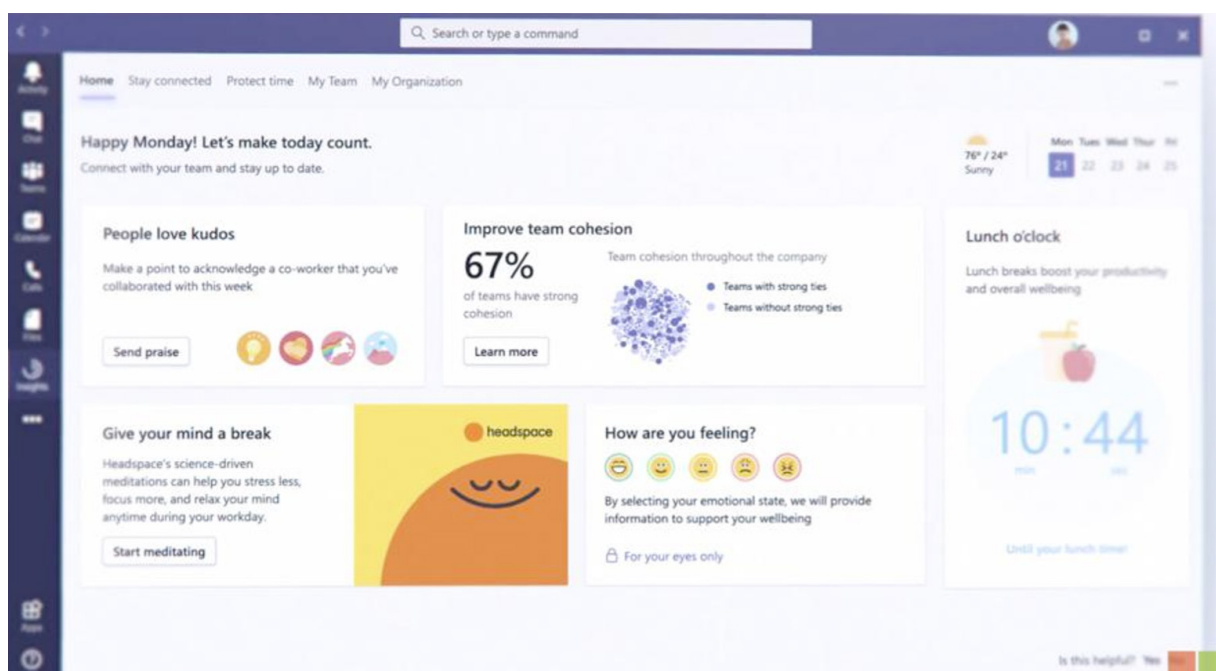
To give you some numbers: it has been found that people who are happy have 37 percent higher work productivity compared to people who are unhappy. Creativity quadruples, with happy people showing 300 percent higher creativity. Not

surprisingly, it has been reported that companies with a large number of happy people have higher earnings per share. The Employee Engagement Benchmark Study of 2016 by the Temkin Group demonstrated a strong correlation between happy employees and a focus on the customer: “Customer experience leaders have 1.5 times as many engaged employees as customer experience laggards.”

## To conclude—Updating employee perks

A good employee experience starts by listening. Knowing what needs be done and understanding the importance of closing the gap between CX and EX. It is definitely not just about perks, but even these little points of joy need to be updated with modern-day perks more in tune with how people live and work today. In the end, obsessing over your employee experience is one of the clues to navigating the converging future of work and future of life.

Microsoft aims to improve the employee experience in partnership with mindfulness platform Headspace. In Teams you will be able to follow guided meditation sessions.



Source: Microsoft (2021). New wellbeing and productivity insights coming in Microsoft Teams [Screenshot from YouTube] Microsoft 365.



## The new agenda—Principle 2

# Serendipity proof

You've probably had a similar experience: by coincidence you bump into someone, share ideas, and that surprising encounter turns out to be exactly what you needed. Accidental discoveries lie at the heart of many technological innovations. One of the most famous examples is the origin of the Post-it note, which came out of research into a strong adhesive. The seemingly useless new glue that 'didn't stick that well' later turned out to be a welcome surprise.

These happy coincidences have traditionally been part of the magic of office life—of meeting people unexpectedly while commuting and at the coffee machine. During a year or more of global lockdowns, such random encounters stopped, almost overnight. Many of the virtual get-togethers became either formally planned, highly goal-oriented, or plain entertainment. Social circles within companies have become smaller and it's hard to give room to those magic sparks that can't easily be strategically planned. With the old wells of serendipity (the office, events, meetings and the famous coffee machine or water cooler moments) drying up due to COVID regulations, several startups set out to offer solutions for their remote workers. We have selected three inspiring domains to quench your thirst for serendipity: The virtual coffee machine, virtual offices to create the feeling of presence, and ultimately building on your company's online culture.

### Donuts and Coffeepals

Old fashioned video calling is seeing some creative iterations. Software automation company Zapier has been fully remote for over a decade. The company tries to make serendipitous, face-to-face interaction happen on a routine basis by using the Slack app Donut. It pairs everyone who signs up with a random co-worker and helps schedule a video call. There are no rules to these conversations—people talk about where they live, their hobbies, or (if they want) work. These interactions don't replace the serendipity of an office, but they can go a long way. There are also Teams alternatives in the making—and take a look at coffeepals.co and ohyay.co for more inspiration.

### serendipity

/,sɛr(ə)n'dɪpɪti/ Noun

The occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.

### Virtual offices

Virtual offices are tools enabling you to create a spatial work interface that is accessible on the web, with features to connect directly with your teammates. Unlike other collaborative software services like Teams, Slack or Trello, the focus here is on synchronous communication to promote spontaneous and efficient interactions. They offer 'presence', which the standard video-platforms lack: you can walk up to someone and start talking. This spatial component also offers an extra dimension to remember things, in line with memory enhancement systems like a Memory Palace. Sometimes you can 'whisper' to someone in a quick one-on-one, or 'overhear' group conversations. The startups offering these tools promise better collaboration, productivity, the feeling of proximity with teammates, and spontaneous conversation.

Some inspiring examples are knockhq.co, ohyay.co, wonder.me, MeetingRoom.io (VR), and MyDigitalOffice.io.

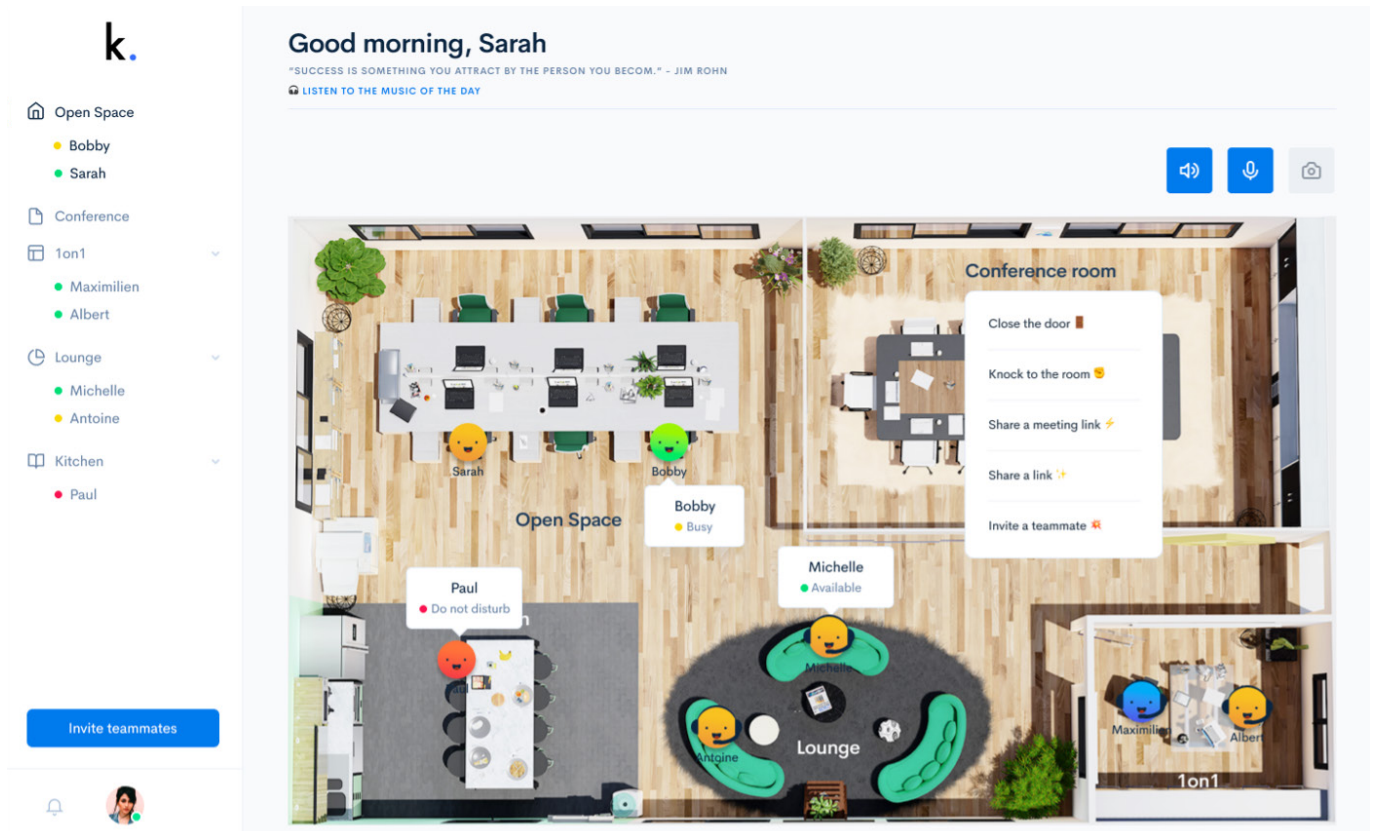
## To conclude—Hyper personalization online

Habits, rituals, conversations, greetings—it’s the little differences between organizations that make them unique. Now this culture has gone online. Do you need to support, control, promote certain cultural behaviors online? If so, which ones? There are already niche players offering advice on this, such as futureworx.io. They predict the evolution of the now redundant intranet into “modern digital hubs and communities with a hyper personalized

user experience that’s equally effective in or out of the office.” Among the interesting software vendors storming in this space are LumApps, Akumina, and Unily.

It’s all work in progress and experimental. Nonetheless, with the right tools enabling a new workplace culture, your people can enjoy surprisingly serendipitous magic moments that bring exactly what’s needed.

KnockHQ aims to give a feeling of proximity to enable serendipity.



Source: Knockhq (2021). KnockHQ collaboration tool [Image]. [Knockhq.co](https://knockhq.co).

## The new agenda—Principle 3

# Digitally creative

How can you be creative when you're no longer able to work alongside your colleagues in the same room? This was the question that leading design agency frog pondered at the beginning of the very first COVID lockdown. Thanks to the online collaborative whiteboard platform Miro, frog kept the creative juices flowing. In three weeks, its people went from skepticism to belief to innovation.

### Rituals going online

Frog is a global design and consulting firm and part of Capgemini Invent. Its mission is to improve customer experience at scale and help clients launch new products and businesses. Before the pandemic, employees were expected to be at the office to take part in the ideation process. For 50 years this was the way work was done. The offices, or “studios”, were used to “cement social ties and teach newcomers about the company culture. Rituals that foster informal learning abound, from Monday Morning Meetings (where recurring themes across projects and industries are discussed or new content is shared in a presentation) to Wellness Wednesdays (during which, for example, a yoga class might be taught) to coffee time every afternoon and happy hours for team members and occasionally for clients.”

For all kinds of employees at frog, from junior to senior, these rituals offered opportunities to mingle, share stories about projects and life, and informally ask for advice. Work wasn't just getting done by sitting behind an office desk; it happened everywhere. In the lounge, in the kitchen at the coffee machine and in the rooms where project teams brainstormed with whiteboards and Post-it notes. Seeing or overhearing these work sessions, formal and informal, was critical to learning the subtleties of good design and managing client relationships. “There's something really magical that happens when you get such different perspectives in a room. That energy is infectious,

and that was something we were concerned would be lost,” says Amanda Villarreal, Business Development Manager with frog.

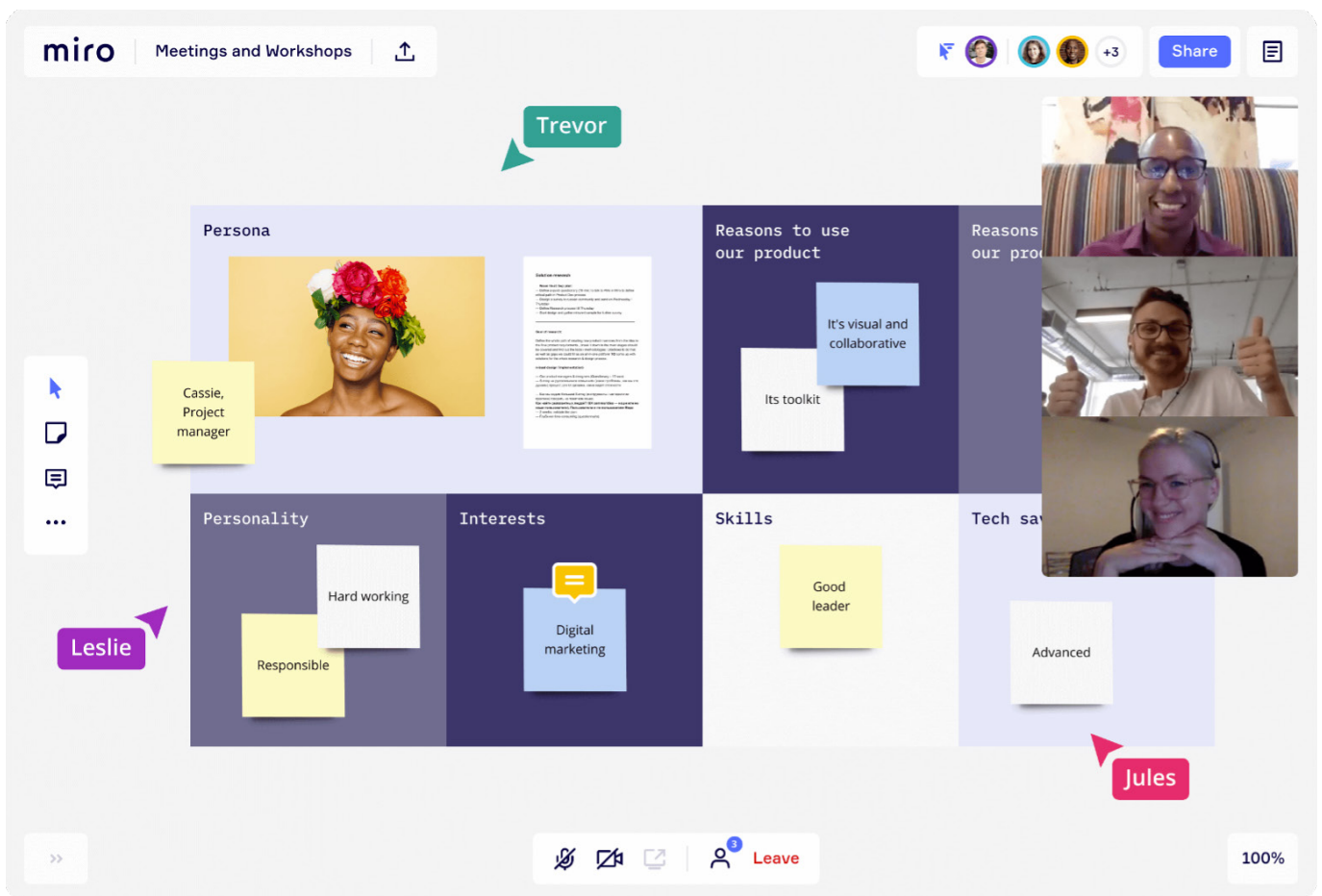
When the world went into lockdown, employees were forced to work from home, and the whole ideation process was destroyed overnight. So, frog needed to find a new way to replicate its processes digitally and make sure that none of the normal business culture was lost. To continue cultivating the company and community culture, it expanded its digital events platform to include panels, hangouts and awards. The company was also able to keep some of the rituals alive, with a few tweaks. In virtual rooms they still had little replica refrigerators where people could put family photos. So, you could go into the team room in a digital context and still get a little insight into everybody's lives. And at virtual daily coffee breaks, someone might post a question such as “what's the craziest way you've been injured?” to get people out of their daily routine.

## To conclude—Free from face-to-face constraints

Now that the roots of many old routines have been torn out of the ground, behaviors that were once understood as second nature are being questioned and changed. Initially, frog thought that working in virtual spaces would be a sort of sticking plaster: it would be a quick solution to replicate some of the things colleagues used to do in person. But within a couple of weeks people started to think differently about the digital transformation that their company was going

through. How can we push the boundaries of strategic thinking? How can we benefit from virtual experiences when we transit away from in-person experiences? To the design agency's big surprise, collaboration across the global studio network improved. Without the constraints of face-to-face work, frog could increase cross-pollination between its studios worldwide and better utilize people's talents. It now has a new tool at the core of what it does; something that will continue to be used and innovated and extended into the future. Frog went from having 16 studios to having over 500 studios—one in every frog home.

One of the online-creativity-enablers frog uses is the collaboration tool Miro



Source: Miro (2021). Demo visual [Image]. [Miro](#).

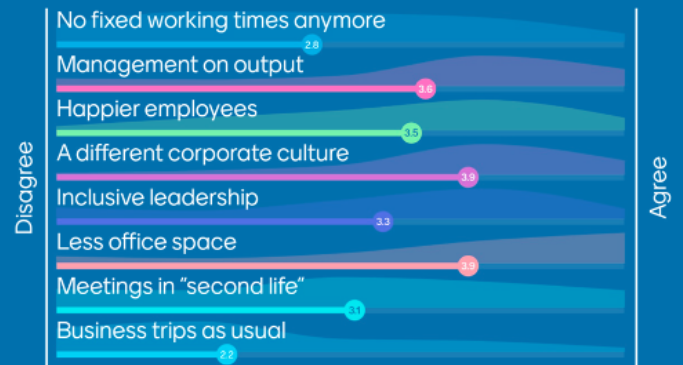


## Culture will change

We asked the executives what their organization in a post-COVID world would look like in two years' time. They could rate the eight options we presented on a five-point scale, from disagree to agree. What stood out was the belief that their organizational cultures will have changed. The same level of agreement was given to the idea of having less office space. The strongest level of disagreement was for "business trips as usual" in post-COVID times, with a score of 2.2 out of 5. Combined with the Wordcloud this seems to point in a direction with fewer business trips, but not in the slightest will this be the end of business travel.

Beliefs are not predictions. We know. What seems hot is not a guaranteed success. We know. But from beliefs, new conversations start. And conversations can turn into ideas. Ideas become strategies. If belief systems change, the identity of organizations change. The hot technologies are just a supporting act. Undoubtedly, we will see a lot of experiments with emerging and new technologies, just as we will see experimentation to find the best new corporate habits.

What will your future organization in a Post COVID world look like in two years time?



## The new agenda—Principle 4

# A platform for meaning

Before there were management consultants—indeed before there was management at all—philosophers pondered about the future of work and the meaning of life. It is easy to forget that over two thousand years of thought underpins the current discussion about the future of corporations and the future of management in those corporations. In the following, we defer to one of the foremost original thinkers when pondering the future of work, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche would be the most relevant management consultant alive if he was still among us today. Best known for his declaration ‘God is dead (...and we have killed him)’, he prophesied what future society—our society— would look like without the church being a dominant force. It was he who predicted the age of the individual and the struggle for meaning as a result of enlightenment. It is Nietzsche we should turn to now when we aim to predict the future of work.

## The age of the individual

Since the age of enlightenment, we have slowly but steadily moved to a reality in which the individual is the highest authority. We rejected being a subject to God or king—and the boss is next. Already we can see managers reinventing themselves as coaches to avoid a losing battle with the sovereignty of the individual. And we are already shifting away from control-based power structures to trust-oriented relationship management. Nietzsche wouldn't be surprised.



## Meaning platforms

Can organizations be meaning makers in a secular society? Yes. But only if they reinvent themselves as a platform on which the individual can be the owner of their self-actualization. And that is a far cry from how most organizations operate today. What is going wrong? Organizations attempt to put the search for meaning in industrial hierarchical structures. And they fail. The result is a new corporate identity and set of core values, which they communicate top-down through the line. The main message being: management knows why you get out of bed in the morning...

Preliminary research shows that such power-based meaning making is not effective in building trust or engaging employees. In many cases it achieves the opposite effect of skepticism, alienation and emotional distance. There is a serious disconnect between the search for meaning and the efforts at employee engagement.

So, what can future proof organizations learn from Nietzsche? He described our times as one of great chaos. Times in which the individual has declared himself as the highest authority on meaning, not knowing where to find it himself. We, as a society, are in the midst of this existential crisis. When

we fail to find meaning on our own, we become disengaged, apathetic and burned out. Failing in this quest means failure as an individual. And this is where organizations can step in.

“Brands are looking for purpose to cater to an audience hungry for meaning.”

## To conclude—Discovering meaning

In the foreseeable future, meaning is not given. That would undermine the sovereignty of the individual. In the age of the individual, meaning is discovered. Organizations can help their employees in their quest for meaning. Not by providing them with core values, but by engaging them on their own terms and providing them with the support, means and incentives for this quest. The organization of the future realizes that to become meaningful it has to help its employees to see themselves and their work as meaningful. The organization of the future is a platform for individuals to find meaning themselves.

**This principle is written by Stephan Ummelen, co-founder of Value Driven (waardegedreven.nl).**

If Nietzsche were alive today, he would say ‘Hierarchy is dead (and we have killed it...)’. He would look at Nike’s successful ‘Believe’ campaign and tell you how 130 years ago he had predicted the only stories that we can still believe in are the stories we tell ourselves.



Source: Kaepernick, C. (2018). [Believe in Something](#) [Advertisement]. Nike



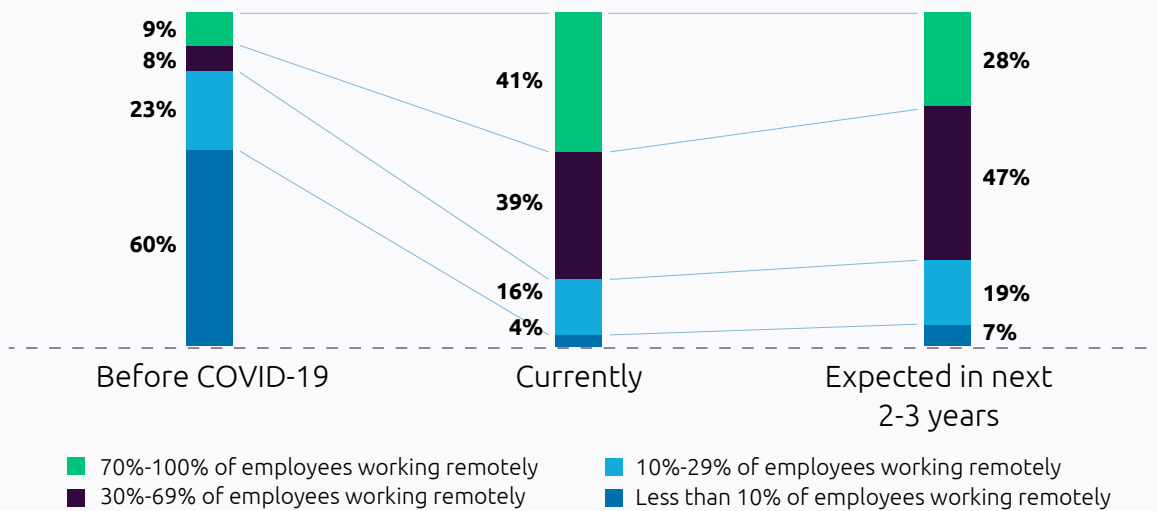
## The new agenda—Principle 5

# In-sync with asynchronosity

Whether you ask executives, managers or employees, the responses all paint the same picture: ‘remote’ is here to stay. Working from home may have taken off, but companies are still maturing in becoming truly remote. One of the clues to the future of work is ‘asynchronous’ work. It’s not about working in- or outside the office, it’s about working anywhere and at whatever time you please.

Working remotely is here to stay. Around three in four organizations expect more than 30% of their employees working remotely in the next two to three years, up from not even two in ten before COVID-19.

500 executives were asked “What proportion of your organization’s workforce works remotely?”



Source: ‘The Future of Work — From remote to hybrid’ published by Capgemini Research Institute, September-October 2020, N=500 executives.

## The five levels of going remote

Matt Mullenweg, founder of Automattic and WordPress, has some ‘working remote’ experience with 1,170 employees scattered across more than 75 countries, speaking 93 languages. The company doesn’t even have a physical office. According to Mullenweg, there are five levels of remote work, and most companies are probably at level two. In a podcast he goes deeper into each level, but the keyword to levelling up is ‘asynchronous work’. In a reflective article, this way of living is summed up as: ‘I’ll get to it when it suits me’. Working asynchronously combines working remotely with a

trusting environment and an employee experience that enjoys autonomy and flexibility. Mullenweg states that too many managers still think in terms of working “inside” and “outside” the office. The question is not whether one should work at home or in the office, but how we can make the most of the new possibilities and work anywhere in a way and time that suits the employee. This “asynchronous” work is, for example, about smarter choices when something can be a video call, an email, or an app. When should we see each other face-to-face and when is a “dry” written information transfer sufficient?

Asynchronous work is highly dependent on digitalization and the company adapting to new technologies. Analyst **Gartner predicts** that by 2025, 75 percent of conversations at work will be recorded and analyzed, enabling asynchronous work habits even further.

## Sync and async

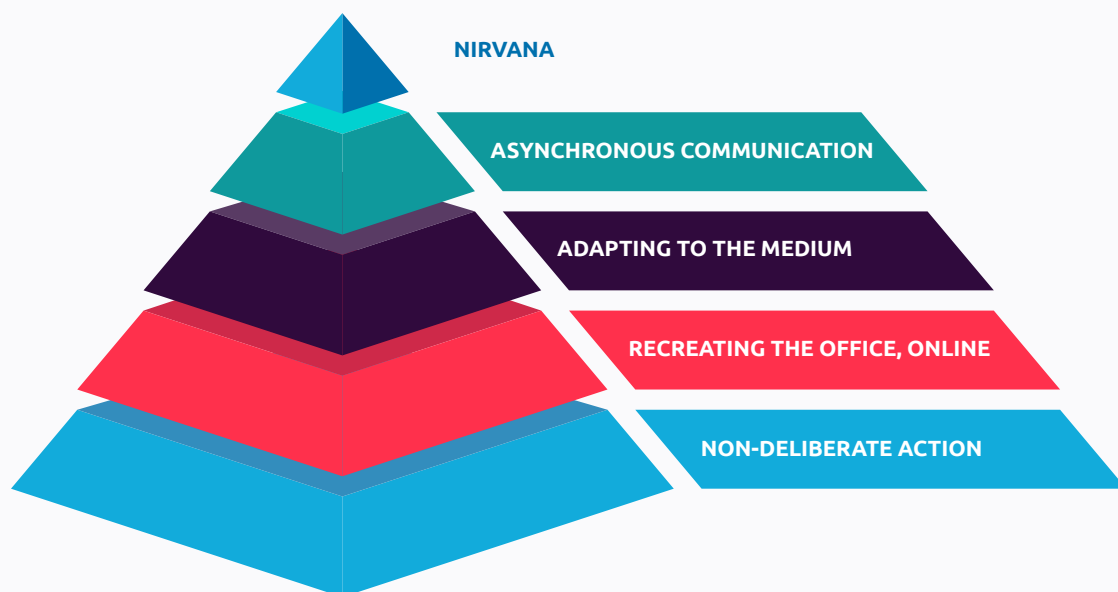
“I use sync meetings to help others when an urgent matter comes up, such as incidents or deadlines.” Learning the lingo is one step, but every organization needs to find their own sweet spot, habits and rituals in working asynchronous. Thankfully, there are many best practices out there to try.

Online DevOps tool GitLabs has an extensive report on its asynchronous way of working (called Async 3.0). Guidelines range from when to use asynchronous and synchronous communication to core behaviors and how to decline meetings in favor of async. Interestingly, when GitLab team

members were asked why they chose synchronous work-related communication over asynchronous, the highest ranked reason was: “It’s useful to build rapport and catalyze future async conversations”. So their core reasons for synchronous work-related communications is to improve their async conversations.

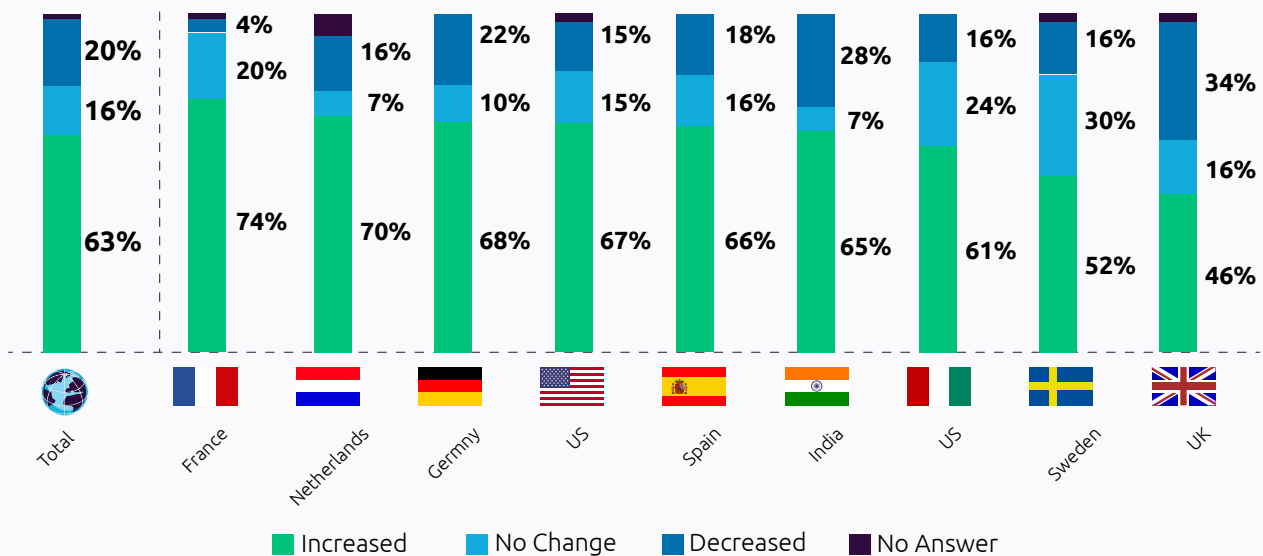
A healthy balance between control and trust is also required. An enormous number of statistical applications are already available that quantify employee value, partly based on artificial intelligence. As always with statistics, the question is what they truly show and if these systems undermine feelings of autonomy and trust. Chris Herd, founder of the remote-enabler company Firstbase, thinks management style must and will change in this respect. For example, the KPI “time spent” will be replaced by “concrete contribution to the intended organizational objectives”. In an asynchronous work place, a coaching and inspiring manager will be a better fit than one who is controlling.

### The five levels of remote working



Source: Matt Mullenweg’s five maturity levels of going remote, visualized by @SteveGlaveski

### Percentage of organizations reporting productivity change due to remote working in Q3-2020 – by country



Source: 'The Future of Work — From remote to hybrid' published by Capgemini Research Institute, September-October 2020, N=500 organizations

### To conclude—A continuous journey

Becoming asynchronous is not about remote versus office. It's about working anywhere in your own time, at your own pace. And it's about connecting with people in the right way. It doesn't say at all that going all digital is the way to go, just to be conscious of when you want to meet in person, when you

want to have video call and when you just want to enable a colleague to do his work by sending him information. Adding 'asynchronous' to your company's culture will only work if you approach it holistically. Work habits, rituals, management styles and offices are all connected in leveling up your 'going asynchronous' game.

## The new agenda—Principle 6

# A media company

How was your company's kickoff this year? Chances are it was a broadcast trying to mimic a TV show. And think about all the webinars and video appearances you have seen and given during the pandemic. Video has become massive. Companies are turning into professional broadcasters.

Where automation is associated with dehumanization, developing into a media company could be seen as a way to humanize your company over the physical distance forced upon us due to COVID. Marketing professor at Erasmus University Stefano Puntoni and other researchers advocate much more human contact. In their paper "The Power of Personal" these academics explain that working in a more personal way is a good marketing approach. They argue "that providing personal information about workers to consumers and vice versa will often yield a win-win-win effect. As more satisfied customers buy more at higher prices, more satisfied workers do a better job, and personal information can be disclosed cheaply using information technology, companies benefit from increased sales at higher prices and at very little extra cost."

Not only does it solve the problem of alienation and removal of the people in the organization due to automation, but these same technologies can provide much more customer engagement and satisfied employees.

The following offers four ways in which companies are trying to humanize their organization over our physical distance and lurking alienation.

### 1. Netflix or Cable TV?

Live is exciting: it's unique, something could go wrong, you are 'part of it'. On Demand is convenient, parts can be skipped, paused and repeated. Whichever way you choose for your message, choose quality over quantity. Because one thing is clear: Zoom-burnouts and people being fed up with boring webinars are real pains. We have seen monthly increases of up to 36% in webinars, and too many emails have been turned into lengthy video calls. Researchers from Stanford University concluded that excessive amounts of close-up eye contact was highly intense and the cognitive load was much higher in video chats. It's really time to go the next level and take your role as media company seriously: don't allow yourself to fall into the groundhog boringness. Aim to inspire, create engagement and real connections.

### 2. B2B influencers

LinkedIn saw **48 percent year-over-year growth** in conversations in 2020. With personal branding, informative postings and videos, we see Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) turning into B2B influencers. This also means everyone has suddenly become a brand ambassador. It is a form of decentralized and distributed marketing. It is no longer just up to a bunch of strategic marketers to carefully shape the brand. With publicly readable interactions, your company culture is going online. It's out there, in the open. B2B influencers bring new questions, challenges and opportunities with them. A focus on brand citizenship and cultivating your online culture seems appropriate.

### 3. Comedy accounts

Fast food chains Wendy's and Chick-fil-A are famous for their "comedy accounts" on Twitter. The marketing teams behind those "accounts" use a lot of humor when answering questions. Lovely @Wendy has fun ridiculing a competitor. When asked if she knows where the nearest alternative fast-food store is, she replies with a picture of a trash can. With 1 million people who have read the message, these brand personalities are an important new feature in the company's media outings.

### 4. The living brand

A new and upcoming medium is the virtual human; embodied conversational AI. While most of the currently implemented chatbots are quite simple, the state-of-the-art versions are impressive. Just look up some GPT-3 (Generative Pre-Trained Transformer) examples, or look at MetaHuman Creator from Unreal Engines for quite realistic looking virtual humans. The virtual face or body is meant to strengthen a relationship of trust with real people for better conversation.



**MetaHumans from Unreal Engines and other virtual humans offer new media streams for your company.**

Source: BBC Capital (2017, June 26). [China's 'Pearl Bro' making millions from live streaming \[Screenshot\]](#). BBC.

### To conclude—Professionalizing media use

COVID restrictions have led to an incredible professionalization in the use of media. But there are still many steps to take in making webinars truly engaging or turn them into Hollywood-quality shows. Which path will you take? A realistic virtual human? Netflix quality broadcasts instead of the boring webinars? Or maybe supporting subject matter experts so that they can become the next PewDiePie YouTube sensation of your industry?

## Intermezzo

# Pearl Bro: a million-dollar live stream

## A new breed

"I'm your host, Pearl Bro. Pearl Mom is opening the mussels. Today's mussel is a new breed: one pearl per mussel." In a short BBC documentary the then 25-year-old Xinda Zhan, known as Pearl Bro, livestreams his family pearl business and the process of harvesting them. He has built a massive following and encourages viewers to share in his own excitement as he harvests and opens a mussel live during the

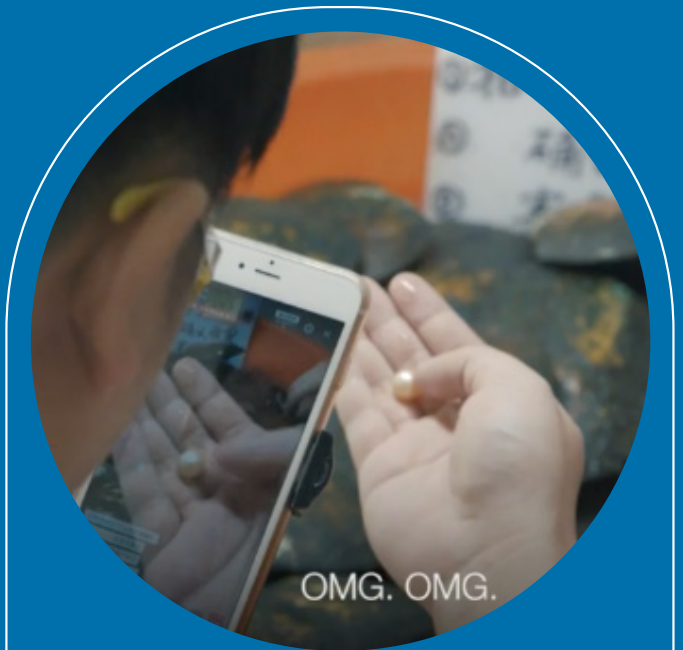
"To my surprise it became very popular."

—Xinda Zhan

stream. Viewers can buy a mussel for \$8.48 and enjoy the thrilling excitement of live discovery, waiting to find if there's a pearl inside, which

will then be sent by mail. In just six months, Pearl Bro made six times what his entire family makes in the business: 30 million RMB, or \$4.4 million.

He states "I think over 90 percent of people in China, or in the world, have never seen the harvesting of pearls. They don't know there could be dozens of pearls in one mussel. So I came up with this idea to live stream the harvesting of pearls from live mussels. To my surprise it became very popular."



Pearl Bro's success is partly due to the excitement of discovery he creates for the viewer.

## Live streaming

According to Market Research Future, the global live streaming market is projected to reach \$247 billion by 2027, growing continually at 28.1 percent compound annual growth rate. According to their analysis, the COVID-19 pandemic increased live streaming activities by almost 50 percent. The growing need within organizations for greater brand engagement and reach through live videos boosts the growth of the market further.

## The new agenda—Principle 7

# Fan-based not customer-based

In parallel to Subject Matter Experts turning into B2B influencers, customers are turning into fans. With social media and new platforms functioning as funnels for their voices, the power of the crowd or swarm can be deafening. Movie scripts, products and services have been changed due to the 'likes' of fans and there are interesting lessons to be learned from a customer relationship perspective.

### The fan knows best

In March 2021, the much-discussed Snyder Cut of the superhero movie Justice League finally came out on HBO Max. This was a long-awaited release after director Zack Snyder had to leave the original production due to family circumstances and Joss Whedon finished his work—disappointingly in many fans' minds. Those fans have been calling for Snyder's original vision to be released ever since. The #ReleaseTheSnyderCut movement has been on every social network since the movie's first release in 2017, from thousands of videos on YouTube to a major petition on Change.org. The actors from the Justice League film also supported the fans' initiative.



Source: Fowler, J. (2019, May 2). [Twitter message](#) [Screenshot].

The money raised through a GoFundMe campaign even bought commercials to convince AT&T and Warner Bros management. In the end, the board gave in to pressure from the fans and Zack Snyder was given the green light to complete his version. In an interview with The Verge, Tony Goncalves, CEO of AT&T's media division, comments on the fans: "The reference to the Snyder Cut is that it's a passionate fandom. [...] My reference to the fandoms is the fact that we're in a space where consumers are loud. Consumers guide, and we absolutely have to listen as an industry."

The call from fans for the Snyder Cut is not unique. More and more fans stir online when they disagree with the creative direction studios are taking in developing their favorite character. For example, the last season of the popular Game of Thrones series was hugely disappointing to many, many fans. More than a million people signed a petition asking for it to be rerecorded. HBO accepted the petition but said it "would not seriously consider" re-recording the series. With the hashtag #NotMyStarWars, Star Wars fans expressed their disagreement with the direction taken for character Luke Skywalker by director Rian Johnsson in the movie Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi (2017). It even led to some actors being harassed online. So, the emotions of fans can be intense, but their interference does not always turn out negatively. Film company Sony was saved from a flop after showing the very first trailer for its film Sonic the Hedgehog. Fans were appalled. The CGI character did not live up to their expectations in the slightest. For example, Sonic's nose was too pointed, his eyes were too small and

his teeth looked more like those of a human than those of a hedgehog. In a tweet, director Jeff Fowler responded that the message had gotten across loud and clear. He promised the fans that their wishes would be fulfilled. The resulting adjustments clearly did not harm the film company, with the film ultimately raising about \$ 313 million worldwide and a sequel now in the works.

## Creator economy

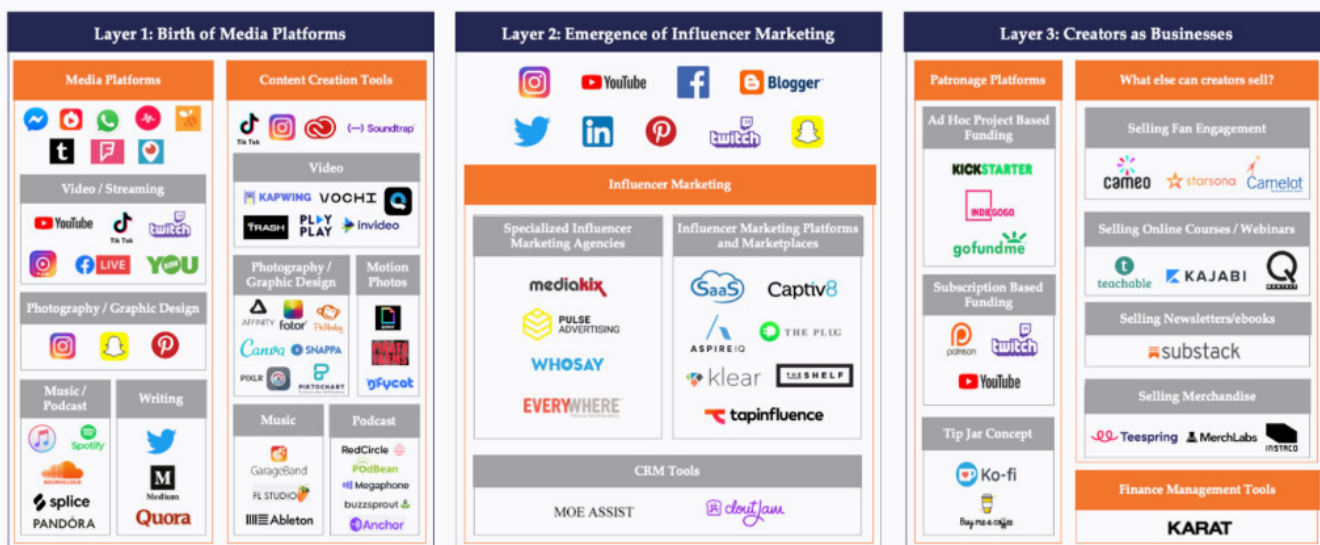
Also known as the Creator Economy or the Passion Economy, this business model is now emerging all over the world. Patreon, Cameo, Clubhouse, MasterClass and Substack are all offering tools and platforms that allow individuals to capitalize on their own creativity. It's a shift away from ads to ecommerce and payment, and you could probably add NFTs (non-fungible tokens) to this list as well. It's the "monetization of the individual". It's also called the "enterprization of the consumer". The individual is the new company now that they can reach audiences on a large scale, build a loyal fan base, and turn their passions into livelihoods, be it playing video games or producing video content. This has huge implications for entrepreneurship and what we will consider a 'job' in the future.

## To conclude—Lessons for CRM

In a way these new platforms are the new CRM (customer relationship management) systems. They provide content providers with more opportunities to build customer relationships, more support to grow their business, and better tools to differentiate themselves from the competition. In the process, they fuel a new model of internet-powered entrepreneurship that enables people to make a living in a way that emphasizes their individuality.

When we project this fanbase-trend onto the corporate world, the focus on the individual stands out. How would your organization or CRM look when every employee is seen as an individual with its own fanbase and thus personal CRM system? Is this a new distributed way of client relationship management? How could a company arrange it in such a way that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? E.g. a situation where all individual business influencers and their many fanbases empower each other and benefit company goals?

### Creator economy market map



Source: Yuan, Y. (2021). *Creator Economy Market Map*. [Image]. Signalfire.



# Culture shock therapy

We have identified a New Agenda and presented seven principles for the future of work. Of course, the only true certainty we can give you is that things will not go as expected. Therefore we suggest culture shock therapy for your organization as a pathway for the implementation of those principles.

Traditional change managers will tell you there is an “ist” and “soll” or “freeze”, “unfreeze” and “freeze again”. At the end of the tunnel there’s stability. But you won’t find it. We’re experiencing a profound culture shock and it’s coming at us in waves. Three shock waves and a honeymoon phase to be exact.

“But the normal will look like abnormal, and the abnormal like normal”

And a very long phase of transformation when things “seem” over. But this is a long-term game. We know these waves; we know what happens as soon as we ride them. Anthropologists know as well. Their

cookbook contains the wisdom of how culture shocks evolve. It’s from these shocks that we learn how behavior is changed over time by sudden events like COVID-19.

Culture shock therapy starts with the understanding that we’re living in the “in between” time. In their study of human culture, anthropologists call this time “liminality”. Our corporate cultures are in between what happened before and after COVID-19. We’re in between what was and what will be. At the end of this period of liminality there’s the “re-entry shock”. When things go back to normal again. But the normal will look like abnormal, and the abnormal like normal. When things shake up on a magnitude like COVID-19, life itself gets questioned. Finding answers to those questions is the path forward.

Dutch anthropologist Jitske Kramer has written books on corporate tribes and on what she learned by spending time immersed in Voodoo. Her latest book “Work has left the building” is heading up the charts of management books right now. The culture shock model is part of her future map, although she doesn’t claim we can actually predict the future. In brief these are the phases of the culture shock: first we have the Honeymoon phase, the early days of COVID-19. The phase in which our mental energy was high: “We can handle this”. Then came the first cultural shock: “This might take longer”. Mental energy drops. Things improve and worsen again; there’s a second shock. And finally, when we think we can return to normal, we experience the reentry shock. Adopting to ‘the new normal’ is not an easy thing.

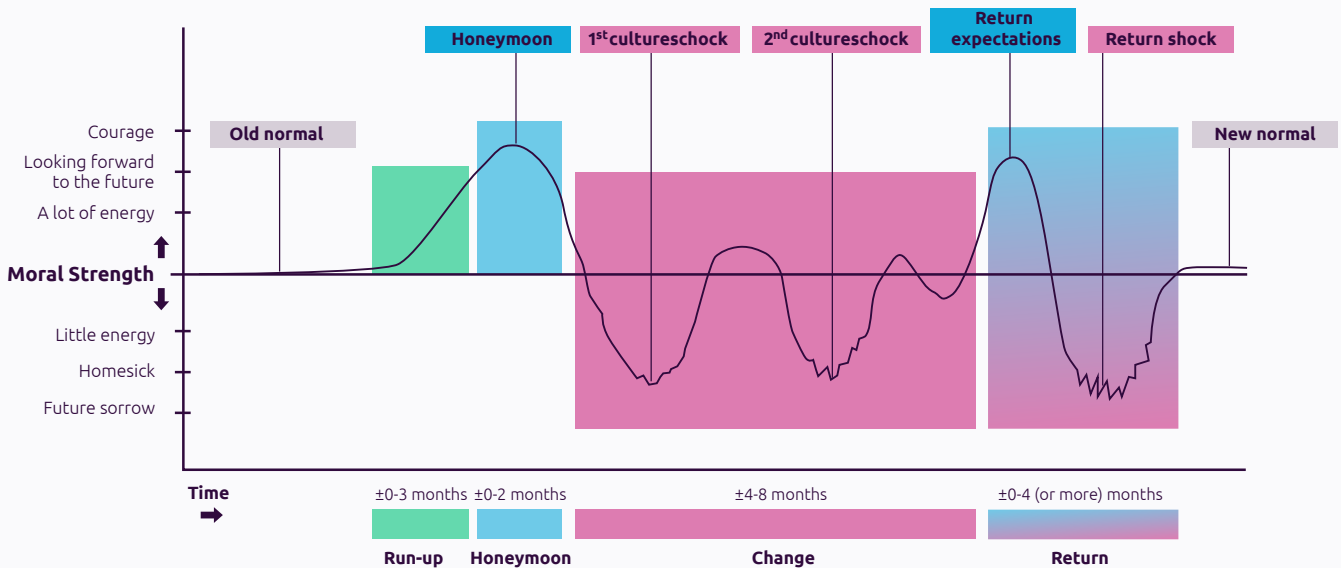


During the period of a first and second shock—roughly eight months—culture adapts. First some basics, practical stuff that keeps us going, then more profound. The re-entry shock is backward focused. It puts everything that happened in a new perspective. What have I done during the crisis? What did we do? What were the beneficial surprises during the adaptation period? What didn't work before the crisis that has now become crystal clear?

We take stock of each other on re-entry days. Those managers who always said that working from home would never work. Those who have built programs for the mental and emotional wellbeing of employees. Those who are clueless about how much employees have changed. And those who take the hopes and fears about remote working seriously. The future of work is the future of life. Their life. During this re-entry shock, Jitske advises us to make use of 'silence'. It's an old Quaker tradition. Your organization

is a metaphorical circle with chairs. When there is complete silence, one can only speak if he/she thinks it adds value to the whole group. The process should be led by transformational leaders. Anthropologists call them magicians. In times of crisis transactional leaders step aside (lessons learned from native Americans). The space that is created in this process sets the right mindset for change. Maybe this intervention out of the 'culture shock therapy' cookbook can ease the transformation that we are all in, because willingly or not, the agenda is ever changing.

### A model of the culture shock we are currently going through



Source: Kramer, J. (2020, April 20). [Corona cultuurschok: crisis of transformatie?](#) [Screenshot]. Human Dimensions.

## About VINT

VINT, the Sogeti research institute and part of SogetiLabs, provides a meaningful interpretation of the connection between business processes and new developments. In every VINT publication, a balance is struck between factual description and the intended utilization. VINT uses this approach to inspire organizations to consider and use new technology. VINT research is done under the auspices of the Commission of Recommendation, consisting of • F.M.R. van der Horst (chairman), Chief Executive Officer Retail Banking ABN AMRO Bank N.V. • K. van Baardwijk, Chief Operating Officer and member of the Executive Committee of Robeco • Jørgen Behrens, Head of Applications and Services at HERE Technologies • M. Boreel, Chief Technology Officer Sogeti Group • Paul Dirix, Chief Executive Officer AEB Amsterdam • D. Kamst, Founder and Chief Executive Officer Klooker and Smyle • M. Krom, Chief Information Officer PostNL • T. van der Linden, Group Information Officer Achmea • Prof. dr. ir. R. Maes, Professor of Information & Communication Management Academy for I & M • P. Morley, Lecturer Computer Science University of Applied Science Leiden • J.W.H. Ramaekers, Head of Sogeti Netherlands • E. Schuchmann, Chief Information Officer Amsterdam UMC • K. Smaling, Chief Technology Officer Continental Europe Aegon • J.P.E. van Waayenburg, Head of Capgemini Netherlands • M. der Weduwen, Chief Information Officer & Vice President Information Services, Holland Casino. And a special thanks to Stephan Ummelen, co-founder of Value Driven (waardegedreven.nl).

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SogetiLabs is a network of technology leaders from Sogeti worldwide. SogetiLabs covers a wide range of digital technology expertise: from embedded software, cybersecurity, AI, simulation, and cloud to business information management, mobile apps, analytics, testing, and the Internet of Things. The focus is always on leveraging technologies, systems and applications in actual business situations to maximize results. SogetiLabs also provides insight, research, and inspiration through reports, articles, presentations, and videos that can be accessed on the SogetiLabs website.

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Part of the Capgemini Group, Sogeti operates in more than 100 locations globally. Working closely with clients and partners to take full advantage of the opportunities of technology, Sogeti combines agility and speed of implementation to tailor innovative future-focused solutions in Digital Assurance and Testing, Cloud and Cybersecurity, all fueled by AI and automation. With its hands-on 'value in the making' approach and passion for technology, Sogeti helps organizations implement their digital journeys at speed.

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