

JOB REVOLUTION

*Ultra flexibility, unlimited vacations, the mobile office and voting for your boss are just some of the trends that are transforming the world of work. **Madeleine Bailey** reports*



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Increased autonomy is good for workers' health, which in turn is beneficial for the company.

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Remember the

old nine-to-five when work was strictly for the office, shop or factory and home was for catching up on TV or spending time with family and friends? Chances are that if you're under 40, the answer is no. For the past 10 to 20 years, our working and personal lives have become gradually more intertwined, thanks to modern technology.

But over the past few years in particular, the pace of change has gathered momentum, affecting not just working hours but the very nature of employment. Jobs are no longer for life – in fact, you may not have a job at all in the traditional sense, but a series of short-term paid projects.

Or you may have multiple jobs – or even careers. You may work from a conventional office, your own home, or perhaps

you share a workspace with people who are not your colleagues.

Collective leadership

Even the structures of companies are changing, with a trend towards giving staff more say in decision-making. One company that took democracy to the extreme in 2015 is Haufe, a German media and software vendor, which put up all its top executive posts – including that of CEO – to an anonymous vote by employees. CEO Mark Stoffel, who was re-elected, believes that involving employees in major decisions gives them a greater sense of responsibility and investment in the organisation. After all, if you feel a degree of ownership over something, you'll take more care of it. This increased autonomy is also good for employees' health, according to a 2007 systematic review of research carried out at the University of Glasgow.

And having a healthy, happy workforce benefits any business.

Meanwhile, Swiss technology company Archilogic works on a principle of direct democracy, which means that all decisions must be made by consensus. While this could cause delays if taken to the extreme, the rise of collective leadership is the shape of things to come, according to a 2014 report by the US Center for Creative Leadership. Its author Nick Petrie puts it down to the fact that the increasingly complex challenges created by a global business environment need a 'two heads are better than one' approach.

Increased flexibility

Hand in hand with more autonomy comes greater control over working hours and holidays. After salary, flexible working hours and scope for remote

working were identified as the next most important factors for attracting staff in 2011 research by Knoll, a large US office design company.

Besides the impact of globalisation, which means more of us are getting up early or staying late for international calls, the demand for flexibility is surely a reaction to increasing personal commitments. A greater number of working mothers and longer lifespans mean that many of us are juggling care of children and the elderly with work. In fact, flexibility is increasingly a legal requirement. Since 2014, most EU employees have had the right to request flexible working hours, though this may be refused if shown to be impractical.

Incredibly, a small number of cutting edge companies such as Netflix are going one better and offering employees unlimited vacation. Yes, you read

Opening doors for deaf workers

While the situation is still far from perfect, more work opportunities have opened up for people with hearing loss, thanks to legislation and technology.

In most developed countries, such as the USA, Australia and the EU, there is legislation protecting people with disabilities from discrimination at work. Laws differ in each country but broadly speaking, it means that employers must make reasonable adjustments to give people with a disability the same training and work opportunities as other employees. In countries where legislation is in place, workers usually have the right to an assessment to establish equipment needs, such as the provision of loop systems to reduce background noise, or the subtitling of presentations.

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that right! The result? Since introducing the policy in 2004, Netflix's market value went from US\$1.66 billion to an impressive US\$51 billion at the beginning of 2016. Far from encouraging staff to slack, greater freedom has brought a more responsible culture. In fact, some companies that have introduced this policy, such as Evernote, have had to incentivise employees to take a holiday by paying towards it!

Hollywood model

Flexibility is even extending beyond working hours and into the very nature of employment. An increasing number of companies are taking on skilled freelance workers for specific short-term projects. It's called the Hollywood model because it's based on how the film industry works: hiring actors, directors, costume designers and make-up artists for specific projects, while certain tasks such as marketing and distribution are done by permanent employees.

This system saves companies money in the long term and means they can find the best people for each project. And while freelance workers don't get job security, paid holidays or other benefits, there are definite advantages, according to Austrian entrepreneur Romy Sigl. Four years ago, she founded Coworking

Salzburg – shared office space that can be hired by start-up founders, freelancers and remote workers. She believes that the freelance economy is set to grow.

"While large companies continue to employ permanent staff to make long-term strategic decisions, they increasingly use subcontractors and freelancers to work on projects involving research and design, for example. The company saves money on permanent employees and the freelancers are happy because they are well paid and have the freedom to move on to a different project or take a break afterwards. This is now easier than ever as the internet and social media provide platforms matching freelancers with companies," she says.

The figures bear this out. An estimated 40 per cent of workers in the USA will be self-employed by 2020, according to a report by software producer Intuit. It's not just creative industries either – the model has spread to construction, IT, human resources, catering and even pharmaceutical drug research. Highly skilled people who are in demand can negotiate better rates.

But for the opposite reason, temporary work probably isn't the best option for low-skilled workers, who end up with

poor rates and none of the advantages of permanent employment.

Mobile working

So if you're not bound to a physical space, what's to stop you working from anywhere in the world? Very little, it seems, as long as you have a laptop and a few accessories. Skype means you can have face-to-face meetings or conversations across continents free or cheaply, while cloud services let you store and access data securely, and a dongle will give you mobile broadband in case the local wifi isn't great. Add in a smartphone and you're set to go, as Marianne Cantwell, author of 'Be a Free Range Human' (Kogan Page, 2013) discovered eight years ago.

Tired of being a wage slave, she packed in her job as a London-based strategic marketing consultant, took a career-coaching qualification, set up some freelance work then took off round the world. She blogged about it, the blog turned into a book and she began running online courses, helping others to escape the 'career cage'. Cantwell now spends months in destinations as diverse as Bali, Thailand, California and Italy, staying in short-term rented apartments and earning more than she did in the job she quit.



Many industries are now following the Hollywood model, where highly skilled professionals such as actors, directors and make-up artists are hired for short-term projects while permanent staff take care of tasks such as marketing and distribution.

She sums up the situation neatly in her book: "I'm not sure where the line between 'work' and 'play' ends any more because I love what I do for a living."

Too flexible?

But not everyone is a fan of remote working, also known as telecommuting. Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo, banned the practice in 2013, and several months later Meg Whitman, her opposite number at Hewlett Packard, took steps to limit it. Mayer's reason was that in-person communication is key to creativity. "Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people, and impromptu team meetings. Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home," was her explanation.

It's an interesting point. While remote working is increasingly popular and has been shown to be productive, it may not be suitable for all jobs, all people or all of the time. So maybe a mixture of the two is an ideal solution?

Two ears are better than one

Many adults who could benefit from cochlear implants in both ears only have one. However, there are clear benefits to having two, especially in the workplace. They include:

- **Better speech recognition in noisy environments**
Research shows that while one implant usually results in good speech recognition in quiet environments, two improve speech recognition when there's background noise, common in almost all working environments, from offices to factories.
- **Better sound direction**
It's also an important safety feature as good hearing in both ears improves sense of noise direction. Knowing which direction a noise is coming from could be crucial when it comes to avoiding accidents if you work on a construction site or in a warehouse, for instance.

'Benefits of bilateral cochlear implantation: a review', 2007, Current Opinion in Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery

Remote fitting

Increasingly, medical tests and procedures such as cochlear implant fittings can be performed remotely, saving users time and travel costs.*

At a fitting session, the volume and tone settings of the audio processor, which is worn on the outside of the head, are programmed to suit the user's needs. A newly implanted user will need three to four fittings in the first year, and from then on one fitting per year.

Gebhard Mader-Ofer, Head of MED-EL's Business Unit for Service and Care, explains: "This process is important because it ensures that the user derives maximum benefit from the hearing implant system. After a few years, some users are reluctant to return for fittings, especially if they live far from a care centre. This is when a remote fitting can be useful."

The user goes to a nearby clinic or partner shop. A clinical engineer, who is based in a care centre many miles away, is able to control the fitting software with the help of the Skype for Business web service. This allows the engineer to adjust the settings in the user's audio processor remotely.

"Studies show that remote fittings are as successful as conventional fittings if procedures are followed correctly," says Mader-Ofer, who believes that this system is likely to become more common in the future. "It saves users time and travel costs and the added convenience means they are less likely to miss fittings. The same system could also be used to provide remote rehabilitation sessions to users in their own homes, as long as they have access to a computer and Skype for Business."

* Remote fitting is currently approved in the EU but has not yet been granted approval in all countries.



At Coworking Salzburg, there are 'food for feedback' sessions – informal support groups, where one person rustles up lunch for the other co-workers in return for specific business advice.

Co-working

It was the importance of in-person communication that inspired Romy Sigl to set up a co-working space.

"I was working at a product design agency but became disillusioned with the way things were done there. I wanted to work independently, but I didn't want to be totally alone. When I visited some co-working spaces in Berlin and Vienna, I was really inspired by the energy, so I reached out to like-minded people on social media and set up Coworking Salzburg."

Co-workers can hire space for anything from one-off events to long-term, full-time use. They bring their own laptops and pay a fee in return for space, marketing and PR, use of equipment such as printers and photocopiers, kitchen facilities, and access to events and workshops.

"We have regular 'food for feedback' sessions. Basically, it's an informal support group where one person cooks and in return asks for specific advice from the other co-workers on various aspects of their business, for instance SEO or marketing," explains Sigl. She also runs Coworking Camps – breaks to destinations such as the Red Sea, during which start-up founders and freelancers can take part in workshops, exchanging ideas, discussing challenges and supporting each other.

Sigl says that co-working provides independent professionals with the support they need to do the work they enjoy in the way that they like. This, she believes is good for the individual and the quality of work. She explains: "Our philosophy is 'do what you love'. We believe that when people do what they love and love what they do, the best results are possible without burnout." And who can argue with that? ■