

The future of work

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As part of SAICA's *Leadership in a Time of Crisis* webinar series, Willem van der Post, CA(SA) and CEO of xTech.Capital shared some thoughts on what the workplace of the future will look like, especially in a post-coronavirus world.



Willem van der Post

The new normal. It's all everyone's talking about. But what exactly does it mean? While van der Post points out he is of course not a fortune teller – “if I was I would give you more useful information, like the winning Lotto numbers” – he has estimated, given the current trend cycle we are seeing, certain changes we can anticipate in the workspace, both on a personal and an organisational level.

Social gestures

We used to shake hands, hug and kiss each other countless times a day when we said hello, goodbye and reached an accord. The anxiety around physical contact has changed this. If you look back in history, you'll see that hand shaking is a millenia-old custom going back all the way to the Ancient Greeks. Men would hold their weapon in their dominant hand, so extending that hand, free of weapons, was a sign of peace and trust. We are subconsciously losing that, so while it may seem like an insignificant change, it will run deep in our psyche.

Authenticity

The persona of corporate veneer is likely to disappear. Through virtual meetings, we are getting real insight into what people's homes and family lives look like. It's normal now to see dogs barking and kids run into the room. This is going to shave off a little bit of that perfect persona we broadcast to the world. This will allow us to regain the trust that we may have lost by working remotely. In a digital world we don't shake hands, we can't monitor each other's moods and body language carefully and so on, so we need a way to regain that trust, and sharing our authentic selves is a way to do so.

Remote working

Lockdown has once and for all shown us how ludicrous the notion is of sitting in traffic. We only have one short life, and it is almost criminal to waste so much of it on the road. It seems unlikely that employees will be going back to sitting in daily traffic if they don't need to, so the expectation of flexible work engagements will become more pronounced, with many employees only going into the office once or twice a week.

Wellness

People are realising the importance of holistic wellness. It has been wonderful to sleep in, meditate, exercise and spend time with family in the mornings, rather than rush off, while grabbing a takeaway coffee and a mass-produced croissant. There will definitely be a shift towards spiritual and physical wellbeing, as opposed to rushing to get to the capital structure we are a part of.

Curriculum of the future

The world has caught on to digital learning, and this is not only because of the coronavirus, but also by virtue of the digital revolution. That said, it's not only about how we learn. What we learn is also subject to a radical shift. There are 16 exponential technologies that are fundamentally changing business models and the nature of business:

- Artificial intelligence
- Machine learning
- Quantum computing
- 3D printing
- Blockchain
- Nanotechnology
- Robotics
- Crowdsourcing
- Crowdfunding
- Drones
- Digital Biology
- Virtual Reality
- Sustainable energy
- Internet of things
- Cryptocurrency
- Space Technologies

Most organisations can't even name all 16. If we can't name them, how are we preparing for the impact they will have on us, and how can we expect our teams to be prepared? If we want to be able to deal with disruption, these technologies need to be a part of our curriculum.

Digitisation

Organisations that haven't started their digital transformation journey are going to be pressured into doing so now. Companies that are already on the journey will extend the scope of their digital presence and invest in speeding up the process. The extended lockdown and economic downturn will make this a necessity.

New measurables

Measurables have always been important, but now they will become even more so. We are entering an era where we will get rid of KPIs, as politics, conflict aversion and so on make these kinds of goal-setting measures subjective. OKRs, or Objective and Key Results, are the way of the future. They are measured in a binary fashion – either a result was or wasn't

achieved, 1 or 0 – that befits a technology company, which is why they are so popular in Silicon Valley. In order to implement these, you need a thorough, rational and thought-through process of deciding what needs to be measured, and what success and failure look like in your organisation.

Disaggregated workforce

If more people are working remotely, many factors of office life will need to be re-examined. Will employers have to cover the costs of their staff's data? Do we need to invest more heavily in cybersecurity? What about real estate? Do we allow employees to work remotely and repurpose or give up some of our office space? How do we deal with sick leave? Is it even relevant anymore if people are working from home? Last, but definitely not least, if employees are only coming into the office once or twice a week, how do we build trust and corporate culture?

Finding meaning

In this era of working from home, people are rediscovering the importance of wellness, and organisations are being forced to think about what they stand for. This is going to give birth to an era of authenticity, and of people re-examining how they spend their time and apply their talents. Currently, many people are trading in their dreams for a salary. Hopefully post the lockdown and reboot, people will find the courage to pursue their lifelong purpose, within an economically sustainable model. We have been given a very valuable window, a period to re-evaluate where we are in the world and what we are doing for society, for ourselves and for our family. Hopefully many people can use it to find their true purpose.

To help address the challenges faced by many, SAICA hosted a complimentary virtual leadership series called Leadership in a time of crisis. This series focused on various elements affecting individuals, businesses and the profession as a whole during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sessions in this series have been recorded and can be viewed on [SAICA's events page](#).

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