

## BOOK REVIEW

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# **Jacob Morgan (2014) *The Future of Work, Build Better Leaders and Create a Competitive Organization*, John Wiley & Sons, 234 p.**

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In recent years there has been an unprecedented boom in the development of technology which has changed virtually every aspect of our lives, especially regarding human interaction and collaboration.

In the organizational psychology field Jacob Morgan, principal and co-founder of Chess Media Group (consulting firm on organizational and managerial strategy) has dedicated himself to exploring and explaining how work might and should develop in the future.

Throughout his latest book “The Future of Work, Build Better Leaders and Create a Competitive Organization”, Jacob Morgan points out that the accelerated technological development should be noticeable in the world of work by now. As a main premise of this book, the author argues not only that there is an obvious discrepancy between the way we could work and the way we actually do work but also that the organizational world should and will adapt to the various technological and social changes in the future.

Published by John Wiley and Sons Inc. (New Jersey 2014), “The Future of Work” could be viewed as an incentive towards both employers and employees not only to make a change in their day to day routine, but also to creatively use the evolution of technology to their advantage, comfort and productivity.

Jacob Morgan introduces his ideas by making use of a Garry Kasparov quote: “A brilliant strategy is, certainly, a matter of intelligence, but intelligence without audaciousness is not enough”, which he translates into business terms: the world of work is observably changing and organizations should prove their audaciousness by refusing to remain stagnant. By comparing business behaviour to chess playing, he argues that a great chess player is constantly thriving to surprise his opponent through the boldness of his moves, an idea which also shaped his company (Chess Media Group).

In the first chapter of this book, the author examines the key trends in today’s organizational environment, such as collaborative behaviours, mobility, globalization and the millennial workforce, and also emphasizes the way these could shape our work life in the future. As pointed out in Morgan’s earlier work “The Collaborative Organization” (2012) it is undoubtedly more productive for organizations to make use of the new technology and become collaborative, flexible, and mobile in regard to where and when employees work. By doing so, they can accommodate the millennial workforce and expand towards a worldwide market. It is further pleaded that in the future the

employee rather than the organization will contribute to adapting leadership and organizational paradigms and structure.

The second chapter, ingeniously entitled “The Cog”, focuses on the future employees and their prospective chances of actually enjoying where, when, how and on what they work. Consequently, methods of achieving employee engagement and its impact on productivity are described in regard to employee demographics: Traditionalists, Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z.

Chapter three further depicts the principles of future employees, such as: flexible work environment, customized work, information, collaboration and leadership, and pleads towards adapting organizational environment by presenting creative ways of introducing these principles into the workplace. Moreover, it is argued that such a change in business context would prove less expensive in regard to time and resources than insisting on an outdated work pattern. Subsequently, employers would be able to achieve more productivity, higher profit and grater development, while maintaining a superior employee engagement and well-being.

In the fourth chapter we learn about the foreseeable changes in the freelancer economy. Firstly, the author defines the freelancer economy as an environment which not only allows people to leverage their skills to find work at any company anytime, but also creates an economy where organizations can seek council from these people and get work done. Secondly, it is argued that a freelancer economy is very popular due to the attractive wages, flexibility and freedom it involves. Lastly, the future of freelancing is projected and, while a considerable amount of people are expected to work as freelancers in the future, the complete desertion of the full time employee concept is hard to imagine. The author also argues that companies will adapt to the change and allow their employees to choose projects they are interested in and leverage their expertise on those, just like freelancers.

- Chapter five introduces today’s managers as opposed to past

managers, through two examples of executives who adapted to the ongoing change in the world of work by: viewing their employees as their team rather than subordinates and

- Aiming towards new ways to motivate their team, in contrast with simply delegating and controlling workers.

While in the past employees were considered generally indifferent towards their work and seeking to reduce their work hours as much as possible, today we notice ambitious, self-driven people who are passionate about their work. Consequently, management should seek to cultivate employee engagement and motivation through new and creative ways.

Additionally, this chapter describes some outdated practices still used in organizations today and the main reasons why they became obsolete:

- Organizational Charts (a hierarchy is contrary to the notion of transparency, adaptability or flexibility);
- Annual Reviews (technology makes it easier to provide feedback whenever it is needed or requested);
- Focus on Inputs (the focus is changing towards the quality of the result, rather than the conditions through which it was obtained);
- Managerial access to information and decision making (collaboration and collective intelligence may prove wiser and more productive);
- Few managers controlling too much;
- No room for experimentation;
- Reliance on the past.

As expected, by now, the subsequent chapter (chapter six) depicts the future manager by relating to 10 prospective principles:

1. Leadership (engaging, inspiring people, building trust and challenging assumptions);
2. Following from the front (staying in touch with their team, collaborating

- with them proactively, creating solutions);
3. Understanding technology and how employees work;
  4. Lead by example;
  5. Embrace vulnerability;
  6. Belief in sharing and collaborative intelligence;
  7. Fire starter;
  8. Real-time recognition, feedback and engagement;
  9. Personal boundaries;
  10. Adapt to the future employee.

In Chapter 7, the author offers an example of how some modern day organizations are rethinking the way that the management adapts to the trends that shape the world of work. Relying on specific examples of companies, Morgan addresses a popular and interesting approach that brings great success in some organizational contexts, namely the “managerless company”.

Certain aspects of how exactly does a company without managers organize and efficiently adapt to the business world, such as, how are employees hired or how do employees know what they’re tasks are and what project they should work on are discussed by describing the way successful companies like Valve or Sun Hydraulics approach the matter.

The author also underlines the fact that the concept of a managerless organization is not expected to be the best choice for every company that tries to adapt their approach on how it’s employees work but it rather serves as an example of how the matter of creating a workplace that enhances engagement, promotes transparency, establishes a suitable context for successful communication and offers the foundation for many other substantial improvements can be tackled in an innovative way.

Chapter 8 addresses “The Organization of Today” and emphasizes certain challenges that forces companies to rethink certain principles on which they have relied for more than a century.

In this chapter, the author states that organizations were created for the primary purpose of making money with the

employees reduced to being the “fuel that keeps the machine running” and he explicitly paints the factors that have changed since the implementation of many of the principles that organizations still rely on.

First of all, jobs are not so secure as they are supposed to be. Therefore, the century-old belief that a larger company offers a far greater stability and increased possibility to retire after a life-time of work in a single company is debunked by the author who also cites a study that projects that 75 % of S&P 500 companies will be replaced in the ranking.

Secondly, employees have shifted their loyalty from the companies themselves to managers, the teams they are working with and the projects that they are keen to work on. By citing many surveys, Morgan also concludes that the future employee prioritizes a flexible work environment, the existence of career path opportunities, and the possibility to do meaningful work over the amount of money they earn.

Furthermore, due to the technology costs that are constantly decreasing and to the multitude of means by which money can be raised, the future employee will (according to the author) become much more tempted to adapt to the future of work either by becoming a freelancer or by creating his own start-up.

In conclusion, the environmental and mentality shifts that the author underlines support his view on the constantly growing need of the organizations to adapt and build their business strategy with the future of work and the future employee in mind.

Chapter 9 illustrates fourteen principles of the future organization that, in the author’s vision, will become essential to any company that wishes to prosper.

The 14 principles are:

1. Companies should rely more on globally distributed teams as this enables them to tap into a global talent pool, it allows employees to work from everywhere, and it better prepares the organization for the freelancer economy;
2. Companies should encourage their employees to become intrapreneurs, the term referring to the business

- ideas that the employees can contribute with (examples such as Google's GMail & AdSense are given in order to showcase how an employee can revolutionize the organization he/she works for);
3. Companies should strive to create a connected workforce because it can speed up the decision making process, reduce content duplication, enhance innovation, and bring many other benefits to the company;
  4. Companies should operate like small companies because the latter are more adaptable, agile, and more productive and efficient;
  5. Companies should focus on the fact that future employees will want to work for companies and will not be driven just by need (here the idea that the organization needs employees more than the employees need the organization is emphasized);
  6. Companies need to adapt faster to changes;
  7. Companies need to seek innovation from everywhere including their employees, suppliers, customers, public, and even competitors;
  8. Companies run in the cloud for a faster deployment of the latest technology solutions while also reducing costs of implementation and improving accessibility;
  9. Companies should hire more women in senior management roles because they can drastically contribute to the overall effectiveness and strategy of the modern organizations;
  10. Companies need to flatten their hierarchies and decentralise their decision making;
  11. Companies need to tell stories that captivate the public;
  12. Companies need to democratize learning and teaching;
  13. Companies need to focus on prosperity rather than profit, and that implies things like: employee happiness, corporate social responsibility etc.;

14. Companies need to adapt to the future employee and the future manager.

In adopting and implementing these strategies, the author advises that the organizations should not be uncertain, fearful, distracted by a lack of urgency, or stunned by the prospect of an unclear impact, as change is greatly needed and ignoring important factors that shape the world of work ultimately leads to companies being out of business.

Chapter 10 is focused on describing the important role of technology, depicting it as the central nervous system of any future organization. Here, 12 habits of highly collaborative organizations are proposed in which the author advises that devising the strategy before implementing the technology, listening to the voice of the employee, and finding a way of integrating collaboration platforms (among other practices) are crucial to every company that wants to thrive.

Chapter 11 is dedicated to illustrating a six-step process for adapting to the future of work. This process consists of recommendations regarding aspects such as the creation of a team whose primary role would be to study how the world of work is changing and how those changes can impact the organization or the experimentation with various changes regarding several aspects of the work environment and mentality.

In the final chapter, the importance of adapting to the factors that shape today's work environment is reiterated and the reader is presented with the fact that in the next few years we will witness a whole new range of opportunities and changes that will impact the way we work in ways never seen before.

In conclusion, the perspective that Jacob Morgan is depicting in his book "The Future of Work" is an enthusiastic projection of how the organizations should rethink the way we work and it provides the reader with many interesting case studies and examples from companies that have successfully implemented innovative strategies that enabled them to prosper and become both

desirable workplaces and more productive and efficient.

From the empowerment that the new technology is giving us, to the diversity of all these different generations bound to working together and the flexibility in terms of work schedule that we are steadily, but continuously, adopting, the world of work has the potential to become, in a few years, a mesmerizing environment in which

organizations will thrive and people will prosper.

## References

- Morgan, J. (2012). *The Collaborative Organization: A Strategic Guide to Solving Your Internal Business Challenges Using Emerging Social and Collaborative Tools*. McGraw-Hill Education, U.S.A.