

Back2Better

An Exclusive Collection of Resources for
Navigating the Future of Organizations, Work
and HR Post-COVID

The New Long Life

Smart new technologies. Longer, healthier lives. Human progress has risen to great heights, but at the same time it has prompted anxiety about where we're heading. Additionally, the insecurity in the age of pandemics and social unrest are undermining our conviction in a stable world and stable organizations. Are our jobs under threat? If we live to 100, will we ever really stop working? How will this change the way we interact, manage and learn from others?

Lynda Gratton, Professor at London Business School, THINKERS50 member and co-author of *The New Long Life*, says that governments, organizations and social structures are not prepared for people to work into their 70's and live to 100. To successfully embrace longer lives, stereotypes about how we order our lives must change. According to Gratton, the three-stage life of education, work and retirement will become a multi-stage life fluidly moving through work, learning, charity, and time off.



Lynda Gratton
London Business School

Changing the Way We Work

The Future of Work must take a multi-stage life into consideration. Additionally, technological advances and human ingenuity are also changing the way we work. With some of our tasks being automated, the time we have to focus on creativity will increase. What does it mean when we live to 100 and so much of our work will be taken over by machines? Gratton suggests that we look at these changes with the following framework:

- **Narrate:** People will think more about their life path and how they describe it. At any point in time, there may be multiple paths to choose from. These paths will be influenced by the external world and by how you narrate your future.
- **Explore:** People must upskill and reskill throughout this longer life. Ways of learning will change. Human adaptability will increase.
- **Relate:** Relationship between work and family will become more intertwined as people work longer.



How we think about ourselves (demography) and how we think about our skills (technology) will be the two major drivers to work.

Office of the Future

Gratton says that the shift to all-virtual working environments during the global COVID-19 pandemic is an example of how adaptable we must be. However, it has also shown weaknesses in this type of environment. During the pandemic, our networks have shrunk as we spend time with the same people—both in our homes and in our virtual workgroups. Gone are the serendipitous conversations and chance meetings that can inspire ingenuity—we are talking to people who think the same things we do. This stunts connection, learning and network formation.

Back2Better: Organizations must rethink how office space is used, not only for social distancing reasons. Gratton says that offices become places of sociability and serendipity and re-envisioned as a catalyst for innovation, learning, and connection. Tasks not requiring interaction can be done at home and those requiring innovation and conversation are better in the office than online.

Measuring Productivity

The pandemic has blurred the lines between work and home. Families are everywhere. CEOs show up for meetings in t-shirts with their children making cameo appearances. While this may be heart-warming, the lockdown of schools, childcare and eldercare has left employees splitting time and mental energies in multiple directions. Travel to the office used to allow employees time to transition into work mode. Gratton says that working from home where other family members are present causes employees to make 20 micro-transitions a day between work and family.

Back2Better: Gratton says that the merging of work life and family life will continue even after the pandemic. With the blending of family and work in a virtual environment, organizations must shift the way they measure and set expectations. Additionally, individuals, organizations, and societies must shift from bio age as a marker for potential productivity. It is no longer how old you are but how many years you have to give to an organization.

Conclusion

Living a longer, smarter, happier life means we must change the way we envision our lives. We can no longer think of it along the traditional progression of school, work, and retirement. According to Gratton, AI will not help us imagine the future. We humans have to imagine it and understand how work and live become more intertwined. Lifelong learning will enable us not only to adapt to the technologies of a changing world, but to continue to be inspired by that world.

“ One thing is clear: advances in technology have not been matched by the necessary innovation to our social structures. In our era of unprecedented change, we haven't yet discovered new ways of living and working.