

# **“Long Covid” Effect on Managing Projects and PMOs** <sup>1, 2</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

The impact of COVID-19 has been enormous for project managers. The pandemic affected many employees’ long-term health, as well as changing how most businesses needed to operate, and it continues to impact how they will operate in the future. Those operational impacts produced a significant and lasting knock-on effect upon managing projects, programs, and portfolios, the governance of project management organizations, and the associated strategic planning, risk planning, change management, and stakeholder management.

The pandemic period of 2019 through 2022 also brought an influx of Generation Z workers. Now five divergent generations need to work together – Traditionalist, Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Values and social perspectives exist for each generation regarding the business world based upon their lifetime experiences and attitudes toward work. Generational conflicts will now occur more often in the workplace. However, project managers can promote adaptive and productive project working relationships by understanding and managing those differences and by using their emotional intelligence and social intelligence capabilities. Leaders must find creative ways to recruit and retain their needed talent from within this multigenerational workforce.

The mandated social distancing of personnel, dictated by governmental pandemic policies, led to the closure of offices and the bankruptcy of some enterprises. Office closures drove the massive expansion of remote working and telecommuting by white-collar project personnel, with some only working part time in offices. This created a hybrid work-location environment which affected productivity, accountability, teamwork, and the ability to communicate and coordinate project work. These hybrid working conditions will now be a permanent part of enterprise operations and will continue to affect project management’s ability to manage personnel and projects and will require developing working condition adaptations. Remote work is about positive change, it is not about convenience.

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<sup>1</sup> *Editor’s note: Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today’s project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. Original publication acknowledged; authors retain copyright. This paper was originally presented at the [15<sup>th</sup> UT Dallas PM Symposium in May 2023](#). It is republished here with the permission of the author and conference organizers.*

<sup>2</sup> How to cite this paper: Hubbard, D. G. (2023). “Long Covid” Effect on Managing Projects and PMOs; presented at the 15th University of Texas at Dallas Project Management Symposium in Richardson, TX, USA in May 2023; republished in the *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue X, October.

In the workplace beyond the pandemic, project management will remain the key to success for many enterprises. For projects to be able to deliver value and for businesses to survive in the post-pandemic marketplace, employing talented project managers will be more crucial than ever. The future of project management also lies in effectively managing remote work and virtual teams.

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## INTRODUCTION

In late 2019 a virulent and deadly variant of the Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), dubbed COVID-19, appeared, and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in mid-March 2020. The WHO declared the pandemic over as of mid-May 2023. COVID-19 is now considered endemic worldwide and has gone from being a health emergency to a fact of daily life. However, the residual physical effects for many people who contracted the virus persist, which the medical community has called “Long Covid.”

The actions and overreactions by governmental agencies across the globe in response to the pandemic, and the associated industrial and business responses, continue to affect the workplace. In one way or another, everyone, every industry, and every profession felt the devastating blow of businesses being shuttered or downsized, which resulted from the economic instability driven by those governmental actions intended to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus. The impact of those responses has forever changed the way we live, socialize, hire labor, acquire material, communicate, and manage people, and where, when, and how we work.<sup>40</sup> In addition, pandemic related border closures and business lockdowns caused major disruptions to material and parts supply chains which created operational nightmares for industries relying on those supplies that will take time and coordinated actions to correct.<sup>60</sup> These are some of the “Long-Covid” effects on businesses and the related management of their projects, programs, and portfolios.

In this fourth year since the COVID-19 virus became a pandemic, the business effects have proven to have a lasting impact on the future of project work. In 2023, enterprises face historic challenges: mounting financial pressure to control costs, overstaffing, a hyper-competitive talent acquisition landscape, an exhausted workforce, workplace stress, employee quiet quitting, continuing supply chain disruptions, and employee burnout.<sup>34</sup> The World Health Organization recognizes burnout as a response to workplace stress and categorized by feelings of exhaustion, negativity, cynicism, or mental distance from work, as well as a feeling of being ineffective.

The residual effects of the pandemic will continue to shape the future operations of businesses and the project management profession through 2030. Here are nine post-pandemic business situations that affect the management of projects, programs, portfolios, and project management organizations (PMOs):

- ❖ Five Generations in the Workplace.
- ❖ Work-Life Balance and Quiet Quitting.
- ❖ Reducing Quiet Quitting—It’s All About Management.
- ❖ Women in the Workplace—Their Work-Life Balance.

- ❖ Remote and Hybrid Working Arrangements.
- ❖ Remote Working in Project Management.
- ❖ Return to Office Mandates Versus Work from Home Desires.
- ❖ Upskilling and Reskilling of Talent and Changing Employment Requirements.
- ❖ Artificial Intelligence—Technology and Project Management Jobs.
- ❖ Project Management Future Jobs.

The global pandemic altered generational perspectives on working and has permanently altered the workplace culture and working arrangements, with the post pandemic period shifting corporate values.

## FIVE GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

The pandemic period of 2019 through 2022 brought an influx of multi-millions of Generation Z workers into the workplace. This means that five divergent generations now need to harmoniously work together for businesses and projects to succeed. Key age and population data related to those generations are given in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: Generational Related Information \***

Generations	Born	Ages in 2023	% US Population in 2021 **
<b>Generation Z (Gen Zers)</b>	1997 – 2012	11 – 26	20.67
<b>Millennials (Gen Y)</b>	1981 – 1996	27 – 42	21.75
<b>Generation X</b>	1965 – 1980	43 – 58	19.83
<b>Boomers</b>	1946 – 1964	59 – 77	21.16
<b>Silent Generation</b>	1928 – 1945	78 – 95	5.76
<b>Greatest Generation</b>	1922 – 1927	96 – 101	0.26

\* Generations defined by name, birth year, and ages in 2023. Published by Beresford Research 2023.

\*\* Population distribution in the United States in 2021 by generation. Published by Erin Duffin, Sep 30, 2022.

Generation X and Gen Y (Millennials) currently make up the majority of the workforce. In 2021, Gen Z made up only 11.6% of the workforce, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, Generation Z will become nearly 33% of the workforce by 2033, as Boomers retire, and more Gen Zers enter the workforce.

"Millennials (Gen Y) and Gen Z have experienced constant economic uncertainty. Entering the job market during massive economic downturns, Millennials have struggled to gain financial stability and have been hit with wave after wave of world-shaking events. Gen Z has had to cope

with technology pushing perfection, head-spinning US and global politics, and a looming recession," said Michael Hershfield, founder and CEO of Accrue Savings.

The common naming of each generation and some employment relevant facts regarding them is given below—with emphasis on Generation Z and Millennials (Gen Y). Gen Z stands out from prior generations as their goals and expectations are different, and many of their characteristics also differ from Gen Y.<sup>55</sup>

### **Characteristics Typical of Each Generation**

**Z Generation:** Known as Gen Z or “Gen Zers,” and also known as Zillennials, Zoomers, iGen, or Postmillennial.

- Competitive, tech-savvy, independent.
- ❖ Youngest generation in today’s workforce.
- ❖ First true digital native generation—grew up with access to the internet and mobile phone.
- ❖ Adapt easily to new technologies.
- ❖ Cohort born between 1997 and 2002 is already working—about 7% of the working population.
- ❖ Place value on cultivating working relationships, flexibility in the workplace, and more.
- ❖ Rank empathy as the second most important trait in a boss.
- ❖ Are appreciation driven and like to get credit for their work.
- ❖ Ideas about how work impacts their mental health differ from those of their older generation bosses.
- ❖ Place different values upon work than older generation bosses as part of their personal identities.
- ❖ Quit jobs that do not align with their values.
- ❖ Take on side “hustles” and freelancing to work towards their values and interests and generate needed income.
- ❖ Want to be seen for who they authentically are, and want to be heard, supported, and given the space and opportunity to thrive as they develop their professional selves.
- ❖ Harbor little trust in the financial security of any job after many watched their parents struggle to rebuild after 2008.
- ❖ Prioritize psychological well-being more highly than previous generations.
- ❖ Want to make a positive impact on their communities.
- ❖ Want to determine when and how they do work.
- ❖ Value face to face communication, but also use technology to stay connected.
- ❖ Care about mission, purpose, diversity, equity, and inclusion in their work environment.
- ❖ Self-starting, independent, and entrepreneurial, but can also work in groups when needed.
- ❖ Plan to stay at their jobs for an average of six years.

- ❖ Desire student loan assistance as their ability to pay will be affected by the altered economy after the pandemic—entering the workforce with substantial student debt.
- ❖ Many do not know how to conduct themselves in a business office setting or meeting.
- ❖ More likely to prioritize work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, and purposeful work than Gen X or Boomers, according to a Deloitte study.
- ❖ Skilled in using digital communication tools, but they may lack skills for in-person interaction, per Adam Garfield, a marketing director at Hairbro, as told to ResumeBuilder.
- ❖ "As a result of COVID-19 and remote education, it's possible that Gen Zers lack the foundation to be as successful as older generations in entry-level positions," said Stacie Haller, the chief career advisor at ResumeBuilder.com.

Nearly three-quarters of 1,300 managers and business leaders said Gen Z is the "most challenging generation" to work with, according to a ResumeBuilder.com survey published 15May2023.<sup>41</sup>

**Millennial Generation:** Also known as Gen Y. (Some material is extracted from PricewaterhouseCoopers' survey on millennials in the workplace.<sup>37</sup>)

- ❖ Confident, results-oriented, collaborative.
- ❖ Will become the largest generational cohort of U.S workers by 2033.
- ❖ Best developed technology skills.
- ❖ Have averaged seven job changes in their twenties and six out of ten changed careers at least once—Pew Research.
- ❖ Prefer online chats and emails to phone calls
- ❖ Prefer watching videos when they want to learn something.
- ❖ Prefer to work in casual comfort, with suits becoming outdated at many workstations—see suits maybe eliminated once the baby boomers have gone.
- ❖ Committed to their work as are their more senior colleagues.
- ❖ Value interesting work and a good work–life balance.
- ❖ Do not believe that excessive work demands are worth sacrifices in their personal lives.
- ❖ Desire flexibility in their working hours and are willing to give up pay increases and promotions for a flexible working schedule.
- ❖ Believe that success should be measured by productivity and not by the number of hours they are seen in an office.
- ❖ Want to feel supported and appreciated by their company and their superiors.
- ❖ Desire more opportunities to develop their skills. These include technological skills, teamwork, and interpersonal skills.
- ❖ Believe that businesses and business leaders should contribute to the improvement of society.
- ❖ Believe in corporate social responsibility, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.
- ❖ Value authenticity, so a company being a big name in the industry is not a priority.
- ❖ More likely to be loyal to a company with strong ethics.

- ❖ More likely to prioritize work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, and purposeful work than Gen X or Boomers, according to a Deloitte study.<sup>10</sup>

About 33% of ResumeBuilder survey respondents said they prefer to work with Millennials—44% of this group said they believe this group is the "most productive" and a similar number said they "have the best technological skills," according to a ResumeBuilder.com survey,<sup>41</sup> which includes responses from over 1,300 managers and business.

**X Generation:** Known as Gen X.

- ❖ Independent, values work-life balance, entrepreneurial.
- ❖ Makes up the second-largest portion of the current workforce.
- ❖ Will be about 33% of the workforce in 2033.
- ❖ Prefer to receive a basic objective and find their own way to achieve it.
- ❖ Work hard to meet their deadlines and complete their work when they have the freedom to decide the processes and time required to reach their goals.
- ❖ Offer basic requirements for their team members and are comfortable offering guidance as needed.
- ❖ Cohort born in the 1960s might share more values with Boomers, while the cohort who grew up closer to 1980 sometimes connect more with Millennials.
- ❖ Have at least 20 years of work experience and are ready to accept the challenge of leadership as Boomers retire.
- ❖ Known for an entrepreneurial mindset and work hard and play hard thinking.

About 30% of the survey respondents said they prefer to work with Gen X, according to the ResumeBuilder.com survey published 19Apr2023.

**Boomer Generation:** Also known as Baby Boomers and the Me Generation.

- ❖ Focused, goal-oriented, disciplined.
- ❖ Largest cohort of senior and executive management.
- ❖ Generally competent leading, coaching, and mentoring staff.
- ❖ Most will reach retirement age by 2033.
- ❖ Are children of both the Greatest Generation (1922–1927) and the Lost Generation (1901–1927).

**Silent Generation:** Also known as the *Traditionalist* generation.

- ❖ Traditional, loyal, seek comfort.
- ❖ Comfortable mentoring and coaching for senior executives.
- ❖ Found mostly in consulting and senior executive roles.
- ❖ Will essentially be out of the workforce by 2033.
- ❖ Generally, dresses to impress.

## **Values, Cultural, and Societal Perspectives**

Varying values and social and cultural perspectives exist for each generation regarding the business world, leadership, employment, social values, and work-life balance. Those perspectives are based upon attitudes toward work and culture each generation adopted from their parents, the general attitudes of their specific generation, basic lifetime experiences, and specific workplace experiences.

“Millennials and Gen Zers came of age at the same time that online platforms and social media gave them the ability and power to share their opinions, influence distant people and institutions, and question authority in new ways. These forces have also shaped their worldviews, values, and behaviors.”<sup>9</sup>

Business and project successes do not come from processes, they come from people—and culture is the glue that holds them together.<sup>53</sup> As the middle generations begin to move up into senior positions and younger generations join the workforce, those new employees will bring new values with them. The result will undoubtedly be workplaces and working cultures that are very different from those older generations. Observational experience seems to suggest that this will result in workplace cultures that are more accepting of diversity and tolerant of individuals’ expectations regarding flexibility in their working lives.<sup>28</sup>

Generation Z is the most divergent in its perspectives from the prior generations. In addition, Millennials (Gen Y) and Gen Zers have pushed for social change. The 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> annual Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z Survey<sup>9 & 11</sup> revealed that those two generations believe the world has reached a tipping point on issues such as racial justice, inequality, and the environment and are taking action to drive the change they want to see in the world.

Gen Zers and Millennials are demanding workplace changes that they have long been asking for, and if these changes don’t happen, many are willing to leave. Beyond better compensation, work-life balance, learning and development, and flexibility, they want to derive a sense of meaning from their work, and to work for organizations that are having a positive societal impact, per a 2022 Deloitte survey conducted with 14,808 Gen Zers and 8,412 Millennials across 46 countries.<sup>10</sup>

The Gen Z and Millennial generations are significantly different from Gen X and Boomers and those companies and institutions who adapt fastest to their *work-life balance* needs will capture the highest quality and most productive employees from these two generations.

## **Managing a Multi-Generational Workforce**

With the increased generational diversity and associated differences, conflicts will now occur more often in the workplace. However, project, program, portfolio and PMO managers can promote adaptive and productive project working relationships by understanding, adapting to, and leveraging those inter-generational differences. In addition, today's project manager must

understand what motivates individuals regardless of their generation. Because dealing with generational differences and expectations is helpful but hardly the whole solution.

According to Deloitte’s 2023 report,<sup>11</sup> while Gen Zers are more likely than Millennials to believe their personal finances will improve in the next year (44% versus 35%), over half of Gen Zers (51%) and Millennials (52%) say they live paycheck to paycheck (up five percentage points among both generations since 2022<sup>10</sup>). Dissatisfaction with pay continues to drive employees to look for other jobs. Among those who left their jobs within the past two years, pay is the top reason cited, consistent with last the 2022 survey findings.<sup>11</sup>

Project managers in the day-to-day work environment can also promote some of the working benefits that can come from a generational diverse workforce. This can be done through inter-generational actions such as:

- ❖ Learning from their colleagues of different ages.
- ❖ Having older colleagues create opportunities for younger workers to learn new skills.
- ❖ Older workers coming to appreciate younger colleagues’ technical skills, creativity and wider perspectives about the changing world and workplace.
- ❖ Younger employees coming to value older coworkers’ wisdom and experience with navigating the workplace.
- ❖ Generally, seeing how older employees make the work environment more productive.
- ❖ Learning from older workers how to behave in the workplace so that everyone can see their worth without questioning what they do.
- ❖ Establishing mentorships to build a multigenerational workforce, allowing those who have such a relationship to more likely see the benefits of collaborating with people from different generations.

The challenge for organizational and project leadership in the near-term not only the melding of the five generations into a cohesive workforce, but also successfully integrating the growing number of Gen Z workers over long-term. An additional challenge is to also meld “gig workers” into their project teams and project management organizations, with those freelance workers also coming from five generations.

Today the workplace has become competitive, project managers wanting to hire and retain Millennials and Gen Zers should also consider:

- ❖ Monitoring their workload and satisfaction levels with their work-life balance.
- ❖ Creating a flexible work culture where the employee has more control over their working hours and their work location.
- ❖ Providing meaningful work and interesting job opportunities.
- ❖ Providing opportunities to develop additional skills and gain experience.
- ❖ Recognizing individual performance achievements.
- ❖ Offering help and support in continuing professional development.
- ❖ Providing individualized mentoring and coaching.



- ❖ Promoting and developing multi-generational teamwork.

Project, program, and portfolio leaders must have better leadership, mentorship, and coaching skills than they did pre-pandemic. Gone are the days where projects can be solely managed to scope, schedule, budget, and quality.

Post-pandemic project managers must develop and maintain better people and team development and motivation skills by developing and using their emotional intelligence and social intelligence capabilities. They must overcome many of the negative views Generations X, Y, and Z have developed of business operations and executive management. They must find creative ways to recruit, retain, and upskill their needed talent from within the global multigenerational workforce.

## **WORK-LIFE BALANCE and QUIET QUITTING**

COVID-19 also severely impacted most employees personally and changed their work-life balance. Post pandemic workers have embraced the concept of quiet quitting, as they reject the hustle-culture and prioritize work-life balance.

The pandemic brought business disruptions that disrupted employees’ working lives, thereby severely disrupting their daily job functioning, and promoting a distaste for and dissatisfaction with management.

Those disruptions also lead to employees working from home, some coming into the company office a couple of days a week, and a minimal number of employees being full-time in the office. These changes in work location happened quickly over just months. Enterprises had no precedents on how to effectively or efficiently manage, direct, control, or communicate with a workforce dispersed across cities, regions, states, and even countries.

That dislocation from the office, lack of having quality competent first-line and mid-level managers capable of managing remote workers, and how management was—and in some cases still is—treating them as production units but not as valued trusted employees lead to disillusionment with their companies and their leadership. This led to employee pushback against employers that is still ongoing post-pandemic. In addition, post pandemic negative workplace experiences for employees include being involved in large layoffs while given neither advanced notice nor reasoning for the staffing reductions—just let go, often by email or finding they are locked out of their business accounts. While at the same time, senior management is attempting to force employed remote workers back into the enterprise’s business offices.

The various life disruptions, changing work arrangements, and bad management have left many employees disillusioned with the companies that employ them and the management of those companies. This in turn has led to employee pushback against their employers.

### **Understanding Work-Life Balance and Quiet Quitting**

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This employee pushback is rooted in those employees, particularly Gen Z and Gen Y, desiring a better work-life balance. Working situations and conditions versus living situations and conditions produce what is currently referred to as an employee’s work-life balance and requires each person to actively manage the interfaces and interactions between their job and their personal life.

Work-life balance can also be viewed as a state of equilibrium where a person equally prioritizes the demands of one’s career and the demands of their personal life. Favoring one demand over the other can cause distress and negatively affect a person’s mental and physical health. Employers need to recognize the importance of supportive, nontoxic environments and robust benefits programs that include mental health services and support for childcare. Otherwise, employee retention may suffer. A 2019 Harvard Business Review study <sup>45</sup> found that 75% of Gen Zers had left jobs, both voluntarily and involuntarily, for mental health reasons.

There are many aspects of a person’s private and professional lives that can intersect causing that employee stress. Those jobs related psychological and physiological stresses come in two forms: Distress—bad; and Eustress—good. From an employee’s perspective, examples of employment related stresses are as follows:

**Distresses:**

- ❖ Company values do not match personal values.
- ❖ Commuting time to and from work and associated commuting costs.
- ❖ Childcare costs.
- ❖ Increased responsibilities at work.
- ❖ Working longer hours.
- ❖ Lack of working time arrangements.
- ❖ Unaddressed leave entitlements for those with care responsibilities—particularly childcare.
- ❖ Loss of independence and control.
- ❖ Lack of working boundaries being set.
- ❖ Distractions caused by other employees who destroy productivity—noise; interruptions; being asked to help outside the employee’s own work scope; having to share resources.
- ❖ Mandated breaks.
- ❖ Being asked to work when the employee does not want to.
- ❖ Denial of using annual leave that aligns with personal plans.
- ❖ Being asked to work on back-to-back shifts.

**Eustresses:**

- ❖ Payrate commensurate with the job position and responsibilities.
- ❖ Pay, or other compensation, for all hours worked.
- ❖ Ability to set work hours.
- ❖ Adequate time off.
- ❖ Flexible work schedules.

- ❖ Ability to prioritize work (focus attention and energy on the 20% activities that matter—Pareto Principle).
- ❖ Workload balance.
- ❖ Treated with dignity and respect, not like units of production.
- ❖ Prioritize personal health.
- ❖ For office workers, no work at home for post-work hours.

Simply put, an employee seeks a work-life balance where the eustresses balance out the distresses of any job they hold. With a satisfactory work-life balance, employers can reap a range of benefits. Productivity is higher, absenteeism is lower, and physical and mental health improves with a higher commitment and motivation to work. Personal and interpersonal business relationships can also benefit from achieving this balance.

The business literature and business and social media from 2020 into early 2023 routinely presented articles related to various workplace negative work-life symptoms and how employees are seeking work-life balance. Those include four employee strategies explained by excerpts from various articles:

- ✦ **Great Resignation:** The Great Resignation, also known as the Big Quit and the Great Reshuffle, is an ongoing economic trend in which employees have voluntarily resigned from their jobs en masse, beginning in early 2021 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been covered extensively in academic and business literature.

The unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic prompted many people around the world to rethink their priorities. This period of historic voluntary turnover presented significant opportunities for employees, especially Millennials and Gen Zers to reassess how they work.<sup>10</sup> The Great Resignation makes it critical for employers to pay attention to Gen Zers and Millennials desires to make their voices heard, to drive change, and have their values appreciated.

Reasons for resigning include wage stagnation amid rising cost of living, limited opportunities for career advancement, hostile work environments, failure to provide pay raises, lack of benefits, inflexible remote-work policies, and long-lasting job dissatisfaction. However, instead of remaining out of the workforce for extended periods, many workers have been simply swapping jobs. With most looking for better pay and greater work-life balance.

Forty percent of Gen Zers and nearly twenty five percent of Millennials would like to leave their jobs within two years. Roughly a third would do so without another job lined up, signaling significant dissatisfaction levels with how businesses are managed. Meanwhile, those who are satisfied with their employers’ societal and environmental impact, and their efforts to create a diverse and inclusive culture, are more likely to want to stay with their employer for more than five years.<sup>10</sup>

As the Great Resignation drags on, understanding why top performers stay or go is a priority for organizations. Managers need to realize that the turnover of high performers—whether voluntary or involuntary—can create a snowball effect causing other quality employees to leave the company. Just as low-performer exits beget low-performer quits and each type of exit causes its own distinct level of disruption, according to research published by Academy of Management Journal article in March 2023.<sup>4</sup>

- ✦ **Quiet Quitting:** Driven by many of the same underlying factors as actual resignations, quiet quitting refers to opting out of tasks beyond one’s assigned duties and/or becoming less psychologically invested in their work. Quiet quitters continue to fulfill their primary responsibilities, but they are less willing to engage in activities such as: staying late, showing up early, or attending non-mandatory meetings.

At first glance, this may not seem problematic. After all, these employees are not disengaging from their core tasks—they are just refusing to go “beyond them.” But for many companies, a workforce that is willing to go beyond the call of duty is a critical competitive advantage.

Furthermore, going beyond can come at a cost for employees. “Companies want loyal workers, and there is a lot of research showing that loyal workers provide all sorts of positive benefits to companies. Although people tend to value loyalty as a moral virtue, loyal employees are often disproportionately (and ironically) targeted for potentially harmful and unfair managerial practices in the contemporary workplace,” according to a Duke University study.<sup>50</sup> “Loyal employees are given more unpaid work than disloyal ones. The study also found a link between perceived company loyalty and an employee’s history of willingness to do additional but unpaid work. Workers making the extra effort on the job usually do not get anything in exchange except more work. Loyal workers tend to get picked out for exploitation. This exploitation of loyal workers likely has more to do with managerial ignorance and incompetence than purposeful malintent.”<sup>50</sup>

In a healthy organization, the request of employees to “go beyond” are typically counterbalanced by benefits such as increased social capital, wellbeing, and career success. The quiet quitting trend suggests that employees are increasingly feeling that this exchange has become unbalanced. Employers are demanding additional effort from workers without investing in them enough in return. And critically, as the economic outlook worsens and outright quitting becomes less feasible for many people, this quiet alternative is likely to become increasingly common.<sup>24</sup>

According to a Gallup survey of workers aged eighteen years and older taken in June 2022, “quiet quitters make up at least 50% of the U.S. workforce—probably more. The percentage is particularly high among workers under age 35.”<sup>23</sup> This leads to their decreased productivity and commitment to work.

- ✦ **Bare Minimum Mondays** (New Quiet Quitting promoted on TikTok <sup>12</sup>): “Essentially, the concept encourages workers to give the bare minimum at the start of the week, when they are likely still recovering from the weekend. It is an antidote to the “Sunday Scaries,” and a form of quiet quitting wrapped into this work trend.” <sup>42</sup>
- ✦ **Freedom Fridays:** “On Freedom Fridays, employees take on a lighter workload and more relaxed schedule, assuming they completed the majority of their work earlier in the week. These light workload days are the reward for being productive and avoiding procrastination, and their low-stress vibes are the perfect segue into the weekend.” <sup>42</sup>

“Freedom Fridays offer a solution to burnout where employees can hit the ground running on Monday, knowing they have an easygoing day to look forward to later in the week. This is in contrast with the typical sequence at cutthroat workplaces, where employees are rewarded for their early-week productivity with, well, more work.” <sup>42</sup>

“Another reason Freedom Fridays could make sense is that they might actually make you more productive throughout the week. According to the Freedom Friday’s strategy, the final day of the workweek should be an opportunity to tie up any loose ends, answer a few straggling emails, and sign off before launching into the weekend.” In short, these Fridays are not all that productive—but the days leading up to them are meant to be. <sup>42</sup>

*Freedom Fridays* are considered an alternate *Work-Life Balance* strategy to *Bare Minimum Mondays*.

Employees, especially those from Gen Z and Gen Y, are seeking, and will continue to seek, positions with companies that provide them with a living wage and various ways for making their work week more work-life balanced, including alternative working arrangements.

### Addressing Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance and quiet quitting are inextricably linked because most quiet quitting is a result of an employee’s unresolved work-life balance issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic allowed workers to rethink—and the post-pandemic residual effects continue to allow employees to rethink—their careers, work conditions, family life, and long-term goals. That rethinking of their working situations and reevaluation of how they are being pressured to live their family life just to have a job have led to the various ongoing forms of quiet quitting and outright resignations being experienced across most industries. Some of the greatest pushbacks are coming from white-collar skilled workers, who are also a primary talent source for project teams.

Even employees who are not quiet quitters reject the idea that work should be a central focus of their life. They resist the expectation of giving their all or putting in extra hours. They say “no” to requests to go beyond what they think should be expected of a person in their specific job position. <sup>63</sup>

Quiet quitting can be viewed as just a new name for a common employee behavior. Every employee, every workday, makes this decision: Are they only willing to do the minimum work necessary to keep their job? Or are they willing to put more of their energy and effort into their work? <sup>42</sup>

The answer and resulting actions for each employee depend upon the culture of the company and how management in general and especially their direct manager treats them as an employee and as a person. Multiple causes exist within business operations that lead to work-life imbalance. For example: <sup>19</sup>

- ❖ 60 percent of employees dealing with work-life imbalance blame bad or overbearing bosses.
- ❖ 39 percent point to consistently working beyond standard business hours.
- ❖ 39 percent claim inflexible work hours or rigid time-off scheduling.
- ❖ 31 percent state that incompetent and annoying co-workers cause imbalance.
- ❖ 30 percent blame long commutes.

Studies also indicate that technological innovations and employers’ ability to be connected to employees around the clock have also substantially disrupted employees’ work-life balance.<sup>29</sup>

When employees sacrifice crucial time from life activities to spend more time at work it can often have a larger impact. Statistics indicate that a disrupted work-life balance can translate to employees either losing time with loved ones or seeing that time eroded to a poor quality: <sup>29</sup>

- ❖ 51 percent of people have missed important life events because of work.
- ❖ 50 percent claim they have spent less time with family and friends.
- ❖ 40 percent say the time spent with their family has been ruined.
- ❖ 38 percent claim a lack of engagement with family.

When work disrupts an employee’s work-life balance it can also lead to devastating ramifications on the job. These consequences can affect not only the employee but also the employer: <sup>29</sup>

- ❖ 68 percent of employees suffer from poor morale.
- ❖ 41 percent of employees experience employee burnout.
- ❖ 41 percent of businesses experience high turnover.
- ❖ 36 percent of businesses have poor productivity.

However, employers can obtain numerous advantages by supporting an employee in achieving a proper balance work-life balance.<sup>29</sup> The following is a partial list:

- ❖ Employees work harder—21% of employees with a good work-life balance work harder.
- ❖ Reduces staff burnout.
- ❖ Improves employee retention—89% of human resource professionals report a positive link between flexible work arrangements and employee retention.

- ❖ Reduces healthcare expenditures by approximately 50% for low-stress workers versus high-stress workers.
- ❖ Boosts employee productivity.
- ❖ Results in lower rates of unscheduled absenteeism (costs businesses about \$3,600 per year for each hourly employee; and roughly \$2,600 per year for each salaried employee).
- ❖ Strengthens employee commitment and motivation.
- ❖ Boosts morale.
- ❖ Lowers stress in staff.
- ❖ Reduces turnover.
- ❖ Increases productivity—more productive staff.
- ❖ Increases positive presence in the business community.
- ❖ Makes staff feel valued.
- ❖ Makes employees feel that their family life is at least somewhat important to management.

Company management can create better work-life balance for employees and can simply resolve many work-life balance problems by utilizing a work location that meets the employee's personal needs while allowing for optimal productivity for the company and paying for performance. “When evaluating a job offer, 58% of Millennials and more than half of Gen Xers (53%) cited improved quality of work-life as more important than financial benefits,” according to a 2016 Fidelity Investments’ Evaluate a Job Offer Study.<sup>13</sup>

## **REDUCING QUIET QUITTING—IT’S ALL ABOUT MANAGEMENT**

Quiet quitting is a mismanagement issue, it is about bad bosses,<sup>63</sup> it is not an employee issue. Employees leave managers, not companies—is an age-old-adage still proven true by the pandemic and post pandemic era employee resignations and quiet quitting. People have worked for a manager whose actions shoved them toward a response of quiet quitting, which was fostered by feelings of being undervalued and unappreciated. Most employees’ lack of motivation is a reaction to the direct and indirect actions taken by their immediate manager with respect to the employee’s work-life balance and working conditions.

Chris Willimas, a former VP of HR at Microsoft, notes from his experience that bad managers commonly exhibit four negative management traits.<sup>58</sup>

- ❖ **Self-Centered**—Everything is all about them. Whether it's driven by ego or panic, they are always worried about how they appear to others and stress about how they appear to their boss. Rather than focus on issues and outcomes, it's all about appearances, since they want to appear strong, unflappable, even invincible even to their team.
- ❖ **Input (not Results) Focused**—Inordinately focused on the inputs to their processes, not the output results from the team. Monitor employees as if they were robots and relentlessly track mostly the inputs that feel easier to control—such as keystrokes per minute, not problems resolved.

- ❖ **Afraid of Failure**—Distance themselves from any appearance of failure that might reflect poorly on them.
- ❖ **Information Hoarder**—Treat information as a precious commodity to be hoarded rather than a gift to be shared and controls the status narrative and all information flow both into and out of their teams.

In addition, the factors under which work is performed—the work location, environment, culture, workload, work hours, pay, etc.—are established by management. Most people also want to have a private life outside of, and away from, work. An unreasonable workload and lack of management support are two of the main causes leading to employee burnout and quiet quitting. Both workload assignment and managerial support are under the direct purview of first-line and mid-level managers.

Another factor leading to an employee being, or not being, productive at work—and one of those that matter the most—is the amount of money an employee is being paid for their position. Most people want to work and will give a good day’s work for a day’s fair pay. If an employee feels they are not being compensated adequately, they tend to show that in under performance—quiet quitting.

Quiet quitting is a result of an imbalance between an employee’s work-life and their personal life that is caused by how management address those work environment factors that are under management’s control versus what an employee needs for a balance with the day-to-day living of their private life.

Social media has multiple confirmed instances of individuals quitting high paying positions when they were forced to return to the office. Even though that return to the office would in no way improve their productivity. Their managers, some were micromanagers, demanded that return, with some saying they need to in person manage that highly performing employee. In every case, that required return to office would have negatively impacted that employee’s personal work-life balance, while producing no actual tangible benefit to the company. These are examples of bad managers threatening morale, engagement, performance, and key staff, without concern for the overall business.

Managers, especially the mid-level managers, still appear to want to see people in the office. That seems a justification for their job. If almost everyone can work remotely, that is a new model for the first line and mid-level managers, and most do not currently have the skills to cope, and many mid-level managers are not needed.

Although employers and workers naturally tend to have different views on quiet quitting, there is growing support for the business view that it is the manager’s responsibility to prevent their employees’ internally driven work slowdowns (quiet quitting) and full resignations. According to a panel of managers and human resources professionals at the World Economic Forum, it is the responsibility of managers and business leaders to prevent quiet quitting after the pandemic fundamentally changed working conditions. “It’s a top-down leader’s job to solve this problem,”



Vimeo Chief Executive Officer Anjali Sud said on 17Jan2023 in Davos. “We need to communicate very differently,” she observed, adding that she does not believe most leaders feel equipped to do so.<sup>6</sup>

Giving workers mobility and visibility on how their career can progress is also key to avoiding quiet quitting, according to Thierry Delaporte, CEO of Indian IT multinational Wipro Limited.<sup>6</sup> “It is an incredibly important aspect not only of retaining the body but the heart, and we want both,” Delaporte said in Davos.

Harvard Business Review researcher analyst Zinger Folkman looked at data from 360 leadership assessments since 2020 on 2,801 managers who were rated by 13,048 direct reports. They found that the least effective managers have three to four times as many people who fall in the “quiet quitting” category compared to the most effective leaders. These least effective managers had 14% of their direct reports quietly quitting, and only 20% of their employees were willing to give extra effort. But those managers who were rated the highest at balancing work results with work relationships saw 62% of their direct reports willing to give extra effort, with only 3% quietly quitting.<sup>63</sup>

Most consultants and senior and mid-career employees have worked for a leader for whom they were willing to do everything possible to accomplish stated objectives, including occasionally working late or starting early. Those leaders inspired them.

### **Converting and Not Creating Quiet Quitters**

A project manager overseeing a quiet quitter first needs to assess if this is a problem with their direct report or is there an issue with their leadership abilities? Research shows in general that most employees want to give their energy, creativity, time, and enthusiasm to the organizations and those leaders that have explicitly shown they deserve that level of engagement.

Therefore, managers need to begin by taking an in-depth look at their leadership approach toward managing and obtaining results from their team members. Research from the *Harvard Business Review* indicates an important factor to minimize the possibility of quiet quitting is the employee’s trust of their leader.<sup>50</sup> When direct reports trusted their leader, they also assumed that the manager cared about them and was concerned about their wellbeing. That research linked trust to three behaviors:

- ❖ First, positive relationships with all direct reports. This means leaders looking forward to connecting with and enjoying talking to team members. Common interests bind manager and employee together, while differences are stimulating. Look for and discover common ground with team members to build mutual trust.
- ❖ Second, consistency in actions. Managers need to be honest and deliver on what they promise. Most leaders believe they are more consistent than others perceive them—check what is really being done.
- ❖ Third, leadership expertise. Does the manager know their job well? Does the manager have the skills set needed to perform their job? Is the manager out of date on any aspects of their

work? Do others trust the manager’s opinions and advice? Does the manager’s expertise bring clarity, a path forward, and clear insights to build trust?

Today’s enterprise and project leader’s post-pandemic approaches to drive results with employees cannot be the same approaches they used pre-pandemic. A leader needs to inspire their team and do their best to assure that each team member finds their work meaningful and feels they are making a difference. To reduce quiet quitting, managers need to create a more supportive, more inclusive, and positive workplace. Retaining valued high performing quitters will require proactive efforts to convey their importance to the enterprise through competitive pay, career development, meaningful tasks, and work-life balance flexibility.

As a project leader, in addition to the leadership personnel actions currently being taken, consider the following to determine if team members are being supported by the leader in establishing a work-life balance that can keep team members productive, effective, and engaged in their work, and thereby also reduce quiet quitting.

- ❖ Do team members receive the same pay for performance as other people for the same jobs and skill sets?
- ❖ What work location arrangements can be made by the project leader to improve an employee’s work-life balance while maintaining the productivity and effectiveness of the team?
- ❖ Does the leader ensure a team member feels valued when asking for increased productivity?
- ❖ Does the leader maintain an open and honest dialogue with each team member about the expectations they have regarding the employee’s work and what the team member can expect from the leader?
- ❖ What career opportunities or advancements or skill enhancements does the leader see for the team member because they performed well on their current project?
- ❖ How can the leader employ their personal expertise to help team members work smarter?
- ❖ What enhanced onboarding support can the leader provide to Generation Z new hires to support them in being successful?
- ❖ Does the leader ensure remote workers are not treated as second-class citizens—as production units?

In addition, project leaders need to determine what type of upskilling or reskilling could be provided to each team member or the whole team to improve the productivity and value of the team members, the whole team, and the company.

The sustained workplace changes employees have been asking for—including higher compensation, more work location flexibility, better work-life balance, increased learning, improved development opportunities, better mental health, enhanced wellness support, and a greater commitment from businesses to make a positive societal impact—are also the business

strategies that will help employers and project managers attract and retain talent in the post pandemic marketplace.<sup>10</sup>

### **Four Day Work Week Option to Reduce Quiet Quitting**

An obvious potential solution to address the workplace Quiet Quitting issues related to *Bare Minimum Mondays* and *Freedom Fridays* is a shorter work week. Work time reduction has long been promoted as a multiple dividend reform, with the potential to bring social, economic, and climate benefits.

A 4-day, 32-hour work week with no reduction in pay is viewed as the most popular form of work time reduction and has been gaining momentum in recent years. Given this growth in interest, a New Zealand company—4-Day Week Global—began supporting companies and non-profit organizations who wanted to try a 4-day, 32-hour work week. In 2022, their efforts led to the world’s first coordinated trials in the United Kingdom and the large-scale independent research effort related to the impacts of a 4-day workweek. The results are documented in their 2022 report “*Assessing Global Trials of Reduced Work Time with No Reduction in Pay*,” which was authored by independent academic researchers at Boston College, University College Dublin, and Cambridge University.<sup>43</sup>

The results indicate the participating companies are extremely pleased with their performance, productivity, and overall experience. Almost all of them are already committing to, or planning to, continue with their 4-day week schedule. Per the report, “Revenue rose approximately 8% over the trial, and was up 37.55% in comparison to the same period in 2021. Hiring rose, absenteeism was reduced, and resignations declined slightly. And on a wide range of outcomes, employees were far better off at the end of the trial than they were at the beginning. They were less stressed and less burned out. The ratings they gave on their physical and mental health were better. They were spending more time exercising and were less fatigued. Their sense of satisfaction with their lives improved, both generally and across a range of domains. Their self-reports of work performance went up substantially, but not because they were sped up or worked harder. The companies’ efforts in re-organizing work were successful in eliciting productivity without speed-up.”<sup>43</sup>

Within the American workforce a four-day workweek is gaining momentum, according to a 2023 survey by Bankrate.<sup>20</sup> Around four in five (81 percent) of full-time workers support a four-day workweek. Support for a four-day workweek is high among all genders and generations, but women tend to support it more than men: 85 percent of women compared to 77 percent of men.

Gen Xers (77%) stand apart as the generation far less likely to support a four-day workweek than Gen Zers (83%), Millennials (83%), and Boomers (82%), who all support it roughly equally. Those who support a four-day workweek would also change jobs or industries (37 percent), work in the office more often (27 percent), or take a pay cut (10 percent). Gen Zers and Millennials (92%, each), as well as Gen Xers (89%), would overwhelmingly sacrifice something for their preferred four-day workweek, compared to the 80 percent of Boomers who would sacrifice something. Gen

Zers and Millennials were more likely than older generations to say they would change jobs or industries, or accept pay cuts.<sup>20</sup>

For companies that do not have day-to-day interfaces five days a week with their consumers or clients, the 4-day workweek may be an option for management to consider trying. However, the company will need to have documented performance benchmarks for their current 5-day workweek to compare with the performance results of the new 4-day workweek to determine if their workweek change produces a value-added outcome.

## **WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE—THEIR WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

The pandemic period and the post-pandemic workplace have highlighted and brought into focus the negative impacts which ongoing negative business employment practices have on women—especially working mothers.

As has been said by many researchers, the modern workplace was created by men, to be run by men, and worked by men, mostly white men—and childless women. The current drive to force employees back into an office setting and to still not address the equity in employment issues with women is an attempt to recreate that pre-pandemic workplace. Some historical perspectives will help in understanding the past and ongoing workplace issues for women.

### **Historical Backdrop**

Before World War II, there was persistent and systematic discrimination against women being employed workers. The women working in the labor force prior to WWII, were usually impoverished and minorities and had jobs in the growing service sector such as receptionists, secretaries, and department store clerks. Society had the notion that women of the middle and upper classes should never go into the outside workforce, for a variety of reasons. The U.S. culture prior to 1940 encouraged women to gain employment before marriage, but upon marriage to dedicate themselves to their main duty: maintaining the family home. That view is still alive and well—even today.

In 1940, which began the last decade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Industrial Revolution, 28% of women over the age of 14 participated in the labor force. However, a need for mass production factory labor during WWII was created by the military deployment of men, and that need both allowed and promoted women to work in support of the war effort. By 1945, 37% of working age women were employed—about a 10% increase from pre-war employment—encouraged by factors such as the war-time governmental promotion of women working, or the negative income effects of husbands earning less in the military.

But, after the WWII armistice with men returning to civilian life, women being employed in the workforce was again discouraged. By 1950, the overall participation rate of women dropped to about 34% a three percent decline over the decade. Participation rose by four percent to about 38% in 1960—being about the same as 1945.

Historically in the 1960s, deep cultural changes were altering the role of women in American society and more females were entering the paid workforce. This increased the dissatisfaction among women regarding huge gender-based pay disparities, position opportunities, promotional advancement, and sexual harassment in the workplace. Plus, the 1960s also saw broad changes in women’s roles in society, which resulted in societal pushback from men. In addition, the key issues affecting women in the workplace have improved very little since some protection was afforded by the U.S. Equal Pay Act of 1963, which amended the Fair Labor Standards Act, to protect against wage discrimination based on sex—but that pay discrimination still exists today.

By 1970, the participation rate of women of working age—15 to 64—had risen five percent to about 43% and rose nine percent in 1980 to about 52%. Women’s participation rate was about 58% in 1990 and remained essentially flat for the following thirty years into 2020.

### **Workplace Issues for Women in the 2020s**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative effect on women in the workplace. The 2020s are primed to experience further changes in the societal and workplace roles of women. While businesses may not overtly be against women, companies are not overtly helping or supporting women in any useful way within the workplace. In addition to the burdens of a job, women still carry the daily weight of raising children, plus they are still experiencing the societal judgments for working outside the home.

Despite the value women bring to work, there is still ultimately the shadow of what women are expected to be that follows them around. Those expectations are to work like they have no home life, and care for the home as if they have no careers.<sup>52</sup> A 2023 study commissioned by theSkimm had the following findings regarding women in the today’s workplace: <sup>52</sup>

- ❖ Nearly 9 in 10 women (86%) agree that women contribute more to society than they get back. They are tired of unreciprocated contributions for their efforts.
- ❖ Over 7 in 10 women (71%) said it is their job to be the “chief worry officer” as they are tasked, explicitly and implicitly, with the mental load at home of thinking through every scenario, and planning for every contingency.
- ❖ Forty two percent (42%) of women experience burnout in the workplace according to a 2022 report from McKinsey. In addition, women, especially working mothers, are more susceptible to burnout compared to men.
- ❖ Just over 4 in 5 (83%) women say they are done letting society and business dictate a woman’s role.
- ❖ Two-thirds (64%) of women now feel the trajectory of their lives is more determined by their personal goals and actions rather than societal factors (36%).
- ❖ Nearly 9 in 10 millennial women (89%) are actively seeking ways to build the lives they want. They are no longer accepting what is being given to them; rather, they are now creating their own work-life balance.

- ❖ Just over 4 in 5 women (82%) said that while there is much talk about overburdened women, no one is helping women ease their burden. There is zero-support structure. And companies—by just paying lip service—impact women adversely, encourage disloyalty, create mental health issues, and cause fatigue with burnout.

In the post pandemic marketplace, women are choosing to make seismic changes to their lives, prioritizing their needs, and exhibiting agency and the willingness to make the tough choices to secure their futures.<sup>35</sup> Those choices include resigning and quiet quitting.

Similarly, Deloitte’s 2023 Women @ Work: A Global Outlook report,<sup>36</sup> which explores the experiences of 5,000 working women across 10 countries, finds that more women left their employer in 2022 than in 2020 and 2021 combined. That same Deloitte research report also noted that various critical aspects of women’s experiences in the workplace have either not improved, or in some cases have worsened, in the post pandemic marketplace. The report had the following significant findings from women.<sup>36</sup>

- ❖ Women continue to be exposed to non-inclusive behaviors and burnout.
- ❖ Forty-four percent (44%) of respondents reported experiencing harassment and/or micro-aggressions in the workplace.
- ❖ Poor work-life balance, along with flexibility, is still the top reason why women resigned during 2022.
- ❖ Eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents work full time, nearly half of them have primary responsibility for domestic tasks such as cleaning or caring for dependents. Only around 10% say that these responsibilities fall to their partner.
- ❖ Ten percent (10%) of women are the primary income source for their family—compared to over two thirds 66% who say their partner is the primary provider.
- ❖ Nearly 40% of women say they feel they need to prioritize their partner’s career over their own.
- ❖ Ninety-seven percent (97%) of respondents feared that simply asking for a more flexible work schedule would hurt their chances for a promotion.
- ❖ Ninety-five percent (95%) of respondents said they did not believe their bosses would adjust their day-to-day workloads if they asked for flexible hours.
- ❖ Twenty-five percent (25%) of respondents revealed they experience health challenges related to menstruation or menopause. A startling number of these women work through the associated symptoms, pain, or discomfort. For those who do take time off work, many do not feel comfortable disclosing these health challenges to management as the reason.
- ❖ Thirty-five percent (35%) rate their mental well-being as poor/very poor, driven by work issues.
- ❖ Nearly 40% of women with hybrid work arrangements say they are excluded from meetings, decisions, and informal interactions.
- ❖ Most respondents said they struggle with predictability and flexibility in their working patterns, and, overwhelmingly, believe their bosses expect them to go into the office, despite bosses messaging to the contrary.

- ❖ Sixty-six percent (66%) of women in roles that allow for flexible work plan to stay at their company for more than three years—compared to 19% of women who have no flexibility.
- ❖ For women to be productive workers they must have confidence that any flexible work arrangement decisions would not be marred by a proximity (colocation) bias by management, or a hush-hush culture around mental health.

The business reality is most every woman wants and needs flexibility and agility within their work environment and therefore wants hybrid working conditions, but equally important is maintaining boundaries between home and work, and equity in treatment by management.<sup>36</sup> Shockingly in the post-pandemic marketplace only 5% of women work for Gender Equality Leaders—organizations that, according to the responses of the women surveyed, foster inclusive cultures that support them and promote mental well-being. The Deloitte report went on to note that women who work for Gender Equality Leaders continue to report more positive mental health, are more likely to recommend their employer to others, have a working pattern that they are happy with, are less likely to experience non-inclusive behaviors, and are much less likely to resign or quiet-quit.<sup>36</sup>

In 2023, women are the majority of the U.S. population, and women’s share of the labor force is greater than 47 percent. For the U.S. overall, the labor force participation rate for *women of working-age*—15 to 64—was about 57% in 2022, per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which is essentially flat since 1990. However, *prime age women*, those ages 25 to 54 years, all had labor force participation rates above 75%, per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2022. That can be compared to about 88% for prime age males.

In addition, women have finally overtaken men and now account for more than half (50.7%) of the college-educated labor force in the United States, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of government data.<sup>17</sup> Yes, college-educated women now outnumber men in the workplace and that outnumbering will continue to grow into the 2030s.

Project Managers, PMO leaders, and executives must proactively develop new business practices to address the workplace issues for women noted above from theSkimm<sup>52</sup> and Deloitte<sup>36</sup> conducted surveys to improve the workplace environment for women and approach becoming Gender Equality Leaders in business.

### **Working Women who are Mothers**

Working mothers make immense contributions to the labor force. They display dedication and commitment to provide financially for their families, while also juggling the demands of motherhood.

Gitnux in their April 2023 blogpost “The Most Surprising Working Mothers Statistics and Trends in 2023,” provide many germane workplace statistics regarding the impacts working mothers are experiencing in today’s employment environment.<sup>21</sup> A key statistic is that 70.6% of mothers working in the labor force have children under 18 years of age.

- ❖ 44% of those work part-time, while the other 56% work full-time. This is important to consider when considering the challenges and successes of working mothers, as it provides insight into the different paths they are taking to achieve their personal goals.
- ❖ 23% who work full-time experience a wage gap compared to men—while only 7% who work part-time experience a wage gap. A stark reminder of the gender wage gap that persists in the workplace, particularly for working mothers.
- ❖ 39% are the primary breadwinners.
- ❖ 21% live below the poverty line.
- ❖ 36% have their career progression negatively impacted due to having children.
- ❖ 40% are missing career opportunities due to parental responsibilities.
- ❖ 57% need additional help managing demands of parenthood and work.
- ❖ 32% feel mentally unmanageable when balancing parenting and employment responsibilities.
- ❖ 54% report achieving work-life balance as a significant challenge.

Within husband-and-wife couples with young children, a significant inequality still exists with the wife still being primarily responsible for the majority of childcare, child rearing, shopping, and household chores. Single mothers of course have full responsibility.

These statistics also highlight the fact that even when women are working full-time, they often experience a wage gap, earning about 85% of what fathers earn. This gender pay gap is influenced by various factors, such as education, experience, time in position, as well as significant gender discrimination.

Sixty three percent (63%) of working mothers believe employers should do more to support them and help them achieve a better balance between career and family life. Despite the above difficulties, most working mothers report feeling mentally manageable and obtaining a sense of identity from their jobs.<sup>21</sup>

### **What Should Management Do?**

For Project Managers and PMO leaders, the studies by Gitnux and theSkimm researchers show those business areas related to mothers and other working women that need to be modified. Significant employment practice changes need to be implemented to help female employees and team members attain a sustainable work-life balance and minimize their quiet quitting and resignations. Those changes include:

- ❖ Ensuring that women are paid fairly for their work and equally with men based upon their overall experience, time in position, and performance.
- ❖ Recognizing the specific needs of women and the unique needs of working mothers and supporting them in attaining their desired work-life balance.
- ❖ Providing agile working arrangement accommodations.



As noted by Sallie Krawcheck—Ellevest Co-founder and CEO—speaking to a group of CFOs in March 2023 at a private event in New York City hosted by the CNBC CFO Council, said "If we want to go back to the way it was (pre-pandemic), then acknowledge that you know it works mainly if you're a man and have a wife at home." "The work environment that existed pre-pandemic worked for white men, but not everyone, and certainly not women." <sup>8</sup>

Women now make up nearly half the workforce and account for more than half of the college-educated labor. Companies that look to recreate a pre-pandemic way of working are going to be left behind when it comes to keeping and attracting the best talent, especially women. Managers and companies who address the problem areas and issues with the employment of women, especially mothers, noted above and do that in a positive manner will have a more effective and productive workforce in the 2020s, which will also be operationally much better than their competition. A key aspect of addressing those needs is management's serious-minded person-by-person accommodation regarding remote and hybrid working arrangements.

## **REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

The COVID-19 business impacts regarding the changes made in the way work is now being performed are a consequence of the response to the pandemic having forced the broader shift away from primarily working within company offices to remote work and hybrid location work, usually at the employee's home. The impact of COVID-19 on the number of days employees Worked From Home (WFH) was dramatic. Pre-pandemic the percentage of WFH hours was 4.7% in 2018 and rose rapidly to 61.5% at the height of the pandemic in 2019. Post pandemic the WFH hours are still robust settling out at about 28% in March 2023—as reported by WFHresearch <sup>3</sup> in their April 2023 report update. The increase in WFH hours due to the pandemic is equivalent to almost 40 years of pre-pandemic growth.<sup>3</sup>

The unprecedented mandated social distancing of enterprise personnel and business patrons, dictated by governmental pandemic policies, led to the closure of company business offices. Those office closures drove a massive expansion of the previously nascent remote working and telecommuting by white-collar project personnel, so post pandemic many personnel are now working only part time in their company-supplied office—hybrid working.

The pandemic forced upon enterprises a mixed—remote and hybrid—work-location environment which has affected efficiency, productivity, accountability, teamwork, and the ability to communicate and coordinate project work. These new working conditions will now be a permanent part of enterprise operations and will continue to affect project managers' ability to lead personnel and manage projects, which will require developing alternative ways of working and managing. COVID-19 may have forced many companies initially into remote work, but many are quickly beginning to see its many benefits and to fully understand its challenges. Some challenges related to remote workers include various forms of security, availability of collaboration technology, worker training, employee engagement, right-sizing real estate investments, and legal and compliance issues.

## Who Wants Remote and Hybrid Working Arrangements

The past few years have shown many organizations that remote, or hybrid work, is possible for a wide range of job roles. However, the discussion is still ongoing regarding the balance between remote work and in-office work for some enterprises. Many large companies are now wanting a major return-to-office of their employees. The reason for this may be that many organizations are struggling to foster strong communication, collaboration, and team bonding in the remote and hybrid working arrangements, according to the May 2023 Fortune article, “Why your boss is giving in to the siren call of the return to the office—and giving up on the flexible work gold mine.”<sup>54</sup>

Pandemic and post pandemic working arrangements all fall into four categories which allow for a wide range of how employers and employees can find a way for work to be performed effectively and productively based upon the type of work and job role. Those are: <sup>44</sup>

- ❖ *Fully in Office:* Employers require all workdays to be spent in the office.
- ❖ *Structured Hybrid:* Employers require some workdays to be spent in the office—minimum number; fixed number; minimum plus fixed; minimum percentage of time. Most likely arrangement is 2-3 days a week.<sup>1</sup> Tuesday is the most commonly required day, followed by Wednesday, and then Thursday. The average Structured Hybrid company requires about 50% of the work time in the office.
- ❖ *Fully Flexible:* Employers give employees control over whether and when to come into the office.
- ❖ *Fully Remote:* Employers permit employees to not come into the office.

Employers’ drive for returning to in-office work has become a point of contention between employees and employers. Therefore, several studies and surveys have been conducted to shed some light on how employees and those seeking work, across multiple generations, view this issue. The following are some of those survey results:

“Seventy-five percent (75%) of Gen Zers and 76% of Millennials would prefer a remote or hybrid working pattern,” according to the 2022 Deloitte Global Gen Z & Millennial Survey.<sup>10</sup> Saving money, freeing up time to do other things they care about, and spending more time with family are the top reasons Gen Zers and Millennials like to have the option to work remotely.

“Forty-two percent (42%) of people aged 25 to 34 prefer to work from home, which doesn’t even encompass the whole millennial generation. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of those aged 35 to 44 selected this preference, which includes older millennials and some young Gen Xers. Surprisingly, baby boomers are a bit keener on working from home than Gen X, with 34% of those 65 and over preferring to work from home,” per a 2022 readers’ opinion survey by GOBankingRates readers on the topic of working from home or in the office.<sup>22</sup>

“While not all of Gen Z wants to work remotely, 27% of them do see working from home as an absolute necessity, more than any other generation. And between all the

generations, 24% (about a quarter of all people) feel the same,” according to the 2022 GOBankingRates readers opinion survey.<sup>22</sup>

According to the 2022 Deloitte Global Gen Z & Millennial Survey.<sup>11</sup> “Less than two in 10 Gen Zs and Millennials want a fully remote work pattern, in which they don’t go to a physical workplace at all, signaling that some in-person collaboration with colleagues is important to these two generations—but they want it to be on their terms.”

“Gen Z had the lowest percentage of people who say that they’d prefer to work from home, with less than 29% choosing that option. However, baby boomers and older Generation X had the highest percentage of people say they don’t want to work remotely (37%), making them the generations that most wants to return to the office.” per the 2022 GOBankingRates survey.<sup>22</sup> According to the survey, Millennials are the generation that most prefers to work from home, followed by Boomers and Gen X, respectively.

With respect to both remote and hybrid working arrangements currently utilized by companies “The Flex Report <sup>44</sup> Q2 2023–Hybrid and Remote Work by the Numbers”—which represents 4,000+ companies, with 30,000+ office locations, who employ more than 100 million people—shows the following:

- ❖ 42% of all companies globally require Fully in Office.
- ❖ 63% of small companies globally with less than 500 employees offer Fully Flexible work.
- ❖ 30% of mid-size companies globally with 500 to 5,000 employees offer Fully Flexible work.
- ❖ 13% of big companies globally with more than 50,000 employees offer Fully Flexible work.
- ❖ 66% of companies globally with more than 50,000 employees have a Structured Hybrid model.
- ❖ 58% of U.S. companies offer some work location flexibility.
  - 28% of U.S. companies offer Fully Flexible.
  - 30% of U.S. companies, companies are Structured Hybrid.
- ❖ 75% of Technology companies identify as either Fully Remote or Fully Flexible.
- ❖ 17% of Technology companies are Structured Hybrid.
- ❖ 55% of Media & Entertainment identify as Fully Flexible.

These surveys of large and small enterprises show that most businesses are embracing the use of virtual teams and remote working. In addition, these surveys show that large businesses are gravitating toward a Structure Hybrid working arrangement model.

The gap between employees and employers on how many days to work from home in the Structured Hybrid model has converged over the last 2.5-years towards 2.2-days per week for

employers, but with employees still wanting about 0.5-days more—as reported by WFHresearch in their April 2023 report update.<sup>3</sup>

With respect to small businesses, “Intermedia’s recent survey revealed that 57% of small business owners will continue to provide remote working options for their employees in the long term. This shows how receptive small businesses have become to working with virtual teams. It is not surprising when considering the numerous benefits small businesses realize with a virtual setup. With an efficient remote team, managers can increase productivity and profitability—while avoiding hefty facility-related fees.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Establishing Equitable Working Arrangements**

Within some hybrid working arrangements, current remote working arrangements, and many in-person workplaces, a lack of employment equity exists. The still prevalent gender pay gap, along with the relatively small proportion of women and minorities in leadership roles, underscores that point. Concerns exist—which some employees have openly expressed via social media—that remote and hybrid work could further deepen inequalities especially for women and minorities, since in-office workers have more contact with managers, potentially leading to more opportunities to progress upward in their careers.<sup>10</sup>

Businesses have a responsibility to make hybrid work arrangements that work for everyone and can account for different career paths, work patterns, and working preferences. This is a critical starting point to address inequities in the workplace and enable better work-life balance. Businesses need to develop effective hybrid work strategies that enable employees to choose where and when they work. The key here is offering flexibility, while fostering an inclusive workplace culture, where everyone has equal opportunities to form connections, learn, grow, and advance in their careers.

A few strategies that organizations can leverage to ensure that those who choose to spend less time in the physical office are not penalized, include:<sup>10</sup>

- ❖ Designing stigma-free work environments that value employee well-being, where workers feel able to speak up about their needs without fear of judgement.
- ❖ Training for leaders about unconscious bias to prevent and overcome proximity (in office or colocation) bias within working relationships.
- ❖ Tracking promotion rates to ensure that remote workers are promoted at the same rate as in-office.
- ❖ Requiring managers to schedule equal one-on-one time with their remote or hybrid reports.
- ❖ Providing employees opportunities to grow professionally and explore their potential.
- ❖ Ensuring women and minorities are represented at all organizational levels, and that they have equal opportunities to grow.
- ❖ Providing opportunities for reskilling, upskilling, and assignment to stretch projects.
- ❖ Showing employees how to set boundaries to protect their work-life balance and supporting them in doing so.

For project managers, the impact of COVID-19 on business operations and the associated greater reliance on remote work has obstructed the collaborative approaches often seen within a traditional in-office project team environment. Remote working leads to a host of new challenges in management for project managers. Managing teams, nurturing top talent, and inspiring innovation does not flow naturally through a computer monitor, phone, or iPad.

However, when executed and managed properly, remote working provides many benefits to enterprises, project managers, teams, and individuals. Including:

- ❖ Increased work productivity.
- ❖ Access to top talent globally.
- ❖ Reduced personnel turnover rates.
- ❖ Reduced levels of personal stress.
- ❖ Improved work-life balance for individuals.
- ❖ Work location convenience for most workers.
- ❖ Minimal time commuting to and from the company offices.
- ❖ Elimination of commuting costs.
- ❖ Reduced or minimized office space.
- ❖ Lowered office expenses, including leases, utilities, and telecommunication.

“Responding to COVID-19 has essentially forced most organizations to accelerate the evolution of the work environment by 5 to 10 years. But no matter the starting point, leaders are reporting similar experiences and responses—they are surprised by how quickly workers were able to transition to the new arrangement and by how productive workers have been through this initial transition, surpassing all expectations. Working from home is no longer a temporary experiment, but a long-term reality. Eighty percent (80%) of recently surveyed workers expect to continue working from home in the future,” per Gartner Analyst Suzanne Adnams.<sup>2</sup>

“Far from just being a hangover from the times of lockdowns and the pandemic, research and statistics are showing that home, remote, and hybrid working arrangements are set to become standard—at least for knowledge workers. During 2022, according to McKinsey and Ipsos, 58% of Americans had the opportunity to work from home at least one day a week, while 38% were not generally required to be in the office at all.”<sup>28</sup> Initial reports assessing the societal impact of such a huge change suggest that this flexibility leads to increased worker happiness as well as higher productivity.<sup>28</sup>

These new virtual team-oriented business models now require newer approaches to strategy, management, organizational structures, and investments as well as newer approaches to all forms of leadership, including project management which would include agility, resiliency, and a growth mindset.

Remote work is about positive business and employment changes, it is not about convenience, and it is here to stay in some form. The business issue is developing the ability and capability of management at all levels to manage remote workers and their work. This is especially true for

project managers. One job title—workplace coordinator—has grown 39% since 2018 on LinkedIn’s job boards, which might indicate how companies are struggling to transition into functionally satisfactory Structured Hybrid and Fully Remote work arrangements.

## **REMOTE WORKING IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

The pandemic has revealed that the future of project management—like many other professions—is integral with hybrid and remote working arrangements and upskilled and reskilled employees.<sup>46</sup> However, changing where we work is just one change that must be addressed when it comes to the effects of the pandemic on the future of project management. From needing to face issues surrounding collaboration and accountability, to splintered corporate cultures, there are several challenges to overcome when building and managing a virtual project team.

Implementing remote work for project management requires changing and upgrading how projects are managed from a personnel standpoint, which includes coaching and mentoring. Mentoring and coaching are similar strategies to improve the expertise of team members, but they have differences.

Coaching as a leader is task oriented, short-term, and structured. It is directed at building a basic relationship with, and addressing the unique needs of, each team member. Such as: answering questions, providing guidance, or training on a specific skill. Coaching leaders typically focus on a balance of praise, support, and constructive feedback.

Mentoring as a leader is more personal, long-term, and inter-personal relationship driven, helping a mentee to reach his overall potential, such as showing someone what to do and how to do it—transferring knowledge and know-how.

While remote working in project management is an adjustment, there are benefits to leading a team of remote workers, such as the ability to hire top candidates for the open roles from across all regions in the country, or perhaps the world. To effectively manage a virtual team, project managers need to focus on clear lines of communication, clear expectations, stated goals, and direct feedback to each team member and feedback from each team member.

Some coaching actions project managers can take to develop cohesion within their multi-generational teams are:

- Explore with members of the workforce what would elevate their job experiences and build their trust.
- Intentionally create opportunities for connection between members of the different generations.
- Enlist team members energy and problem-solving skills to co-solve issues facing the team.
- Build a culture of reverse-mentoring—have younger employees reverse-mentor their mentors, thereby helping these more senior employees better understand the younger generations.

- Tap into influential members of each generation inside and outside the team to help test ideas and shape the future culture of the overall project workforce.
- Reconfigure in-office workspaces so that members of project teams can work in proximity with each other on any of the days any of them are in the office.
- Train virtual team members on how to effectively communicate and report work progress and status—if the project team and all remote team members are to be successful.

When executed properly, remote working provides many benefits to an enterprise, project managers, and project teams: <sup>46</sup>

- ❖ Increased productivity.
- ❖ Access to top talent globally.
- ❖ Reduced turnover rates.
- ❖ Reduced levels of stress.
- ❖ Improved work-life balance.

Switching to remote working requires a balancing act. But if properly executed, project managers gain the ability to establish a highly skilled team that yields exceptional results. Virtual teams, either remote or hybrid, are the new paradigm in business and project management. Managing virtual teams in a multi-generational work environment requires project managers to determine and understand the various operational gaps between them and each employee. Each of these gaps has different implications for what actions project leaders can take with an employee to address them. Those gaps and some related required actions could be categorized as follows:

- ❖ Knowledge Gap: Manager does not fully understand what the employee wants and vice versa. Action required—Manager employs enhanced two-way communications to formally establish what is wanted and how it might be provided or accomplished by both parties.
- ❖ Alignment Gap: Manager understands what the employee wants but disagrees with them. Action required—Manager utilizes negotiation to reach an accommodation that meets the needs of the job position and satisfies most of what the employee desires.
- ❖ Execution Gap: Manager and employee agree that a change is necessary, but both lack clarity on how to implement the change. Action required—Manager in concert with employee creates a mutually agreeable action plan to implement the desired change.
- ❖ Skill Gap: Manager determines that employee lacks the skill(s) required to perform the job desired by manager. Action Required—Manager arranges for the employee to be either upskilled to be able to do the identified work, or reskilled in preparation for assignment to a new but different role.
- ❖ Role Gap: Employee is not experienced in the role to which they are being assigned. Action required—Manager coaches and/or mentors the employee on how to perform their new role.

Managers also need to mentor virtual employees in the following seven types of life work-skills which they need to succeed as a remote worker and—from a business perspective—for that worker’s project to be successfully completed. These skills are the same skills needed to be successful as a contract “gig” worker.

- ❖ **Self-disciplined:** No other person is directing how the work should be performed. Leaders will not be checking daily. There is a sense of autonomy, but complacency must be guarded against, because it can sabotage meeting a work deadline or producing a completed deliverable that was agreed upon with the project manager. Self-motivation to perform the work is the key to self-discipline and is a required capability in the absence of direct supervision. Work must consistently be performed in accordance with any agreed upon plan and schedule.
- ❖ **Time Management:** Position and measure the amount of time needed to perform the pieces of work (tasks) against the time frames needed to do personal items. The timing of performing work needs to meet the plan and schedule agreed upon with the project manager, which should therefore support the employee’s work-life balance. As a member of a project team, delivery to the schedule matters and becomes a work-life balance priority.
- ❖ **Job Focused:** Clear any distractions from the work area and eliminate any disruptions that could impede productivity. That includes Facebook, routine texting, recorded or live programs, etc. Otherwise, productivity, efficiency, and quality of the work will be impacted. Paid work requires 100% attention to the tasks at hand when working. No one can do two different things at once—and be effective, or efficient, or productive.
- ❖ **Flexibility:** Develop the capability to change tasks as needed to meet any changing requirements presented by the project manager. This allows for assessing changes that require a decision on how and when to proceed. It also allows for accepting tasks that need to be completed within a short turnaround time.
- ❖ **Persistence and Perseverance:** Persistence attention is required to what needs to be accomplished, when it needs to be done, and how it needs to be performed. To get the work accomplished requires daily perseverance to stick to the plan and schedule for each task.
- ❖ **Prioritize Tasks:** Develop the skill to prioritize assigned work tasks improves working efficiency and effectiveness. Utilize the simple method of prioritization by focusing attention and energy on the 20% of activities that matter—Pareto Principle.
- ❖ **Communication Capability:** Develop the ability to achieve active focused listening. Utilize open-ended questioning and non-judgmental engagement with team members and the project manager. Mentoring by the project manager regarding communications by the team member is crucial, because findings from The University of Law found 97% of people aged 25 through 34 fear they will be judged by their colleagues over how they communicate at work.

These seven skills are necessary to: foster self-directed remote workers—project virtual team members; minimize the requirement for direct supervision; eliminate the need for overseer middle-managers; and enhance project communications. Business-wise that reduces mid-management headcount and reduces the need for office space, which reduces administrative overhead and facility costs. These cost savings are important as project budgets are becoming constricted, but with companies still wanting the products and services developed by those projects.



Although these skills are needed by employees to be successful in remote working arrangements, they are not taught in any schools. For many who work as consultants they are learned through painful experiences. Some project management consulting companies provide mentoring for new employees in developing and employing these skills. In addition, various small training firms provide fee-based courses on many of these skills. However, in the end, it is incumbent upon the project manager to ensure their remote project team members develop and mature these skills.

In addition, for their team members and therefore their teams to be successful, project, program, portfolio, and PMO managers must also look to both the upskilling and reskilling of project team members.

## **RETURN TO OFFICE MANDATES VERSUS WORK FROM HOME DESIRES**

The pandemic highlighted that remote working and hybrid working arrangements are viable options for many companies. Post pandemic business executives are asking the question: When and how often should employees be in the company’s offices? However, this is the wrong question from a broader business perspective. The question they need to be asking is: What working arrangements—ways of working—would be best for the overall enterprise?

Yes, there is a difference in perspective between the two questions. The first shows executives have their heads in the past and do not understand the business changes wrought by the pandemic. The second addresses what should be done to optimize employee work arrangements and work-life balance in a manner that best supports the enterprise's goals, mission, and vision in the post pandemic marketplace. Line employees do the work, executives neither directly produce products nor provide services.

During the pandemic, executives embraced and supported fully remote work, hybrid work, and flexible work schedule arrangements—*Work from Home* (WFH)—that kept their businesses alive and helped keep the economy from collapsing. Now, rather than determining what working arrangements would best support the needs of their company post pandemic, they are having debates over whether corporate culture, innovation, and worker productivity and efficiency can survive if employees do not ultimately *Return to Offices* (RTO) more or less full-time.

Per a 2023 Fortune article,<sup>54</sup> “The executive opposition to flexible work is rather unexpected, considering that in 2022, when CEOs were polled by the Chief Executive company (chiefexecutive.net) if they were content with their chosen work model, 60% of those using remote or hybrid models responded yes. A barely noticeable 0.5% expressed intentions to revert to in-person work once the pandemic subsided. Intriguingly, the 2023 Chief Executive company survey revealed that a mere 5% of companies operating with remote or hybrid arrangements reported decreased performance due to the shift. So, this begs the question: what happened?”

These debates about Return to Office (RTO) are *red herrings*, and all managers need to understand that corporate culture, innovation, productivity, and efficiency are the very items that need to be

optimized in the newer ways of working. And, any post pandemic working arrangements for employees, whether in the office or at home, will have challenges and issues that must be addressed and managed.

Banking CEOs, such as JPMorgan's Jamie Dimon, were among the first executive leaders to claim that companies and cultures work best when people are in person and have criticized remote and hybrid work as a long-term arrangement and are promoting the Return to Office movement. Unsubstantiated claims of wide-scale quiet quitting, non-efficient production, holding two jobs, lack of motivation, and lack of support for corporate culture are what executives are using to drive their Return to Office agenda. In addition, to counteract remote working corporate, executives are now paying extra for workers to move closer to offices, including housing costs and relocation expenses.<sup>49</sup>

However, getting line personnel back into the office appears to be merely a guise for executive managements feeling their lack of control over remote work. It also reflects their need to address their lack of having established accountability measures for remote workers during the pandemic and effectively responding to rapidly changing technologies—Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Mesh platform, Meta’s Horizon Workrooms, Nvidia’s Omniverse collaborative working tool, shared data clouds, etc.

It is also interesting to note that, “the number of Americans back in offices has been steadily climbing since the height of the pandemic. But it is starting to fall back down,” per charted LinkedIn data, says Erica Pandey, author of *Axios Finish Line* in her LinkedIn posting. “It is a sign that the balance between remote and in-person work will continue to oscillate with the times. Employers want workers to come back to the office for good, but it is unlikely work will ever return to what it was before the pandemic's massive experiment in teleworking.”

Even as post pandemic layoffs in technology and other business sectors mount, employees are pushing back against leaders who issue return-to-office mandates. Which side prevails in this RTO tug-of-war remains to be determined. However, remote and hybrid work arrangements have been proven to deliver increased employee productivity, reduced attrition, and access to a global talent market. By going back to the traditional in-person work model, companies would be willingly turning their backs on these advantages.<sup>54</sup>

### **Why Does a Struggle Still Exist Between WFH And RTO?**

Yet, the bigger question is why is there any struggle? A key answer is executive management has now become anxious with remote employees because they did not implement any useful means of remote employee management or status and performance reporting, thereby allowing accountability and trust with employees to become strained. Management failed to provide clear roles, responsibilities, and task allocation which caused confusion, duplication of efforts, and lead to a lack of accountability. Managers did not set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound goals, and did not ensure remote personnel understood their tasks or how they contributed to overall team objectives. In major corporations, senior management’s response to deal with those

self-created issues is their attempt to force personnel back in the company offices as soon as possible.

This tends to beg the unanswered question of why executives during the pandemic did not either upskill or replace first-line and mid-level managers who were obviously not managing their remote employees. Since, it appears from the literature and media that those line-managers and mid-level managers did not know what many of their remote workers were really doing during the pandemic.

Now those pandemic days of line-manager and mid-level manager overseers of workers are gone. Post pandemic project managers and other direct line managers will be held responsible and accountable for the production of their remote teams and other direct reports.

Another point is that the RTO movement directly penalizes women, who make up approximately 46.6% of the US workforce, with approximately 72.4% them having children under the age of 18.<sup>64</sup> It therefore disproportionately impacts women compared to men by limiting their work locations and employment options.

This RTO versus WFH struggle is best understood through the succinct comments of Sallie Krawcheck—Ellevest Co-founder and CEO, former Citi CFO, and former head of global wealth management at Bank of America—as taken from a CNBC Leadership Series article by Susan Carminati,<sup>8</sup> which was also quoted previously:

Speaking to a group of CFOs in April 2023 at a private event in New York City hosted by the CNBC CFO Council, Krawcheck said she heard loud and clear that corporate culture and cohesiveness depends on people being in the office. She summed up what she heard from peers in a subsequent interview with CNBC: "In other words, they were saying we have to get back to the way it was."

The problem with that thinking, Krawcheck said, is that the work environment that existed pre-pandemic "worked for white men, not everyone, and certainly not women and under-represented groups." At the CFO meeting, she told a majority male group of finance leaders to look around the room. "Who's missing from here?" she asked them. "If we want to go back to the way it was, then acknowledge that you know it works mainly if you're a man and have a wife at home."

The most progressive leaders are not looking to return to pre-pandemic ways, Krawcheck said, but instead are striving to offer arrangements that work for all employees. She pushes back against the idea that culture can exist only when people are in the office, or that to get ahead, full-time in-office attendance is required.

Krawcheck also acknowledges that fully remote is not right, or even possible, for every company, but flexibility and autonomy are well within reach. As for leaders who tell her that they are still trying to figure out a hybrid/remote/in-office arrangement, she is optimistic. "At least that represents intellectual curiosity," she said. "They're testing things to see what works. I much prefer that to a blanket demand that everyone get back to the office and that's how we're going to grade loyalty and commitment."

Krawcheck believes flexibility is the new currency. Companies that look to recreate a pre-pandemic way of working are going to be left behind when it comes to keeping and attracting the best talent.

The bottom line is that planned, sustainable, and inclusive growth will require changing how work gets done to maximize the contributions of all personnel, and that will not be done by RTO mandates. The current push by many senior executives for a return to working within physical business offices is short sighted and ignores the major cultural and employment changes that took place during the pandemic. It also dismisses the fact that most Gen Z and Gen Y personnel place a higher priority on the work-life balance than older generations—which includes various work location arrangements.

The solution is to adopt methods of building culture, collaboration, team bonding, and communication that are a good fit for hybrid work arrangements and an in-office environment. Then, companies can obtain the best of both models. To do this, companies and project management offices must create a work-friendly culture, rethink how they communicate, leverage technology for collaboration, prioritize team bonding, prioritize mentoring and coaching, and invest in training and the upskilling and reskilling of employees and project team members.

## **UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING OF TALENT AND CHANGING EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS**

Worldwide the talent skills gap is so large it has become one of the main barriers preventing companies from modernizing their business model, according to a 2023 WEF report,<sup>61</sup> which estimates 44% of each individual worker’s skills need to be updated. Businesses and projects need upskilled and reskilled talent to address business requirements. This might be viewed as a skills driven revolution in the search for talent. As marketplaces, technologies, and organizational requirements evolve, the necessary skills also change. Market forces and consumer demands are reshaping most employees’ jobs, with technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence, now being bigger drivers of change. In response to these drivers, companies during the pandemic made a significant shift toward upskilling and reskilling with skill building becoming a widespread practice.

According to a McKinsey 2020 report *Beyond hiring: How companies are reskilling to address talent gaps*,<sup>30</sup> “As technologies and business models continue their rapid evolution, companies are experiencing a step change in the workforce skills they need to thrive and grow. Previous McKinsey research showed that as many as 375 million workers globally might have to change occupations in the next decade to meet companies’ needs and that automation could free employees to spend as much as 30% of their time on new work. Now, in this survey on future workforce needs, nearly 90% of executives and managers say their organizations either face skill gaps already (43%) or expect gaps to develop within the next five years (44%). In addition, nearly all respondents classify closing potential skill gaps as a priority for their organizations, and about one-third say it is among the top three priorities. However, relatively few indicate that their organizations are ready to respond. Those respondents who are looking ahead cite skill building

(51%), rather than hiring (31%), as the most effective way to close their skill gaps in the next five years.”

Per the 2020 McKinsey survey, “although reskilling programs in 2020 were generally at an early stage, many organizations were already seeing positive results from them. Nearly seven in ten respondents reporting reskilling said the business impact from the programs has been greater than or equal to the investment in them. Respondents reporting successful reskilling efforts were more likely than others to say their organizations have strong skill-management practices. What’s more, 48% said their reskilling programs were already enhancing bottom-line growth.”<sup>30</sup>

The current upskilling and reskilling of employees is preparing companies to address workplace and workforce changes driven by the pandemic and existing and planned advancements in technologies. According to a Gartner February 2023 Benchmark webcast survey of HR Managers, “Fifty-seven percent of HR leaders are offering career pathing guidance and opportunities to upskill, reskill, and cross-skill to improve career management strategies in 2023.”<sup>19</sup> According to the McKinsey 2020 Survey,<sup>30</sup> “The most commonly cited purpose for these reskilling efforts (57% of respondents) is to enable the implementation of new offerings, business models, or strategies. The second-most cited reason (53% of respondents) is reacting to emerging technological disruptions.”

For better or worse, due to COVID-19 impacts, the way in which project managers work and manage employees has changed. With this change comes the growing need for professional skills that will improve operational practices, talent management, and hiring to achieve project value and benefits. Changing an existing employee’s skills can be delivered in two forms:

- **Upskilling:** Self-learning new skills or teaching workers new skills to enhance their ability to perform in their existing role. Provides training programs and development opportunities that improve an employee’s abilities and minimizes their skill gaps. A simple example is a technician who takes certification courses on a newly released software version.
- **Reskilling:** Preparing a current worker for a different role by providing training programs and development opportunities that teach them the necessary new skills. Even though there is currently no need for that employee’s existing skills, the company does not want to replace them. Instead, the company trains the worker in new skills to embark on an altered career path into a position that requires new knowledge.

Project Management Organizations (PMOs) need to upskill their current project managers, existing workforce employees, and new hires toward new and technologically reorganized higher-skilled roles. PMOs need to move their skills training provision from personnel performing today’s in-demand job roles to taking a longer-term perspective.

Global and regional competition for scarce skilled talent is intensifying and will continue to become more competitive. A proactive approach is needed to increase the availability of desired skills in the future and address the current skills scarcity. This view can enable a wider range of personnel to understand and employ recent technologies and work more effectively with them through skills augmentation. Upskilling the capabilities of project managers to learn new

collaborative approaches and how to lead in a virtual team setting can empower a remote project workforce to yield exceptional results.

Enterprises need to ensure they have a sufficient pool of appropriately skilled talent. This situation creates an opportunity for businesses to reach out to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to gain support for their reskilling and upskilling efforts.

Skill requirement changes directed toward acquiring project talent for project management and team positions will take many forms. This will include changes that are happening across multiple industries and disciplines which are refining the basic employment requirements for skilled workers. Three of those employment requirements are:

- ❖ More reliance on professional skills certification.
- ❖ Emphasis on relevant experience related to working with and in projects, programs, and portfolios.
- ❖ Demonstrated capabilities in utilizing applicable project management software applications and associated technologies.

A fourth employment requirement which many employers are considering changing is the elimination of college degree requirements.

A 2023 *Wall Street Journal*-NORC poll <sup>5</sup> found that 56% of Americans think that a college degree is not worth the cost, the highest rate in the survey’s ten-year history. Skepticism is strongest among people ages 18-34, and people with college degrees are among those whose opinions have soured the most. The study suggests people are losing faith in the value of a college education because of rising tuition paired with a low return on investment after graduation.

From a hiring perspective, roughly 70% of US job postings require a bachelor’s degree. But less than 50% of the workforce has one. That means millions of workers are locked out of well-paying jobs, project team assignments, and benefits before they even have a chance to interview.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, to encourage more qualified workers to apply to open job listings, major companies like Kellogg, General Motors, and Bank of America have now removed four-year degree mandates for select job opportunities. This shift in employment practices is not limited to the private sector. Governments in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Utah have dropped bachelor’s degree requirements for thousands of public-sector jobs as well. <sup>15</sup>

However, removing degree requirements will not guarantee that applicants without a degree will get hired more often by an enterprise. To truly become inclusive to those with non-traditional education backgrounds, companies and their HR departments need to change their hiring culture and practices as well. To compensate for a degree, companies and PMOs will need to add more behavioral skill requirements and screening steps, such as specific skill certifications, background checks, personality tests, skill evaluations, panel interviews, and candidate presentations.<sup>15</sup> In theory removing the paper ceiling may create more opportunities for workers and project team members, but it will require a few years to tell whether hiring practices have really changed.

Setting objective position requirements and requiring established marketable credentials for a large variety of emerging project management job roles will create clear skills and performance measures to help management screen job candidates. This will support paying certified skilled workers more and increase the labor talent pool from which to draw potential new hires.

In addition, a continuing growth in the “gig” economy and associated number of gig-workers provides an additional pool of skilled available talent. The challenges of hiring the gig-contractors to assist on a project can be mitigated by utilizing the same basic employment requirements for a given project role that would be used to make a direct hire. Project managers also need to consider the financial stability of any large talent contractor assigned to a project, carefully craft the related contracts, and perform a risk analysis related to using that contractor to avoid potential disruptions to project delivery.

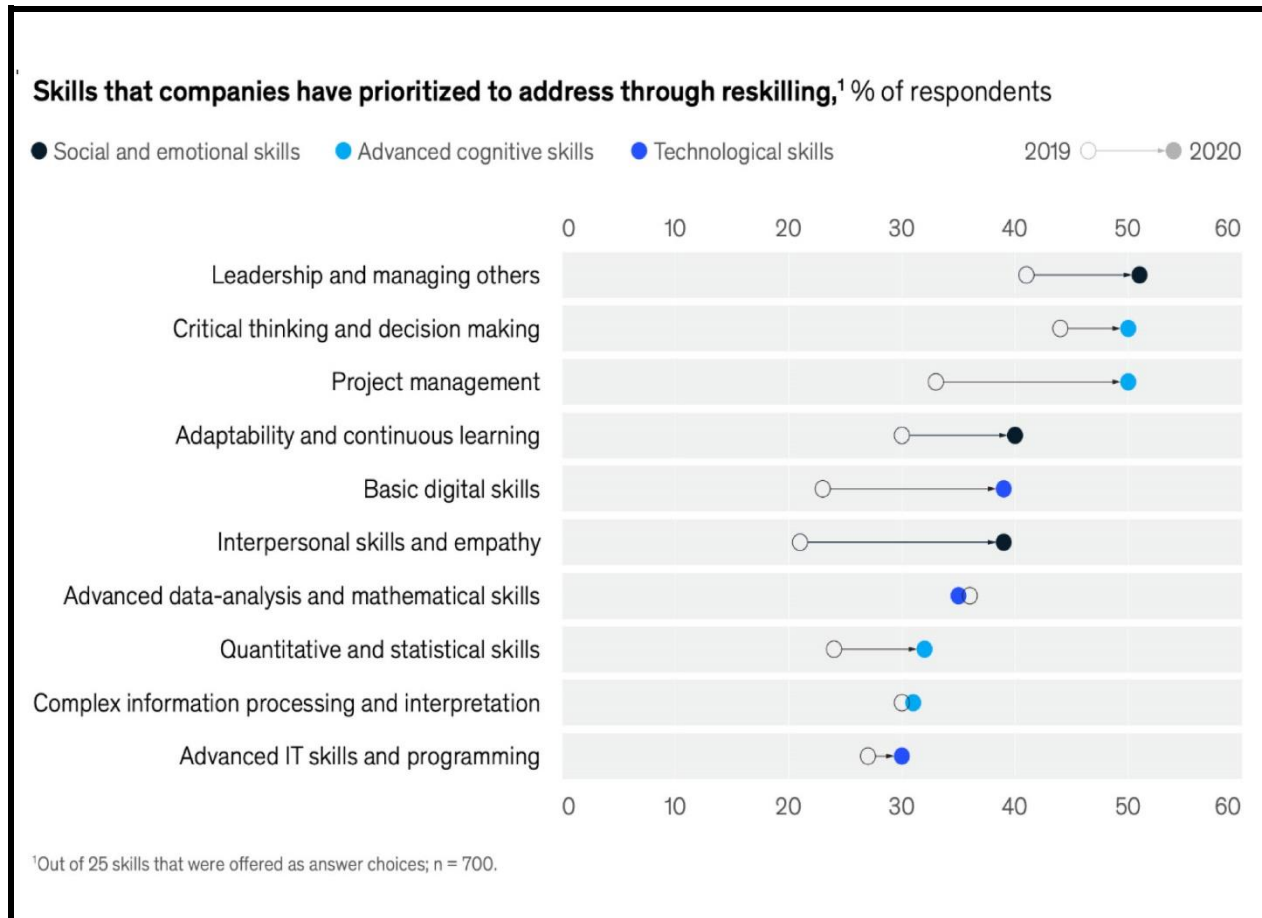
The business and project management literature shows that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for new or different skills in the workforce. This was exacerbated by the rapid rise of digitization, remote work, hybrid work, and redeploying talent, which imposed new demands on many employees. Sustainable inclusive business growth post-pandemic requires modifying the workplace to maximize the contributions from all personnel, including contractors.

Project management needs to accelerate inclusivity and sustainability by being consciously aware of their talent pool mix and providing coaching and mentoring to marginal employees, so they become a productive part of that mix and see different career path opportunities. Individual employees need help from their employers to develop those skills that will make them ready to support their companies in the post-pandemic workplace and to support those pending changes in how work needs to get done to make their companies and projects successful.

The McKinsey 2021 Global Survey<sup>31</sup> on reskilling indicates “the need to address skill gaps across industries is more urgent than ever. Most respondents (58%) say that closing those gaps in their companies’ workforces has become a higher priority since the pandemic began. Redeploying talent to new roles that require some degree of building up skills has also become more commonplace and is the second most critical area for closing skill gaps. Skill building is more prevalent than it was prior to the pandemic, with 69% of organizations now doing more than they did before the COVID-19 crisis.”

Per the 2021 McKinsey survey, company skill-building efforts are increasingly focused on softer social, emotional, and advanced cognitive skills. Table 2 below from the McKinsey 2021 survey shows those skills that companies have prioritized to address through reskilling of management personnel. Of the top ten prioritized skills, it should be noted that Project Management is number three, with leadership and managing others being number one, critical thinking and decision-making ranking as number two, and interpersonal skills and empathy coming in at number six.

**TABLE 2: Skills that Companies have Prioritized to Address through Reskilling <sup>31</sup>**



Those listed top ten skills are not generally taught in US universities or colleges at the undergraduate level and only a few are taught as part of some master’s degree programs. Project, program, portfolio and PMO managers need to understand that generally all workers being hired and most currently employed personnel are probably deficient in these critical business skills. Therefore, most workers have not been equipped for the modern multi-generational and COVID-accelerated marketplace. Project manager coaching and mentoring must address these skills for project teams to function successfully in the post pandemic business world.

Project managers and their teams are expected to move enterprises into the future by judiciously employing innovation. Therefore, upskilling the project team’s knowledge and capabilities to stay ahead of the curve in emerging technologies is also critical to long-term success. This training should include areas such as:

- ❖ Data analytics.
- ❖ Business analysis.
- ❖ Cloud-based systems.
- ❖ Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation.
- ❖ Systems design.



- ❖ Project management software.
- ❖ Quality control.
- ❖ Continuous improvement.

According to the 2018 World Economic Forum jobs study report,<sup>59</sup> technology-related and non-cognitive soft-skills are becoming increasingly more important to deliver in tandem, which opens significant opportunities to invest in new types of education and training that would be most useful to individual employees and project team members.

While the WEF jobs report looked at those skills seen as most needed post pandemic for individual employees, and the McKinsey report focused on the broader set of skills—as noted above in Table 2—for management personnel, the 2023 survey conducted by PM Solutions<sup>38</sup> regarding project managers found the most important project management skills in high-performing organizations to be the following:

- ❖ Carrying out activities with integrity, care, and trustworthiness.
- ❖ Problem solving: Identifying causes, generating possible solutions, and taking actions.
- ❖ Engaging with customers and improving the customer experience.
- ❖ Working collaboratively in a project team environment.
- ❖ Exhibiting sound judgment under pressure while remaining calm.
- ❖ Communicating with others (oral and written communications, presentation).
- ❖ Ability to clearly express complex ideas.
- ❖ Satisfying stakeholders’ quality expectations and fulfilling project requirements.
- ❖ Working to serve the purpose of the organization.

In the post-pandemic marketplace, project managers need to focus on refining those leadership and management skills noted in Table 2 and in the project management list above. They also need to develop the four key individual inter-personal soft-skills of self-awareness, emotional stability, self-regulation, and self-expression. These four basic skills are needed to provide open honest communication and to enhance resolving conflict. Those soft-skill capabilities make an enormous amount of difference in managing project management organizations and any project team—especially multi-generational virtual teams.

These findings dovetail with the 2023 World Economic Forum (WEF) jobs study report<sup>61</sup> assertion that the top three skills that will become most important over the next five years are soft-skills such as creative thinking, analytical thinking, and technological literacy, plus intangible traits like motivation, and doing lifelong learning—none of which can be automated. The WEF report stated that employers’ desire for these strong cognitive skills shows the continuing importance of complex problem-solving. In addition, project management needs team members who can communicate, support teamwork, show empathy, and display a positive attitude toward work.

## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE—TECHNOLOGY AND PM JOBS**

The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) became mainstream in the business marketplace during the pandemic. The rise of large language models (LLMs) since 2019, like OpenAI’s GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformers) and Google’s LaMDA (Language Model for Dialogue Applications), made way for conversational generative AI chatbots with advanced capabilities that can mimic a human conversation style, find information online, and create unique content, such as audio, computer code, images, text, simulations, and videos.

These chatbots—software robots—provide automated computerized non-human interactive conversations to answer a human user’s text-based questions. That major change came in addition to the increased deployment of mechanically based robots and a few humanoid-form robots in some segments of various industries.

The emergence of these AI “ChatBot” applications, which use machines and software to simulate human reasoning and problem solving, will have a particularly pronounced impact by displacing and automating many existing roles that involve basic reasoning, communicating, and coordinating, a WEF report stated.<sup>62</sup> The next phase in AI implementation will be fully voice-driven AI.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta (Facebook), in a 14 March 2023 memo<sup>65</sup> to the Meta staff highlighted the company's renewed focus on AI as an area of growth. "We're focused on the long term," the CEO wrote. "That means investing in tools that will make us most effective over many years, not just this year—whether that is building AI tools to help engineers write better code faster, enabling us to automate workloads over time, or identifying obsolete processes that we can phase out." Later, Zuckerberg noted that the company's "single largest investment" is in advancing AI and building it into every one of its products. "We have the infrastructure to do this at unprecedented scale, and I think the experiences it enables will be amazing," he added.<sup>65</sup>

Google and Microsoft have also announced their future business focus will also include enhanced Artificial Intelligence and building advanced AI into their products. Why? Because AI promises a transformation in economic advancement and productivity not seen since the days of the second industrial revolution.

AI will cause significant labor-market disruption over the next 5 years, says the WEF.<sup>61</sup> Some 75% of the companies surveyed by the WEF said they expect to adopt AI technologies by 2027, which WEF predicts will eliminate up to 26 million jobs in record-keeping and administrative positions. The report's findings are largely based on a survey of 803 companies that employ a total of 11.3 million workers in 45 different economies around the world.<sup>61</sup>

Companies now value the ability to efficiently use AI tools more than computer programming. The WEF report on job impacts related to AI <sup>62</sup> predicts: a 40% jump in the number of AI and machine learning specialists by 2027; a 30-35% rise in demand for roles such as data analysts and scientists or big data specialists; and a 31% increase in demand for information security analysts.

This would add a combined 2.6 million jobs. That is good news from a project management jobs perspective.

Today’s project management workforce should prepare to work together with AI. Since, project, program, portfolio, and PMO managers will be right there to manage those projects producing that transformative AI.

## **PROJECT MANAGEMENT FUTURE JOBS**

The Project Management Institute projected in 2017 that on an annualized basis, employers will need to fill nearly 2.2-million new project-oriented roles each year through 2027.<sup>39</sup> That means about 22-million project management related jobs over that ten-year period. In 2023, this leaves about 11-million jobs to be created over the next five years.<sup>39</sup>

However, due to the impacts of COVID-19, the skill level, educational requirements, and certifications that will be needed by many of those new workers will be quite different from those envisioned when that report was written in 2017. In addition, during the next decade, the world will see more projects than ever due to governmental pandemic and post pandemic funding and therefore, even more project management jobs will be created.

The WEF projects by 2027 nearly 69 million new jobs will be created worldwide and 83 million will be eliminated. That constitutes a reduction in employment of 14 million jobs, or 2% of the global workforce over five years.<sup>61</sup>

However, people in the project management profession will mostly avoid being one of those potential unemployed 14 million, because they are employed in today’s fastest-growing roles—driven by technology, digitalization, and sustainability. Most of the fastest-growing jobs are technology-related and project economy based.

Here are the 10 jobs that businesses expect to grow the most over the next five years, according to the World Economic Forum 2023 jobs report: <sup>61</sup>

- ❖ Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning specialists.
- ❖ Sustainability specialists.
- ❖ Business intelligence analysts.
- ❖ Information security analysts.
- ❖ Fintech engineers.
- ❖ Data analysts and scientists.
- ❖ Robotics engineers.
- ❖ Electrotechnology engineers.
- ❖ Agricultural equipment operators.
- ❖ Digital transformation specialists.

In addition, according to a Fortune May 2023 article,<sup>51</sup> here “are the top 10 skills which employers say are rising in importance over the next five years.”

- ❖ Creative thinking.
- ❖ Analytical thinking.
- ❖ Technological literacy.
- ❖ Curiosity and lifelong learning.
- ❖ Resilience, flexibility, and agility.
- ❖ Systems thinking.
- ❖ Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data.
- ❖ Motivation and self-awareness.
- ❖ Talent management.
- ❖ Service orientation and customer service.

Notice that the top five of these skills are pseudo-soft-skills and are difficult to teach, which may place an emphasis, perhaps a premium, on workplace experience when hiring new talent.

“Even Apple CEO Tim Cook has long encouraged workers with strength in these soft-skills to apply to the technology giant. He seeks out four particular traits in new hires, he told students at the University of Naples Federico II in Italy last year: the ability to collaborate, as well as creativity, curiosity, and expertise,” according to a related article on Yahoo.<sup>51</sup> That same article also noted that an 11<sup>th</sup> skill could be added of Leadership and Social Influence, which are also a soft-skills.

Project management personnel who are considering items like AI, big data, systems thinking, design thinking, and technological literacy seem to recognize the growing importance of sophisticated technology in the workplace, including Artificial Intelligence.<sup>51</sup>

“Much near-term growth will arise from a once-in-a-lifetime wave of capital spending on physical assets between now and 2027. This surge of roughly US \$130 trillion in investment will flood into projects to decarbonize and renew critical infrastructure. But few organizations are prepared to deliver on this capital influx with the speed and efficiency it demands. Companies should consider implementing a portfolio-synergistic strategy in which planning is top-down, which is a major business challenge requiring savvy stakeholder management, capital markets expertise, and understanding of complex approval processes.” noted McKinsey & Company.<sup>32</sup>

Here also, project, program, portfolio, and PMO managers will be right there to manage those new projects that result from that massive projected influx of capital monies.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had short-term disruptions, generated long-term impacts, and provoked long-term changes in project management and how the world lives and does business. The pandemic can be viewed from business, social, governmental, and health perspectives as a Volatile–Uncertain–Complex–Ambiguous (*VUCA*) event of global proportions with long lasting impacts resulting from the unintended consequences of regulating and restricting the physical interactions of businesses personnel with each other and with their clients and suppliers.

The pandemic forced project managers to adjust their communication and management strategies both internally and externally and drove companies with little experience in managing remote work to adapt quickly.

The global pandemic altered generational perspectives on working and has permanently altered the workplace environment and working arrangements, with the post pandemic period experiencing a shift in corporate values and cultures. As a result, most of the major changes fostered by the pandemic shutdowns within societies, business operations, and the project management profession will become permanent over the next decade.

### **Five Generations in the Workplace**

The pandemic period—2019 through mid-2023—ushered in a dramatic shift in the generational makeup of the global workforce. That shift will accelerate into 2033.

The *Silent Generation* {*Traditionalists*} of workers (1928–1945) is vanishing and will be gone from the workplace by 2033. But, they will still be present in small numbers in executive management and executive consulting positions into 2033, and their expertise will need to be utilized as the workforce slowly morphs into a 4-generation cohort.

The *Boomer Generation* (1946–1964), which has advanced into senior management and leadership positions, will be retiring and represent a smaller portion of the workforce by 2033. The sea change in organizational and social values and cultures they championed will be replaced by those of Generation Y and Generation Z. The knowledge and skills held by this generation need to be transferred to the younger generations.

*Generation X* (1965–1980) is a generation socially sandwiched between the Boomers and Millennials (GenY). Gen Xers therefore generally tend to reflect the organizational and social values and cultures and work ethics of the Boomers. These workers are moving into senior management and consulting roles, with some Gen Xers transitioning into retirement by 2033.

*Generation Y—Millennials* (1981–1996) brought a small change in organizational and social values and cultures and work ethics to the marketplace that are reflected today in most mainstream businesses. These workers are represented in first-line and middle-management positions in most organizations. Their managerial skillset will need to be enhanced to train and manage the latest generation, Generation Z.

*Generation Z—Gen Zers* (1997 – 2012) flooded into the workforce during the pandemic and will represent over 30% of the workforce by 2033. Gen Zers bring a new set of organizational and social values and cultures and work ethics that will impact the way workforces are managed and function for the next 30 years. Gen Zers desire flexibility, freedom, and more autonomy in their business work and personal lives. This new workforce cohort is more entrepreneurial and more willing to change jobs and companies to attain a work-life balance. They are less driven by pay than prior generations. The American dream in the past was formulaic to a greater extent and depended to a greater degree on security. But the American dream with Gen Y and Gen Z is now more individualized.

Generations Y and Z perceive that companies view employees as just numbers. For them that has been confirmed by how companies impersonally conducted mass layoffs in early CY2023 and the attempt to force personnel back in the office without any consideration of the impact on their family lives. In addition, this is being confirmed by how these two generations are experiencing being treated by HR departments when applying and interviewing for a position and in being laid off.

Those companies that treat employees as unique individuals deserving respect and consideration during both layoffs and hiring will be the business winners going forward. Management across the enterprises need to consider changes in the talent acquisition process to ensure efficient, respectful, and coordinated communication with job applicants. These HR actions are fundamental to ensuring a smooth hiring process and promoting a positive external social view of the company and providing an inviting experience for new hires.

The following are all pieces of the rapid changes that leadership must make to manage a multi-generational globally dispersed workforce in the post-pandemic marketplace:

- ❖ Investing in employees’ mental health and wellbeing,
- ❖ Accepting workplace location flexibility as an expected employee benefit,
- ❖ Re-evaluating the need for—and providing—reskilling, upskilling, and soft skills training,
- ❖ Addressing work-life balance—especially for women—and
- ❖ Navigating toward business sustainability to attract and retain the necessary skilled talent.

### **Risk Management of the Global Supply Chain**

Pandemic related border closures and business lockdowns caused major disruptions to material, products, and parts delivery through shrunken and withered supply chains, which created operational nightmares and losses for industries relying on those supplies that will take time and coordinated actions to correct.<sup>57</sup> Those are the unintended consequences of enterprises’ failure to apply risk management processes and analysis to their supply chains and address the obvious issues that those risk assessments would have raised.

Those issues were created pre-pandemic by big businesses seeking the lowest production cost for material, products, and parts which created a globalized supply chain network with just-in-time

delivery to maximize return on investments. The folly of this single source just-in-time globalized supply network became blatantly obvious during the pandemic, from both individual businesses and national economic perspectives.

These supply chains showed a lack of risk assessment by corporate management who had also not created any realistic means to effectively address global supply disruptions. As a result, the various risks of operating a business and managing projects, which required third-party materials, skyrocketed because of the associated increased costs and longer lead times for materials, products, and parts delivery, which in turn impacted finished goods production.

The pandemic exposed the downsides of place-agnostic economics related to products, materials, and parts supply. A significant crisis anywhere could snap supply chains and throttle economies everywhere. In response, most major businesses in the United States are now developing in-country sources of those products, materials, and parts needed to conduct business. The US government, through legislation, has also directed the development of a US based supply of those strategic materials and parts needed to conduct domestic and governmental business.

Business owners and their project managers have been trying to cope with the supply chain crisis for nearly 3 years as of 2023 and will continue coping for some time into the future. Project management as a profession is forward-thinking, so project managers need to become proactive in addressing the potential future threats of supply disruptions. In the near term, this may include stockpiling critical materials and parts or sourcing local alternatives for their projects.

The pandemic brutally exposed the business hazards of supply chain gaps and the advantages of domestic manufacturing. This has propelled companies to increase domestic investment in optimizing operations to expand and re-shore production back to the United States. The US, to re-shore its parts and material supply chains, will be spending \$2 trillion over the next ten years. So, from a project management jobs perspective, thousands of projects will be implemented over the next decade to accomplish this reshoring.

### **Work-Life Balance and Quiet Quitting**

Quiet quitting results from a lack of positive employee engagement, which is generally fostered by bad management. Employee engagement can be viewed as the positive involvement of employees in their work and workplace and their enthusiasm for the work being performed. Employee engagement is a foundational management component of project and business outcomes. Negative employee engagement leads to quiet quitting and resignations.

When employees are engaged, productivity increases, performance improves, turnover drops and customer satisfaction grows. And yet, 77% of workers worldwide are still waiting for their employers to engage them and give them a reason to do more than just show up, according to Gallup in their State of the Global Workplace 2023 Report.<sup>18</sup> Gallup's State of the American Workplace report can be viewed as an indictment of American leadership styles. There are many causes of poor employee engagement, but the majority of them trace back to leadership actions and inaction.

- ❖ Across the countries and areas that Gallup surveyed, 51% of currently employed workers said they are watching for or actively seeking a new job. Increased pay is a top factor in what people want in their next job. But improved wellbeing and opportunities to grow and develop are also highly prized by job seekers.<sup>18</sup>
- ❖ Worldwide, 44% of employees said they experienced a lot of stress the previous day. This is the second year in a row worker stress reached record levels in Gallup’s survey. But employee stress has been rising for over a decade. Many factors influence stress, but bad managers play an outsized role in the stress workers feel on the job, which influences their daily stress overall.<sup>18</sup>

To retain the workforce talent that an enterprise needs to succeed, executive and senior management must address the work-life balance needs of its workforce. Many executive and senior managers are driven to work long hours to outperform their immediate competition in their personal striving for advancement within their enterprise. That is *not* how most employees want to work or live their lives.

Most employees and project team members are looking for a position where they can positively contribute to the enterprise’s success by working a normal workweek with free time remaining for their family and personal interests. Or simply stated, most employees are seeking some work-life balance in their employment and to work under the supervision of a good manager. Management, by simply addressing these two basic needs of employees, can significantly reduce, and hopefully eliminate, the business issues of forced resignations and quiet quitting.

### **Reducing Quiet Quitting—It’s All About Management —Worker Engagement and Treatment—**

Quiet quitting is a global phenomenon that could cost the global economy \$8.8 trillion which is 9 percent of global GDP, according to Gallup.<sup>18</sup> In its State of the Global Workplace 2023 Report, Gallup surveyed 122,416 employed respondents ages 15 and over in more than 160 countries from 2022 to 2023 and concluded that 59% of the workers worldwide were quiet quitting.<sup>18</sup>

The underlying cause is primarily poor management and bad managers. Undermanaging and micromanaging bosses are two examples of bad bosses. The undermanaging boss is just as toxic as a micromanaging boss and also lacks the courage or work ethic to really coach and lead their direct reports.<sup>7</sup> People do not quit companies—they quit non-supportive organizational cultures. Research shows when employees are engaged, treated with respect, shown empathy and understanding, and feel valued and appreciated their productivity increases, performance improves, and turnover drops.

Project team members and other employees are either motivated to perform, or are discouraged in their performance, by their immediate supervisor and enterprise leaders. These two points are highlighted in a report by Perceptyx, a company that provides employee surveys, consultation, people analytics and leadership coaching.<sup>27</sup>



The company, Perceptyx, conducted their survey with over 3,000 individuals (1,500 employees and 1,500 managers) about the specific behaviors and skills required for good leadership in 2023. Those results are published in their report “*The Management Behaviors that Make (or Break) a Great Employee Experience.*”<sup>27</sup> The report posits six points where there is general agreement about what makes a good boss and what makes for a poor boss:<sup>27</sup>

- ❖ Employees who say their manager demonstrates excellent or very good responsiveness are 5x more likely than their counterparts to report that this is the best boss they’ve ever had.
- ❖ Employees are 2.5x more likely to be fully engaged in their workplace if they are currently managed by their best manager versus their worst manager.
- ❖ Employees currently working for their best boss are 5.7x more likely to say they really belong within their organization.
- ❖ Twenty-four percent (24%) of employees studied say they are currently working for their worst boss ever.
- ❖ Employees who currently work for their worst manager are nearly 2x more likely to report that workplace stress has caused them to be less productive at work.
- ❖ Employees who work for their worst manager ever experience problems in their personal lives as well. They are more than 2x as likely to report unhealthy coping behaviors, such as substance use or overeating, and treating their family poorly due to workplace stress as those reporting to their best boss.

Employees in the Perceptyx survey rated their managers on ten personal traits as noted in Table 3 below.

**TABLE 3: Words Employees Selected to Describe Their Best and Worst Boss<sup>27</sup>**

<i>Words Employees Selected to Describe Their</i>	
<b>Best Boss Ever</b>	<b>Worst Boss Ever</b>
64% Professional	46% Incompetent
56% Trustworthy	46% Unsupportive
47% Caring	28% Disrespectful
28% Approachable	27% Unfair
27% Respectful	25% Tyrannical

Multiple business studies have shown that poor managers have a disproportionately negative impact on employee performance and attitudes toward the enterprise and its operations. Therefore, enterprises and their project management organizations must encourage and coach the noted positive management behaviors and work to minimize the negative behaviors identified in Table 3 to ensure successful project, program, and portfolio outcomes.

The ability to communicate effectively is needed to be a good manager and good communication is the cornerstone of effective management.

Managers believe that they are communicative and responsive, but surveyed employees are not so sure. Employees are nearly 2x as likely to say their manager could use coaching on these behaviors than are managers themselves. Managers should make sure employees feel supported with reliable, timely, and complete communication—particularly when an employee asks for feedback.<sup>27</sup> Good communication includes providing adequate information transfer, recognition for work performed, positive feedback, and constructive criticism.

The influence that good managers and leaders have on the work attitudes, performance, mental health and well-being of project team members and other employees cannot be over emphasized. Good managers and leaders are integral to building an enterprise’s culture and values which employees love and that will entice them to stay as an employee.

To minimize or possibly eliminate quiet quitting, executive leadership must endeavor to enhance the positive traits of good managers. This may require in some instances removing a bad manager from the enterprise. That removal is preferable to losing good productive employees and team members.

### **Women in the Workforce—Their Work-Life Balance —The Age of Women in Project Management has Arrived—**

Women’s rights and equality are still major areas that need to be addressed in the post pandemic marketplace. And, on a broader view, as noted in the World Economic Form Davos Agenda 2022 article “Why women’s rights must be at the heart of the pandemic crisis response.”<sup>26</sup>

The following is a paraphrase of some points made by Natalia Kanem, the author of the referenced article: Our collective failure to uphold women’s rights in the workplace means that we could emerge from the COVID pandemic one step further away from gender equality. Early and sustained engagement with women and women-led advocacy groups must be a priority and not an afterthought in the pandemic recovery efforts of enterprises. The women employees of each enterprise and outside women’s groups understand the unique needs of women and families and they should be full and equal participants with a full voice in business recovery efforts and future human resources plans.

As project managers and leaders, we have a choice. We can either continue down the current path where women’s rights and equality do not advance, or stay faithful to implementing both national and international commitments that respect women’s agency and uphold their fundamental rights.

Women, pre- and post-pandemic, have proven they are great assets to those enterprises smart enough to employ their talents. Post pandemic they make up more than 50% of the workforce. The movement of Gen-Z women into the workforce during the pandemic has surged the flow of women into all professions and industries, which will increase through 2030. Women in the US are now more college educated as a group than men and are fast moving into senior management and executive positions.

If the Project Management Profession wants a prominent place in shaping a more just and resilient future for women, the profession cannot be part of excluding or marginalizing women in the business marketplace or on projects, programs, or portfolios. The project management profession must explicitly include women in management and leadership positions on projects, programs, portfolios, and project management organizations.

### **Return to Office Mandates Versus Work from Home Desires —Productivity and Efficiency Issues—**

It is clear—from the various recent surveys and studies previously cited—that the solution to the challenges presented by remote and hybrid work arrangements is not to return to the traditional full-time in-person in-office work models. Whether America's large corporate CEOs like it or not, a new normal has been established. Women working from home are no longer the aberration — tradition-bound executives are. The old white men who lead corporate America may desire the good old days when every white-collar employee had to show up, in person, to toil for 72 hours a week in the office. But the pandemic has disproved the myth that work and home function best as separate and gender-divided domains.

Management, from executives down to first-line managers are threatened by remote work and just want people back so they can see them working, call them into their offices, and walk up to them to assess what they are doing.

Management believes that remote workers were, and are, less productive and work less effectively and efficiently. However, there is no factual basis for those perceptions. There is no baseline for in-office productivity or efficiency to make a comparison against remote work productivity or efficiency, since management never established a means of measuring those metrics for either in office work or remote work. According to a September 2023 Fortune article the Return to Office war is ending in a stalemate and it is time to call a truce and move on.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that hybrid and remote work puts more operational strain on middle and first-line managers by requiring them to be able to effectively manage and lead remote personnel and project teams. But that is their job. The remote working arrangements of the pandemic glaringly showed that a significant number of middle managers and first-line managers were either incapable of, or incompetent of, both managing remote workers and assessing their productivity and efficiency. Why? Because their enterprises had neither the policies or process or procedures or metrics needed to effectively manage remote workers or quantitatively measure the performance of their associated assigned work.

The real issue related to productive remote work is having the enterprise develop and deploy the managerial skills needed to effectively manage remote workers and measure their performance. And to then upskill or reskill their middle and first-line managers to employ those skills for the benefit of the enterprise. Also, an assessment of the performance of various middle- and first-line managers need to be made to determine if their positions are actually necessary for the operation of the enterprise.

Increasing efficiency is about more than managing an immediate crisis or getting the same work done with fewer resources; it means more effectively deploying resources when and where they matter the most.<sup>33</sup> Companies must learn to adapt and embrace the unique opportunities that these new hybrid and remote work arrangements offer. By doing so, they can enjoy increased efficiency and productivity, reduced attrition, and access to the global talent market.<sup>54</sup>

"The ideal worker in most industries has changed from 'full-time onsite plus overtime' to hybrid," says Joan Williams, the director of the Center for Work Life Law at the University of California College of the Law. "That's a huge change. It is better for women. It is better for men who actually want to show up at home. It's better for people of color." It is better, in short, for everyone—even, ultimately, the corporate executives who are desperately trying to force their employees back to the office. The more America's CEOs can unlock the gift of remote work, however "soft" or insufficiently "hardcore" it may feel to them, the stronger and more profitable their companies will be.<sup>25</sup>

The various solutions of where and when employees will work are still evolving post-pandemic. Many companies are trying three days in the office, Tuesday through Thursday, while some companies are evaluating a straight 4-day work week,<sup>43</sup> others are employing two days in the office with some fully remote workers. Hybrid work arrangements plus fully remote working are now seen as the new norms.

### **Remote and Hybrid Working Arrangements in Project Management**

The experiences of businesses related to the use of remote workers—that was foisted upon enterprises by the pandemic lockdowns—has for the most part been positive for the businesses and their projects and beneficial to those employees who worked remotely. Hybrid work arrangements have been proven to work when they are organized and adequately managed.

Gen Zers and Millennials clearly value remote and hybrid work and see its benefits. Three quarters of respondents who are currently working in remote or hybrid roles would consider looking for a new job if their employer asked them to go on-site full-time.<sup>11</sup>

Historically though, this recent pandemic driven shift toward more remote work and hybrid work arrangements is just the latest event in a long trend toward an untethering of work from the office for “white-collar” employees and consultants. In the US, pre-pandemic hours worked from home was about 5%. Since 2021, the share of hours worked from home each week has kept mostly stable at 25%. Flexible work policies are not a passing trend.

From both a business and project management perspective, addressing hybrid work needs to be less about the days per week in the office than how to create work that delivers joy, flexibility, trust, accountability, and productivity to both the organization and the team member. It is also readily apparent that workers prefer carrying out administrative tasks and independent work that calls for deep thinking at home, while the office is the clear favorite for collaborative, creative work. In addition, productivity and efficiency should be taken into consideration when developing

hybrid and remote work policies, with office days and office meetings intentionality designed for collaboration, interpersonal communication, innovation, and creativity.

While the prospect of returning to the office can hold promise for increased collaboration and engagement, it also brings to the forefront the longstanding challenges surrounding childcare accessibility, affordability and the urgent need for companies to address these issues head-on. If employers and PMOs want workers back in the office, they will need to address their workers’ childcare crisis.

The increasing need by most enterprises to obtain and retain unique talent with hard-to-find project management skillsets will continue to drive greater acceptance of remote work as they address their need to hire the right talent. The pandemic period has shown that self-starters and motivated people with established goals can excel when working remotely.

For an enterprise’s project management to be successful, company leadership and their internal organizations must adapt and evolve their strategies to create a new normal that leverages the strengths of remote work and hybrid work models—and thereby preserve the best of both worlds. To make the remote mode of project management work means enterprises must rely more on leadership skills – influencing, motivation, emotional intelligence, and organizational politics.<sup>47</sup>

### **Upskilling and Reskilling of Talent**

The pandemic has had an immense impact on project management and changed the ways in which project managers need to work. These changes have demonstrated the growing need for new and different managerial and team skills. That in turn has driven the need for professional upskilling to foster improvements in operational and human resource practices that will promote successful project results.

Internationally the talent skills gap is so large that the 2023 WEF report,<sup>61</sup> estimates 44% of each individual worker’s skills need to be updated. Organizations have recently made a significant shift toward upskilling and reskilling with skill building becoming an accepted widespread practice.

While most managers, who were queried in a Perceptyx Blog, report ample formal management training, additional coaching was desired by many, particularly for improving communication. Although a human coach was the preferred choice, a large number were open to AI-powered development solutions — such as Cultivate Intelligent Coaching — highlighting an easily scalable, and more cost-effective approach for many organizations.<sup>27</sup>

As noted previously, in the post-pandemic marketplace project managers need additional training to develop and refine the four key individual inter-personal soft-skills of self-awareness, emotional stability, self-regulation, and self-expression. These skills make an enormous amount of difference in managing the multi-generational virtual and hybrid teams that are becoming common in the workplace. In addition, all project team members need to have their cognitive abilities—skills—in creative thinking, analytical thinking, and technological literacy enhanced, because those skills are critically important to complex problem-solving.

According to the project management consultancy PMSolutions, project Managers leading hybrid work arrangement project teams in the post pandemic marketplace will require additional training in and upskilling of their:

- ❖ Leadership (or "Power") skills.
- ❖ Organizational agility skills.
- ❖ Business acumen skills.
- ❖ Different ways of working skills.

### **Artificial Intelligence—Technology and Project Management Jobs**

Three different aspects of artificial intelligence (AI) are currently being discussed and represent different aspects of artificial intelligence systems. Traditional AI systems, which excel at pattern recognition and are primarily used to identify, categorize, and analyze data and make predictions, have been in use for several years.

General AI, also known as artificial general intelligence, broadly refers to the concept of AI systems that possess human-like intelligence. General AI represents an imagined future stage of AI development in which computers are able to think, reason, and act autonomously.

Generative AI systems, which fall under the broad category of machine learning and are the next evolution in AI, learn how to take actions using past stored data and excel at pattern creation. Generative AI focuses on creating new content or ideas based upon training with existing data. It creates new content similar to its training data, including audio, images, text, simulations, videos, and even computer code.

The technology associated with Generative (AI) matured through its initial deployment stage during the pandemic and then became operational. The post pandemic marketplace is experiencing the influx of consumer generative AI programs like Google’s Bard, Microsoft’s Bing, OpenAI’s ChatGPT, and Apple’s—yet to be announced—Apple GPT.

“The world is poised to see explosive growth in the AI sector over the next ten years that promises to fundamentally change the way the technology sector operates. The generative AI market will expand, growing from a market size of just \$40 billion in 2022 to \$1.3 trillion over the next 10 years, according to a new 2023 Generative AI Growth report by Bloomberg Intelligence (BI) <sup>48</sup> The technology is set to become an increasingly essential part of IT spending, advertisement spending, and cybersecurity as it develops.” according to Mandeep Singh, Senior Technology Analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence and lead author of the BI report.

Growth could be driven by training infrastructure in the near-term and gradually shift to devices for large language models (LLMs), digital advertisements, specialized software and services in the medium to long term. Moreover, rising demand for generative AI products could add about \$280 billion of new software revenue, driven by specialized assistants, new infrastructure products, and copilots that accelerate coding, BI’s research finds.<sup>48</sup>

Gartner, the management consultancy group, predicts so-called generative AI will account for around 10% of all data produced by the year 2025, up from just 1% in 2021.

BI estimates that generative AI is poised to expand its impact from less than 1% of total IT hardware, software services, advertisement spending, and gaming market spending to 10% by 2032.<sup>48</sup> The potential also exists for generative AI to benefit life sciences and education, with BI’s analysis finds that these are two areas that could see rapid growth from their position as a fraction of larger software segments today. Specialized AI-based software assistants may be particularly transformative for search and other means of summarizing information that drive these two market segments.<sup>48</sup>

Looking to the future, by 2027 nearly a quarter of all jobs will change because of the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), increasing digitization, and various economic developments, according to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) 2023 Future of Jobs report, with some jobs eliminated and others created.<sup>61</sup>

The nature of work will continue to change, but AI will ultimately create more opportunity, jobs and wealth for society than it destroys.

Therefore, over the next twenty years the wave of artificial intelligence (AI) based innovative technologies will transform the corporate landscape and change every single job in some way. As an example, the proliferation of new and powerful AI tools means anyone can be a programmer by simply issuing a few commands to an AI system.

While the adoption of AI could help some workers become more productive, spend less time on boring tasks, earn higher wages, and even have a four-day workweek, others could face more competition, earn lower wages, or even see these technologies replace their jobs. In the years ahead, generative AI could disrupt—not necessarily replace—300 million full-time jobs across the globe, according to Goldman Sachs.

From a project management perspective, the global growth in generative AI, and AI in general, will create a significantly increased demand for millions more projects and therefore more project managers over the next ten years. In addition, many project management related AI tools will also become available in the marketplace, such as “AI assistants” for project managers that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of project leaders.

### **Artificial Intelligence Age Advancing Women’s Place in the Workforce**

Analysis of international workforce data indicates that jobs that require abstract thinking and interpersonal skills are the least likely to be threatened by the introduction of AI. Therefore, the AI revolution will become a gender revolution for women as operational disruptions cause a reevaluation of the positive attributes of the soft-skills and empathetic nature that are more native to women.

Soft skills entail attributes that have traditionally been characterized as feminine. Beyond clumsy stereotyping, this association of women with specific professional traits is well documented in both labor market statistics and academic research. In fact, from a young age, females have been found to demonstrate a greater preference for activities with higher brain and people content than males. This trend continues into the workplace, as employment data from across the US and UK reveals that females are 31% and 57% more likely to choose jobs that are people-oriented than their male counterparts.

For enterprises to remain competitive as AI undercuts their existing offerings, innovative employees will become crucial to developing new products, services, and income streams. Equally important will be empathetic leaders capable of cultivating a workplace culture that empowers these innovators to excel. Therefore, the new automated workplace will be one that empowers and rewards women’s talents as an increasingly urgent business performance strategy. McKinsey found, in their 2019 analysis, that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile.

Hence, as AI transforms how businesses operate and firms reward and incentivize interpersonally-skilled empathetic leaders with increased salaries and promotions, women will at last be rewarded for the traits that were traditionally perceived as a weakness—and thus a barrier to progression—in many professional environments.

### **Project Management Future Jobs**

The trillions of dollars that have been authorized for the pandemic recovery and global warming and the US re-shoring of its parts and material supply chains, plus the ascendance of Artificial Intelligence means millions more projects. That will require multi-millions more project team members and millions more project managers who will need to manage in new and smarter ways.

Enterprises seeking project management personnel must also account for the fact that the long-term trend of businesses having trouble hiring skilled talent is undeniable, with the demand for desired skills outpacing the supply of skilled job applicants.<sup>51</sup>

### **Project Management and PMO Leadership**

The impact of COVID-19 has been enormous for project managers. The pandemic period coupled with modern media providing greater access to information have reshaped the business perspectives of younger generations and made them question whether work should be the center of their lives. This is true across generations because the pandemic crisis also triggered a retirement boom. Additionally, younger workers have seen how short life can be, and how easily their lifestyle can be disrupted by a global crisis like a pandemic or climate change. Many organizations are developing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, such as those related to women, but to realize those DEI aspirations, executive leaders will need to identify appropriate opportunities and take specific actions to make progress within their organizations and support related changes in the broader society.<sup>33</sup>



The pandemic affected many employees’ long-term health, as well as changing how most businesses needed to operate, and it continues to impact how they will operate in the future. Those operational impacts produced a significant and lasting knock-on effect for managing projects, programs, and portfolios. Those effects include modifying the governance of project management organizations, altered strategic planning, more robust risk planning, implementable change management, focused stakeholder management, modified hiring practices, revised job requirements, team member upskilling and reskilling, and remote-talent management.

“The workplaces in 2023 and beyond will be more diverse, distributed, and virtual than ever before. Corporations and even smaller organizations will learn to adapt and cater to shifting employee expectations in the wake of the post-pandemic new normal, and behavioral trends such as the great resignation or the even-more-recent quiet quitting movement.”<sup>28</sup>

Business and project leaders around the world are currently addressing not only economic volatility, geopolitical instability, and the lingering effects of the pandemic but also a range of organizational shifts that have significant implications for structures, processes, and people. The shifts include complex questions, at a time of rapid technological change, about how to:<sup>33</sup>

- ❖ Organize for speed to shore up resilience,
- ❖ Find the right balance between in-person and remote work models,
- ❖ Address employees’ declining mental health, and
- ❖ Build new institutional capabilities.<sup>33</sup>

Larry Fink, BlackRock Chairman and CEO in his 2022 annual letter to other CEOs,<sup>14</sup> referring to the post-pandemic marketplace, stated that we are in a new world of work and that is a good thing. Fink’s business operational views are germane because BlackRock is the world’s largest asset manager, with US \$8.6 trillion in corporate assets under management in 2022. Fink made six salient observations:<sup>14</sup>

- ❖ No relationship has been changed more by the pandemic than the one between employers and employees.
- ❖ The pandemic has turbocharged an evolution in the operating environment for virtually every company.
- ❖ Companies expected workers to come to the office five days a week. Mental health was rarely discussed in the workplace. And wages for those on low and middle incomes barely grew. That world is gone.
- ❖ With respect to record numbers of personnel resigning, it is good that workers are ducking out for bigger and brighter things in the new world of work. And companies that keep up will reap the rewards. Workers seizing new opportunities is a good thing. It demonstrates their confidence in a growing economy.
- ❖ Employees across the globe are looking for more from their employer—including more flexibility and more meaningful work. So as companies rebuild, CEOs now face a profoundly different workplace paradigm than what they were used to.

- ❖ Companies not adjusting to this new reality and responding to their workers do so at their own peril. Turnover drives up expenses, drives down productivity, and erodes culture and corporate memory. CEOs need to be asking themselves whether they are creating an environment that helps them compete for talent.

As with earthquakes, unexpected global business shocks at the right time and place can suddenly release constrained workplace and business forces which build up over decades. The COVID-19 crisis was such an unexpected global shock wave, releasing business-changing forces at a time when geopolitical, technological, sociological, employment, and demographic trends were starting to converge. Now suddenly, these trends are being realized and are creating enormous threats and opportunities. Those enterprises and project management organizations that recognize and effectively respond to these changing trends will be the new winners in the global marketplace. These trends include:

- ❖ Large scale remote and hybrid work forces combined with in-office workers and the use of virtual project teams.
- ❖ Ongoing multi-generational workforce.
- ❖ Upskilling of talent coupled with the desire for related experience and the elimination of college degree requirements for project management positions. (This is also reflected in the newest requirements for becoming certified as a Project Management Profession by the Project Management Institute.)
- ❖ Accelerating deglobalization, which will change material supply and delivery to become more home-country specific.
- ❖ The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which promises to unleash a massive leap in widescale automation and associated productivity, and to create new jobs.
- ❖ Shrinking budgets, which leave little room for errors in managing a project—placing a premium on agility, resourcefulness, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.
- ❖ Enterprises will forge stronger bonds with project personnel, because companies who forged strong bonds with their employees saw lower levels of turnover and higher returns throughout the pandemic.

In the workplace beyond the pandemic, project management will remain a key to success for many enterprises. The future of project management also lies in effectively managing remote work and virtual teams in combination with in-office personnel. For projects to be able to deliver value and benefits, and for businesses to survive in the post-pandemic marketplace, employing talented project managers and upskilled project workers will be more crucial than ever.

Post-pandemic, to position their companies for success, Project Managers should focus not only on the tactical and performance aspects of how people work, but also directly address the changing social-cultural contracts between their enterprise and talent caused by COVID-19. In addition, to support positioning their companies for success, Project Managers need to directly address the

changes to strategic business and project requirements caused by the COVID-19 changes in the project economy and the expansion of the gig economy.

The unprecedented global shift to remote work created by the pandemic transformed the public’s notion of work and the workplace. That has had a lasting impact on how people view their jobs and careers. At the same time the gig economy—which refers specifically to areas of the labor market that utilize independent contractors to fill temporary and part-time positions within organizations and project teams—has also been transforming the world of work.

A large portion of the U.S workforce is undergoing a once-in-a-generation reassessment of what it means to have a fulfilling career and is questioning the traditional entrenched ways of working. Instead, they are seeking out alternate career pathways to find greater professional fulfillment, more meaningful work, work arrangement flexibility, autonomy, and financial stability. Individuals, therefore, are increasingly opting for freelance gigs—temporary contracts and short-term projects—over traditional 9-to-5 full-time permanent jobs. This allows them opportunities to pursue their passions, learn new skills, and earn extra money.<sup>56</sup>

According to Upwork's 2022 Freelance Forward Survey—a representative study of 3,000 professionals—about 39% of the U.S. workforce, or approximately 60 million Americans, performed freelance work in CY2022. Gen Z and Millennials (Gen Y) were the most likely to explore freelancing, with 43% of all Gen Z professionals and 46% of all Millennial professionals performing freelance work.<sup>56</sup>

Leading project teams—not managing teams—not being a people manager—will be the new project management normal post pandemic. Project managers will lead project teams in optimal ways of working by understanding and leveraging inter-generational employee diversity, differences, and capabilities, and managing gig-workers. They will lead and support their teams by employing member coaching and member mentoring to obtain efficient team functioning and foster productive work methods.

Project management leaders need to not only be able to lead themselves, but also exhibit those leadership skills and mindsets required to lead and inspire networks of teams. To do that, they must build a keen awareness of themselves and the operating environments around them.<sup>33</sup>

The right types and styles of upskilled and reskilled project management leadership will be critical to effectively operationalize the emerging hybrid team workforce and to develop an efficient and productive project teamwork model in the post-pandemic marketplace.

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## About the Author



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**Darrel Hubbard** is President of D.G.Hubbard Enterprises, LLC providing executive consulting and assessment services. He has over 50 years of experience in consulting, line management, and technical positions. He has served as a corporate executive officer; managed information technology, proposal, accounting, and project management organizations; managed the due diligence processes for numerous mergers and acquisitions; was a program manager on engineering projects; was a project manager on commercial projects; and a designated “key person” under government contracts. He has also held executive positions in, and was professionally licensed in, the securities and insurance industries.

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Mr. Hubbard holds a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and physics with a minor in chemistry from Minnesota State University at Moorhead. He is a registered Professional Engineer in Control Systems in California. Mr. Hubbard joined the Project Management Institute (PMI) in 1978 (#3662), is a charter member of the PMI San Diego Chapter, and was deputy project manager for the Project Management Body of Knowledge (*PMBOK® Guide* Third Edition ANSI Standard by PMI. He was the Exhibitor Chairperson for the 1993 PMI North American Congress/Seminar/Symposium, is a published author of many articles, a presenter at many PMI Congresses and other Project Management Symposiums, a keynote speaker, and a guest speaker at PMI and IIBA Chapter meetings. Darrel is also a Life-Member of the International Society of Automation (ISA).

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