THE FUTURE OF WORK
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EXPERTS
Dear Readers,

Big data and digital transformation are changing our society in ways we cannot yet fully gauge. It is equally difficult to predict how these approaching changes will affect the future of our work lives. In light of this, it is more important than ever to deal with the future – as unforeseeable as it may seem – and to remain agile and adaptable to new developments and currents. Only then can we continue to actively shape our businesses and keep them fit for a new world.

As a leading international designer and furnisher of modern office and work environments, our mission is to anticipate changes in these areas as early as possible and to provide new, intelligent solutions for our customers.

Earlier Bene Trend Reports have shown that we at Bene have the capability of translating the future into usable office concepts and products. This Bene Future Report provides you with our latest findings and offers a comprehensive overview of what the future of work could look like. The report is based on specialized literature and on the opinion of more than 40 experts from well-established international companies, startups, the science community, and consulting firms. Our team has led numerous interviews with opinion leaders and hosted round table discussions particularly in Berlin, London and Vienna. Based on our research, we believe the following four aspects will play a decisive role in the future of work: Digital Transformation, Leadership, Purpose of Work, Open Collaboration.

In dealing with these four topics, we’ve taken a closer look at trending buzzwords such as robotics, self-organization, artificial intelligence, shared economy, internet of things, fluid leadership, virtual reality, 3D-printing, click worker, and many others. Our (work)life is subject to a series of highly complex and multiple changes, so there is more than one possible future. Instead of suggesting final answers, or insisting on a singular prediction, our primary aim is to portray current moods and to provide food for thought on how businesses can shape their own future. And we at Bene will surely come up with new sustainable concepts and products to help you shape your future. Stay tuned!

We are looking forward to your feedback and exchanging opinions!

Your Bene Team

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Digital transformation is entering all areas of our lives, revolutionizing how we work and live. The following chapter takes a closer look at how digital business models, robotics, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and other digital technologies influence and change life as we know it.

DIGITAL BUSINESS MODELS It's no longer the best product that garners the most success. Experts seem to agree that, in the future, businesses that generate the best data and turn it into the best services will come in first. Even so, the sharing economy and tendencies of giveaway culture also have a downside: Users make their data transparent and thus more vulnerable to manipulation.

ROBOTS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE The young generation of digital natives is expected to deliver intuitive and promising solutions. Various forms of artificial intelligence will increasingly help them. At the same time, routine tasks in production and administration will be performed by robots. While people believe that this development will give individuals greater freedom to do what they enjoy, they are at the same time wary of a difficult transitional phase, in which many people will lose their jobs.

INTERNET OF THINGS One of the last years’ buzzwords describes a world in which not only smartphones and tablets are linked in networks. Everyday objects like refrigerators or washing machines will also be connected as they collect, communicate and process data. These new smart devices will have a life of their own, programmed to invisibly assist people at home and at work. The lasting changes these developments will bring have garnered reactions ranging from breathtakingly impressed to frightened.

OTHER TRANSFORMATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES Technological developments in 3D printing, 3D projectors, VR glasses etc. will have a lasting effect on our daily lives. While some see them as positive innovations in a globalized, mobilized working world, sceptics fear our lives will gradually be taken over and dictated by new technologies.
Digital Transformation

Robotic systems are already self-learning today. By calculating an infinite number of examples, they find new solutions that humans could never conceive. We can’t even retrace how the machine came up with its suggestion. Deeply fascinating, but also a bit spooky.

— Lars Gaede

Artificial Intelligence

Today – at least for an averagely tech-savvy person – it is nearly impossible to escape automated, data-collecting and processing environments. As soon as you use Amazon, Google, Facebook or maybe Siri on your iPhone, you hand your personal data to artificial intelligence software. We should all be aware of this, remarks Prof. Michael Bartz, professor of the International Business Institute at IMC University of Applied Science, Krems.

Facebook experimented with two artificial general intelligences which developed their own language, which was much more efficient than ours. This new language was much shorter to transport their kind of ideas and the human programmers when not able to understand that anymore. That was very creative actually. When we go further than machine learning, when we go into artificial general intelligence, then we come into areas that have the potential to be creative. I am afraid of that.

— Petra Hauser

What do experts think will change?

A study published by the World Economic Forum shows that 65 percent of jobs that we will have ten years do not yet exist today. Researchers also found that most people will have a lot more to do with robotics and artificial intelligence both at work and at home. Whether this is considered a chance or a threat a matter of perspective: Positive voices claim that shorter working hours (or at worst mass unemployment) could lead to people spending their newly found time with meaningful things. On the other hand, there are concerns that “the transitional phase will hurt many, as a lot of people will not be able to cope with a transfer”, Ali Mahlodji, co-founder of Whatchado, believes. Of course politics and the economy are called on to adapt our system accordingly, so the gap between rich and poor doesn’t become even wider. Whether winner-takes-it-all tendencies can be successfully countered will depend heavily on global initiatives.

Whether technological progress will actually have positive effects on work is yet to be known. Will people really have more time to spend on creative tasks or human relationships, while machines take care of boring routine tasks? “Someone was saying to me the other day, to have a job in 20 years’ time, what you need to be is an artist because it’s the thing that computers will struggle to replicate in terms of artificial intelligence. That is an interesting idea”, says Tom Lloyd, co-founder of PearsonLloyd. One thing seems clear: Robots and artificial intelligences will profoundly change organizations and their personnel structures. “We need business leaders who already deal with these issues today, so they can set the right course for the imminent shift”, believes Dr. Peter Schuhmacher, President of Process Research and Chemical Engineering at BASF. Our education system is also in need of a paradigm shift, if we want today’s children to be well-prepared for tomorrow’s job market, experts agree.

What added value do humans have to offer? Whether more than the human touch – as Alibaba founder Jack Ma describes it – will distinguish humans and machines cannot yet be answered today. Researchers assume that differences in quality will be increasingly tied to the question whether something was produced or a service was rendered by humans, or not. “When it comes to functionality, machines can cover the majority of tasks, but the added value of a handmade watch, for example, cannot be replicated. Just like a fast-food chain where robots serve food could never compare to the fancy service you would receive in a top-notch restaurant,” as emphasized by Dietmar Dahmen, Innovation Consultant, Futurologist, Chief Innovation Officer at exc.io an IBM company, author and speaker and the founder of the Bamm-Institut. It is obvious that progress in the development of artificial intelligence will substantially change internal processes and the customer experience. For example, instead of human customer service, many businesses today rely on chatbots who have automated conversations with their customers.

Experts believe that we need to agree on global rules for artificial intelligence as soon as possible. “Otherwise we may cross a point of no return and lose control over the subject. Policymakers in the US, Europe and the rest of the world aren’t as aware of the subject as they should be”, says Dietmar Dahmen.

The major advances in robotics and artificial intelligence we are currently experiencing are based on three factors. Firstly, on rapidly increasing processing power, which allows machines to react and make decisions in the blink of an eye. Secondly, on the growing amount of data volume: By comparing a situation with a seemingly endless amount of examples, a robot or processor can identify patterns and react specifically to solve problems. And thirdly, on algorithms, which are becoming more and more optimized. Experts note that machines have surpassed human intelligence in many fields. But human acceptance is the decisive factor in determining whether, and to what extent, artificial intelligence will spread and enter our private and work lives.
LEADSHIP
77 percent of business leaders in Germany believe that we need a paradigm shift in leadership culture.* Network economy doesn’t work so well with traditional hierarchal structures, but rather thrives on cooperation, self-organization and teamwork among equals. The following chapter explores how businesses organize themselves and manage their staff in the future.

**FLUID LEADERSHIP**

In an unpredictable, globalized, and increasingly complex world, traditional management mechanisms like command & control no longer get the job done.** Like an orchestra conductor or coach, managers face the challenge of coordinating their staff to reach a common goal. This requires staying focussed on the big picture, while also paying attention to people’s individual strengths and weaknesses. In this sense, ‘fluid’ stands for a new permeability in business structures, going beyond traditional communication channels and hierarchies.

**SELF-ORGANIZATION**

As work processes are becoming more and more complex and difficult to standardize, executives’ expectations are changing, too. Nowadays, managers seek employees who deal with their tasks independently and self-sufficiently. Experts agree that trust and responsibility are key factors in this development, which can also have positive effects on motivation and stability.

**SELF-ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS**

The fact that businesses are fluid systems and not static entities, is often overlooked. Many things can neither be anticipated, nor planned, as human interactions constantly change and evolve. It is up to smart leaders to understand and support this co-evolution and to support employees in their learning process and teamwork efforts.

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Leadership

WHAT ARE SELF-ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS? Businesses have always been complex, adaptive systems, but not until recent changes brought about by technological, political and economic developments has this approach garnered more attention and further research in practice. The basic assumption on self-adaptive systems is that all parts of an organisation interact and continuously influence each other. This co-evolution means that every action leads to multiple unpredictable reactions. Some connections are stronger, while others are weaker. We surely should not assume a rigid structure, but rather a lively, constantly evolving organism”, explains Markus Spiegel, Ph.D. and partner at Schaffer Consulting New York. Business leaders should look at the fundamental dynamics of this organism from a systemic, holistic perspective.

WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP CULTURE MEAN? Business leaders today must do more than make decisions. Staff must be taken along and involved in the process. Only when they share responsibility can decisions lead to lasting success. Trust and communication are key factors. Employees should also be supported in their learning process and collaboration – this opinion is a common theme in expert interviews.

Paying too much attention to control numbers and projections seems to be the wrong path, many experts believe. Large corporations usually work with multi-layered management structures, tuned to minimizing risks. This approach, however, is no longer fit for today’s fast-paced world. “We must learn to allow much more ambiguity and a deep increase in uncertainty when it comes to information. It is becoming more and more difficult to find clear interpretations, while misunderstandings are multiplying. The complexity of our lives, the multi-layered, multi-channelled interaction of many, at times unknown, variables will continue to increase along with the growing stream of data. Our system, our relationships to each other and the flow of decision-relevant knowledge have undergone fundamental changes.

This meant that other aspects of leading could be more flexible because everyone in the organisation knew where they were going and they felt supported, so they were willing to step into the unknown. Complex thinking leaders understand what needs to be tight so that people have room to innovate – that is how they create adaptive companies. Leadership

During my studies, I found out that leaders that create adaptive systems are complex thinkers. They understand the fact that you can’t control; you have to steer because you are dealing with something that is dynamic. They didn’t talk about it in terms of these concepts but all of them actually understand them as leaders. They had three things in common no matter what kind of organisation it was – all had a really clear idea of what they were there to do (which they communicated); all had a tight set of values and all were pragmatic optimists.

– Prof. Fiona Kerr, Ph.D.
PURPOSE OF WORK
While what makes a job purposeful means different things for different people, experts agree that the idea of finding purpose in work is becoming more and more important. What employees expect from their work is becoming increasingly nuanced. Especially young talents are becoming more pronounced in their wishes. Policymakers face the challenge of adapting the existing educational system and labour laws to tomorrow’s needs.

**THE MEANING OF WORK** Millennials have high demands when it comes to their employers. Work is not only supposed to be fun, it should also serve a higher purpose. Customers are no longer the only ones who base their decision for a product or service on a company’s social and environmental behaviour; today’s employees are just as critical of the business they work for.

**EMPLOYER BRANDING** A business trying to recruit tomorrow’s talent has to offer more than a decent salary and attractive benefits. Organizational culture and individual development opportunities have become major points for job seekers. A healthy work-life balance has also never been as important as today.

**NEW WAYS WE WORK** Digital transformation and globalization go hand in hand with the trend of more unconventional forms of work. People are paid for the work they get done instead of for hours spent in the office; work conditions in general have become more flexible. Workshifting, for example, describes a modern concept based on defining work independently from time or place. Models like this subsequently bring about changes in leadership styles and communication strategies within and between businesses.

**SOCIO-POLITICAL EFFECTS** Robots taking over routine tasks in production are a phenomenon we are familiar with. Thanks to the continuous development of artificial intelligence, even more jobs will be passed on to machines in the future, some fear. At the same time, this will create new job profiles, requiring new skills and qualifications. As a result, voices calling for timely reforms and adjustments in education and labour laws are becoming louder.
Numerous studies confirm that collaborative businesses – where individual achievements are channelled into the efforts of a common whole – have more long-term success on the market than others.* Practices of inter-divisional collaboration and bilateral exchange between businesses have never been as widespread as today.

OPEN COLLABORATION

INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE As businesses delve deeper into digital transformation and global presence, they must also deal with the side effect of depersonalization. Experts agree that we need places where people – as social beings – can fulfil their need for personal exchange. This holds true for both work environments and contact points for customers.

INNOVATION NEEDS INTERACTION Silicon Valley is a perfect example of how productive letting go of the idea of perfectionism can be. And how important it is to involve customers in the development process. The increasing opening of the innovation process makes it more necessary than ever to incorporate impulses and know-how from external partners and experts.

INTEGRATION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND MACHINES In the future, nearly all sectors will increasingly apply artificial intelligence. Issues that arise when people and machines intersect must be resolved as soon as possible, experts believe.

*Gloor, P. (2016) “To Bee or not to Bee”, GDI Impuls No.3
EXPERTS

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