

# Remodelling approaches to work – Analysing and discussing current issues

## Facts

The pandemic hit societies hard. For many, people and businesses alike, it meant new ways of working had to be adopted more or less overnight. Home office was the main answer, but it came with problems ranging from where one could work (the kitchen table or the bedroom), sharing a limited space with a partner who also had home office, having conference calls whilst the children were screaming to inadequate Internet speeds.

Despite all the negative factors relating to remote working, many people discovered they could actually work from home with little or no need for their offices. In addition, a flexible workday was more family friendly especially regarding younger children. Money and time were also saved by not having to travel to work.

Companies, though, had issues to face. They had expensive offices and needed to persuade contented homeworkers to return to them. Furthermore, social interaction had been missing, which is necessary for team building, work relationships and gaining quick answers to minor problems. Subsequently, a compromise developed in the form of hybrid working: employees could divide their week between the company office and home office. However, empty desks meant wasted space, resulting, in some cases, in hot desks, which employees dislike since they lose their personalised office space.

Parallel to the pandemic upheaval, young people, Generation Z in particular, were analysing their work-life balance and were finding the “life aspect” was increasingly lacking. Being away from the daily treadmill, many people re-evaluated their former office practices and became critical of them. There was a realisation that if one had a flexible working day, remote working or a four-day week, childcare became far easier and there was less stress and more leisure time. Totally remote working also meant one was not committed to living in expensive city suburbs.

A rethink of how talent is used is the theme in **topic 3**. The article considers ageism in the workforce and how older workers are viewed, together with myths and stereotyping surrounding them. Students must formulate explanations to statements, and they are then provided with work-related issues to write about. Euan Blair saw that in finance almost everyone was white, male and came from a privileged background, and employers were continuing to select people from a limited pool who frequently lack the necessary skills. In the video, Blair explains why he started his successful Multiverse business as an alternative to university with the aim of creating a diverse group of future leaders. The worksheet contains a multiple choice task and an opportunity to write about education relevant to employment.

**Topic 4** looks at the issue of achieving a good work-life balance: that balance, however, frequently tips towards work rather than leisure time. Students read an article in support of a four-day working week and the reasoning behind that opinion. Tasks involve answering questions relating to the text and describing and analysing a cartoon. Issues concerning remote working are given to be discussed. After completing the tasks, students are asked to express views on their preferred working model. One recent development is a situation called “quiet quitting”: people doing their jobs as written in their contracts and for the stated number of hours but nothing more. A German text concerning this phenomenon is provided for students to mediate.

**Topics 5** includes two cartoons which reflect on business practices and people’s attitudes. Students are asked to describe and analyse the cartoons and, in each case, they are given a quotation to reflect upon and relate to the scenes. Finally, they are asked how they would react to given situations when considering employment.

## Key: M3 Worksheet – Video: *The Changing World of Work*

### Listening/viewing comprehension

1. Watch the first section of the video (00:00–00:38). Tick the summary which best describes many people's workdays.
  - ✓ Routine and mindlessness
2. Watch the rest of the video (00:38–06:15). Take notes concerning the content under the headings provided. These notes will be used later.
  - a) *Examples of work inefficiency and distractions (00:38–01:09)*  
clearing emails (whole day) / the average information worker is disturbed 7–11 times an hour / IQ temporarily reduced by interruptions
  - b) *A chief executive's statement about his workforce (01:09–01:40)*  
11% interested / 70% just for money / 19% disliked the company and would sabotage it
  - c) *Changes (positive/negative) in the world of work (01:41–02:06)*  
Negative: uninterested workers / automation, a job threat (50% in USA)  
Positive: new companies creating value / yearly, there are billion-dollar start-ups
  - d) *Two examples of what the digital world can bring (02:07–02:32)*  
new ideas / new insights / new people / new relationships / new opportunities
  - e) *Changes needed (02:32–03:16)*  
(mindsets) / way of working (not up to the speed of change) / workplaces, software and technology designed for scarcity of information and need to be for the abundance of information instead
  - f) *Contrast home and work usage (03:18–03:27)*  
use a lot of technology, but not in the office
  - g) *Company methods (03:42–03:51)*  
often old fashioned / similar to the Industrial Revolution / still aimed solely towards large-scale production
  - h) *Historical reference (03:51–04:11)*  
Ford's model: efficiency, speed of production, minimal costs (e. g., only black used)
  - i) *Reason for a new approach (04:02–04:31)*  
speed and more interconnection = less predictability / cannot plan for the future
  - j) *Two sides of the modern world defined (04:31–04:48)*  
too much information and constant communication / immense creative possibilities as a result
  - k) *Two examples of challenges that companies are facing (04:48–05:17)*  
(how to ...) lead / create value / organise / create culture of experiment without judgement / budget when priorities change / assign resources / manage

4. *Point out the failings of using AI tools in the job candidate selection process.*

The journalist cites Martin Burch as an example of AI technology failing to identify a well-qualified and suitable candidate for a job. Burch had had a successful career with the Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones. When he applied for a position with Bloomberg in London, which matched him perfectly, he was sent a digital assessment to complete that appeared pointless to him since it simply involved working out patterns and had nothing to do with his ability or experience. The following day, he received a job rejection from a computer (ll. 3–13). The increased use of AI technology and algorithms to sift through job applications has created the anomaly that many jobs are vacant although there are numerous candidates suitable to fill these positions; but they are being rejected through the digital technology assessment (ll. 14–18). 88% of executives are aware that qualified candidates are being overlooked because of the processing (ll. 41/42). Furthermore, the technology tends to discriminate against women and uses criteria inappropriate for assessing a person's potential for the job (ll. 22–24). The failings are not solely a result of the software being used. There is a human factor that is causing the AI selection process to miss ideal candidates. Employers are increasingly adding more and more desirable criteria to their job descriptions. This, in turn, means the algorithms reject people who do not fulfil every criteria in the long list of them. Since well-qualified people are being rejected due to a low score in an area that is not directly needed for the job, although scoring highly in essential areas, it results in mediocre candidates going through to the next stage of the overall selection process (ll. 52–62). Furthermore, women tend to be discriminated against due to the long list of job requirements because they tend to be put off by it and only apply when they fulfil most of the criteria (ll. 62–64). The technology also fails to recognise the reason for a gap in the résumé. It automatically rejects anyone with a career break of more than six months despite their qualifications (ll. 65–71).

### Writing

5. *Express your views regarding whether the AI method of initial candidate selection is fairer than employers reading all the applications themselves. Justify your opinions with sound reasoning.*

Individual results. Possible arguments:

Fair:

- All candidates face the same questions regardless of their ethnicity, sex, education or social class.
- Employers/recruiters cannot read every application and thus ignore many of them; AI assesses every candidate.

about him/her. The cartoon and the statement contrast vividly, but to some extent both illustrate that selecting a new employee is not straight forward since many considerations play a role in appointments, unfortunately not always positive ones, either.

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### Discussion

5. *Discussions are an opportunity to express views and expand on issues as far as possible. In your class discuss the following points:*
- a) *Would you work for a company whose policies do not agree with your own beliefs, for example an oil company when you support the Greens?*
  - b) *When looking for work, are company ethics important to you?*
  - c) *Before applying for a job would you research a company's record on diversity?*
  - d) *If you are invited to a job interview, it would be fair to presume that the other candidates are similarly qualified. How would you try to convince an interviewer, therefore, that you were the most suitable one?*
  - e) *What value do you place on non-work-related experiences?*
- Individual results.