

LEAP DAY OF THE SWAN

Futures Wheel Exercise - Pre-Read

29th February 2024





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Facilitator's Welcome

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Dear curious mind,

Thank you for registering for our first Leap Day Event hosted by the Grey Swan Guild.

A recent Guild discussion about a Leap Day-related event inspired me to learn more about this every-four-year phenomenon. As I researched Leap Day, I realized that it's "just another day" unless you marry that day or are a Leaping (born on Feb 29th). It wasn't always the case, though. In North America, Leap Day was traditionally celebrated with two-day national parties and the reversal of cultural norms.

To our Guild, however, this year is an opportunity: a four-year recurring day that can be utilized as a benchmark or capsule of sorts of scenarios that we can prognosticate and then revisit. The Guild has a knack for foresight and future thinking, so I decided to showcase our experts, their skill sets and Guild tools we use. Based on the "Leap" our world made from Feb 29th, 2020 to now, we all know a lot can happen in four years.

So what should you expect?

We are curating an interactive event for people to participate in our tradecraft of foresight and future thinking. At the end of this pre-read you will find a set of recent articles that highlight four different lenses to view the topic "Work from Home". The four lenses are [Work Culture](#), [CEO Perspectives](#), [Employee Perspectives](#), and [Economic Implications](#).

This pre-read will take 20-30 minutes to complete and acts as a primer for our interactive discussion and activities.



We will start off discussing the subject as a group, touching on articles and aspects of this workforce transition along with some fun mixed in. We will examine four different We will then divide into four breakout sessions to work with a Futures Wheel tool.

Using this tool our moderators will guide the group through complex relationships and current trends to tease out various aspects of remote work in the next four years.

The Grey Swan Guild will then study this information, compile it, and present the participants with a report that will be published with credit to all. Then on Leap Day of 2028, we can see where the trends took us, review our assumptions, and evaluate the surprises we did or didn't predict.

Where to start?

Start off with the Executive Summary, it gives you a short deep dive on current content regarding work from home. Dive deep on one or all four of the categories in this pre-read. And then let your imagination be sparked and ask yourself:

What will this mean for our futures?

Looking forward to forecasting together.

Your host

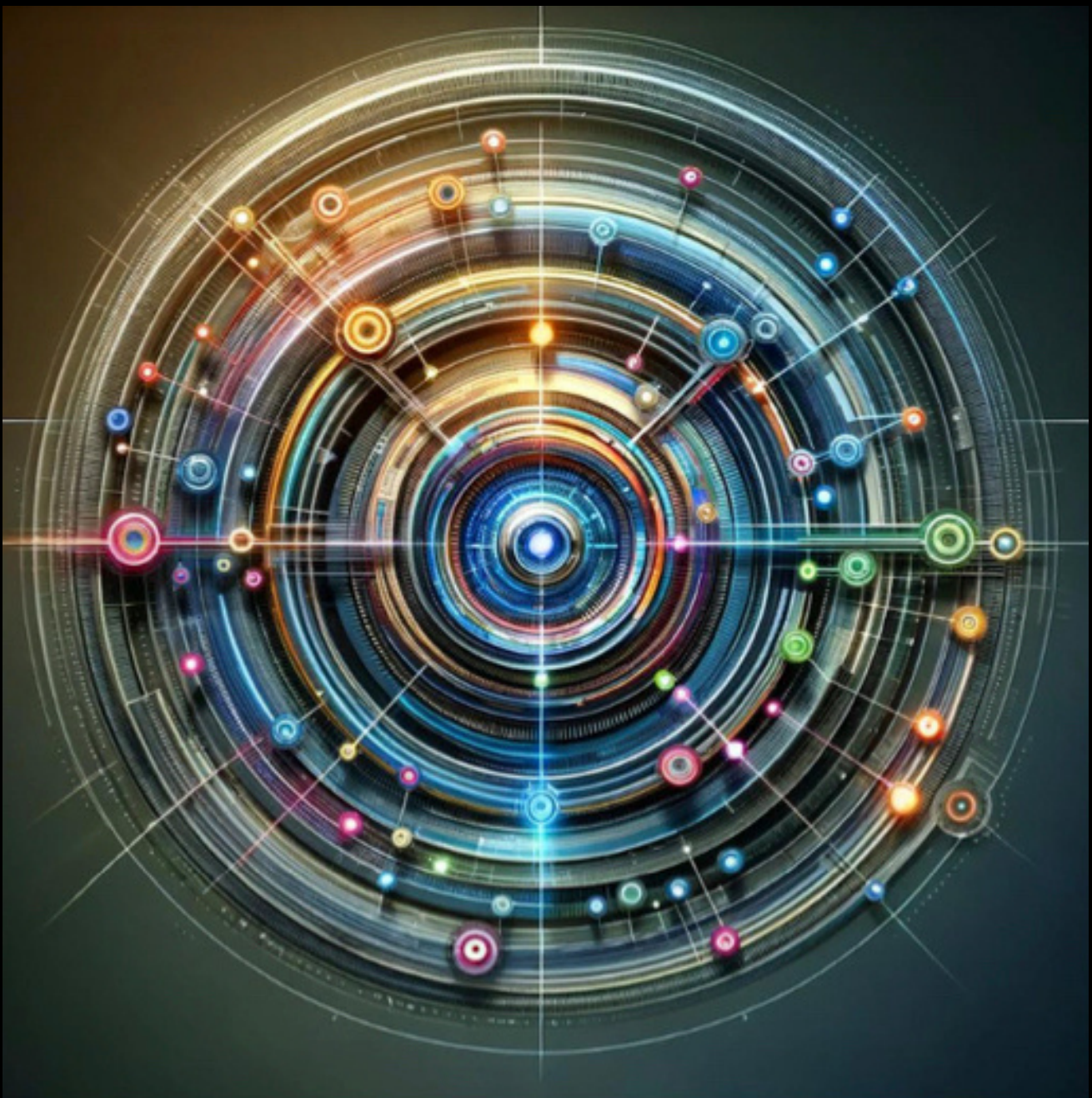
Scott Phares

and the Grey Swan Guild Team



A brief overview of Futures Wheels and how to use them

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A Futures Wheel is an insightful tool designed for exploring and mapping out the potential ripple effects of a single change or innovation, much like throwing a pebble into a pond and watching the ripples expand outward.

To use a Futures Wheel, you jot down a significant change or trend relevant to your work or industry inside a circle. From this initial nucleus, draw lines outward to connect to smaller circles, capturing the second-level consequences, and so on. This process creates a visual web, or 'wheel' of cascading effects.

A Futures Wheel offers a structured yet creative approach to anticipate and prepare for the multifaceted impacts of changes, be they technological advancements, policy shifts, or cultural transformations. By engaging with this tool, you can strategically visualize and plan for both immediate and far-reaching implications of new trends.

For the Grey Swan Leap Day event, we will be divided into breakout rooms - one for each lens: [Work Culture](#), [CEO Perspectives](#), [Employee Perspectives](#), and [Economic Implications](#). Each breakout room will create a Futures Wheel for their lens, and then report out to the rest of the group.

What happens to our wheels?

The wheels and notes from the session will be synthesized by volunteer report writers. (Want to participate in writing the report? Let us know by completing this [form](#).)

We will review this report at the next Leap Year in 2028 and see how aligned our prognostications were.



Executive Summary
generated by
Chat-GPT-4

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The discussions around work from home (WFH) have evolved significantly over the years, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which acted as a catalyst for a massive transition towards remote working. This shift has prompted various challenges and opportunities, reshaping the future of work and how companies and employees adapt to this new norm.

One of the main discussions revolves around the effectiveness of remote work. Studies and reports indicate that remote work has led to increased productivity among workers. For instance, during the initial stages of the pandemic, productivity among remote workers saw a significant increase, with activities such as emailing, telephoning, and chat messaging all climbing. This dispels the initial concerns many employers had regarding potential productivity losses with remote work. The Buffer's 2023 State of Remote Work report further supports this by showing that a vast majority of workers enjoy working remotely, citing flexibility as the biggest benefit.

However, remote work is not without its challenges. According to Zapier, some of the biggest hurdles include working too much, prioritizing work, dealing with interruptions, loneliness, communication issues, technology hiccups, and bad health habits. These challenges highlight the importance of establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life, ensuring effective communication, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle while working remotely [Source: Zapier.com] .



To address these challenges and make the most out of remote work, companies and employees are encouraged to adapt their approaches. This includes setting clear expectations, utilizing performance indicators to monitor productivity remotely, and leveraging technology to maintain effective communication. Video conferencing and coworking spaces have become essential tools, enabling seamless remote work and fostering a sense of community among remote workers. Moreover, companies are increasingly recognizing the need to support their remote workforce by covering expenses related to hardware, office equipment, and internet service.

The future of work appears to be leaning towards more remote and hybrid models as technological advances, particularly in AI, continue to facilitate the management of remote staff. This trend suggests that remote work, in various forms, is here to stay.

Embracing workplace innovation and improving remote work policies and capabilities will be crucial for organizations to remain competitive and accommodate the growing expectations of the workforce for flexible work environments.

In summary, while remote work presents numerous benefits such as increased productivity and job satisfaction, it also comes with its set of challenges. Overcoming these requires a concerted effort from both employers and employees to adapt and innovate, ensuring remote work remains an effective and sustainable option in the evolving landscape of work.



Deep Dive Session 1: Hybrid Work Trends and Future Work Culture

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Stanford Remote Work Expert: The Return to Office Wars Are Over. Hybrid Work Won.

The battle between management and workers over the future of work post-pandemic has subsided with hybrid work emerging as the victor, but the terms of this peace are far from permanent. While the current compromise of three days in the office and two days at home may suit many, the evolving landscape of technology begs the question: How will future advancements reshape the balance between in-person and remote work, and what unforeseen challenges might arise as a result?

We're now finding out the damaging results of the mandated return to the office—and it's worse than we thought.

The mandate to return to the office is revealing unforeseen consequences, highlighted by a trio of compelling reports. Employees are expressing a strong preference for flexible work policies, with a staggering 76% willing to seek new opportunities if these policies are revoked. The emergence of flexible work as the queen in talent acquisition and retention strategies underscores a critical question: How can organizations adapt to embrace flexibility as the new standard while mitigating the risks of employee turnover and dissatisfaction?



The Surge of Remote Work in the Digital Age.

The global workforce is undergoing an unprecedented shift towards remote work, propelled by technological advancements and evolving employee expectations. As companies embrace this transformation, what strategies will they employ to maintain team cohesion, support equitable access to resources, and foster sustainable remote work cultures? Moreover, how will the ongoing evolution of remote work practices shape the future of the workplace, innovation, and work-life balance in the digital age?

What remote-first Gen Zers want at work.

As Gen Z dominates the workforce with their preference for flexibility and work-life balance, the demand for genuine mentorship and connections becomes increasingly apparent. With the generation prioritizing holistic well-being and career growth, how can organizations adapt their mentorship programs to meet the evolving needs of early career professionals in a hybrid work environment? Additionally, how might the shift towards more casual communication and increased focus on mental health among young employees reshape traditional workplace dynamics in the years to come?



The future of work depends on understanding Gen Alpha now

As Generation Alpha emerges as the largest cohort in history, businesses face a critical juncture akin to past generational shifts. With nearly two billion Alphas set to reshape culture and economies, the question arises: Are organizations prepared to harness their potential or risk falling behind, as seen with previous generational transitions? By proactively understanding and adapting to the unique needs and values of Alphas, businesses can pave the way for inclusive, stable, and community-driven workplaces of the future.

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Deep Dive Session 2: CEO Perspectives and Decision-Making

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The CEO 'return to office or else' is having limited success in 2024.

The emergence of stringent return-to-office mandates by companies like Boeing and UPS underscores a growing tension between employer policies and employee desires for flexibility and autonomy. While some firms double down on in-office requirements, others grapple with resistance and disengagement, sparking questions about the long-term viability of such mandates in a rapidly evolving work landscape. How can companies balance the need for collaboration and productivity with the demand for flexibility and employee satisfaction in a post-pandemic world where remote work has become deeply entrenched?

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CEOs thought the return to office debate was over. It looks like they were wrong.

As companies grapple with the return-to-office debate, data from New York City's office market indicates that many employees are still asserting their autonomy. While mandates have been implemented, office visitation rates have plateaued, signaling resistance to a full return. The challenge for employers lies in striking a balance between their return-to-office policies and the evolving needs and expectations of their workforce. How can companies navigate this delicate balance while fostering a workplace culture that prioritizes employee well-being and productivity in a post-pandemic world?



Mark Zuckerberg's new return-to-office mandate is a clear problem, says Harvard expert: It'll cause a 'huge amount of distrust'.

The tumultuous shifts in Meta's return-to-office policies under CEO Mark Zuckerberg spotlight broader issues of leadership transparency and empathy, raising concerns about trust and employee morale. As companies navigate post-pandemic work dynamics, the balance between driving results and fostering empathy becomes increasingly delicate, posing a crucial question: How can leaders cultivate trust and understanding while implementing necessary workplace changes in an evolving landscape?

Why a CEO says bosses should embrace 'coffee badging': 'I don't hire people to watch them work'.

In an era dominated by in-office mandates, CEO Frank Weishaupt of Owl Labs champions flexibility, encouraging employees to embrace unconventional schedules and remote work arrangements, even endorsing the practice of "coffee badging" as a means to balance social interaction and productivity. As traditional notions of office attendance clash with evolving work preferences, Weishaupt's approach raises pertinent questions about the future of workplace dynamics and the role of trust in fostering employee autonomy and engagement. How can organizations navigate the tension between rigid office mandates and the growing demand for flexibility to cultivate a work environment that prioritizes both productivity and employee well-being?



The Great Mismatch: Why Employers And Employees Are No Longer In Sync.

The pandemic accelerated a shift towards remote work, prompting a rapid adoption of flexible arrangements that would have otherwise taken years. Yet, as the world reopens, many employers are pushing for a return to traditional office-based work, creating a significant mismatch in expectations between employees seeking remote work and employers advocating for in-person attendance. How can organizations bridge this gap to create sustainable work environments that meet the needs of both employers and employees, especially amidst growing job market complexities and economic uncertainties?



Deep Dive Breakout 3: Challenges to and Impact on Employees

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We're Now Finding Out The Damaging Results of The Mandated Return to Office – And It's Worse Than We Thought.

The mandate to return to office spaces is proving to have dire consequences, as evidenced by a trio of reports revealing increased attrition rates and recruitment struggles among companies enforcing this policy. With 76% of employees ready to seek new opportunities if flexible work policies are revoked, the clash between traditional office models and the desire for flexibility becomes glaringly evident. How can companies navigate this evolving landscape to retain talent and maintain productivity in an era where flexibility reigns supreme?

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There's one big reason why workers don't want to go back to the office 5 days a week.

The pandemic highlighted the feasibility of remote work for a multitude of job roles, challenging traditional notions perpetuated by figures like Elon Musk, who deems it "morally wrong." Yet, despite this realization, major corporations such as Amazon and Apple are spearheading a return-to-office movement, prompting employees to grapple with the toll of commuting, which not only drains finances but also exacerbates stress and compromises mental well-being. As the debate over remote versus in-office work intensifies, how can businesses balance the desire for face-to-face collaboration with the growing recognition of the detrimental effects of commuting on employee health and productivity?



The forced return to the office is the definition of insanity.

The stubborn insistence of CEOs on returning employees to the office despite evidence showing declining productivity begs the question: Are leaders truly prioritizing results, or are they clinging to outdated norms? As the workforce seeks a balance between office collaboration and remote efficiency, how can companies adapt their approach to mentoring and productivity to thrive in the evolving landscape of work?

Why The Traditional Office Is Dead.

The demise of the traditional office heralds a new era of work, one defined by flexibility, collaboration, and employee-centricity. Yet, as we embrace hybrid and remote models, are we neglecting the essential need for in-person connection and camaraderie, or can we redefine office spaces as hubs of innovation and well-being? By investing in flexible workspaces, fostering inclusive cultures, and leveraging initiatives like reverse mentoring, organizations can navigate the evolving landscape of work and harness the full potential of Generation Alpha, creating workplaces that inspire and empower across generations.



After Being Told They Could Work From Home Forever, Employees Made Major Life Changes. Then, a New CEO Ordered Them Back to the Office.

Farmers Group's abrupt shift back to in-office work highlights the clash between employee expectations and corporate mandates, sparking outrage among staff who had made life-altering decisions based on promises of remote work permanence. As businesses grapple with the post-pandemic landscape, the incident raises poignant questions about the balance between employer authority and employee autonomy in shaping the future of work. How can companies navigate such transitions while maintaining trust and transparency with their workforce, especially when faced with conflicting priorities and expectations?

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Deep Dive Breakout 4: Economic Implications

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Expert says return-to-office is costing the average worker \$561 a month.

As the push for returning to the office gains traction, employees are grappling with the financial strain and loss of flexibility associated with in-office mandates, with estimated monthly expenses reaching \$561. Amidst this, the erosion of work-life balance due to long commutes and the loss of home-related conveniences are exacerbating discontent among workers. Looking ahead, employers must confront the question: In a landscape where remote work proves cheaper, environmentally friendly, and conducive to employee happiness, what drives the insistence on traditional office culture, and how can companies adapt to meet evolving employee needs while maintaining productivity and morale?

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The Ticking Time Bomb in America's Downtowns

The looming "debt wall" in commercial real estate, amounting to \$1.5 trillion, poses a substantial threat to the stability of the economy and urban landscapes. As downtown office buildings struggle with underwater loans and rising vacancies, the ripple effects extend beyond the real estate sector, impacting city property taxes, urban vitality, and regional banking stability. Amidst this turmoil, what strategies will emerge to revitalize downtown areas, repurpose vacant buildings, and navigate the complex interplay between lenders, property owners, and urban communities?



Companies still have way too much office space, and they can't sell it.

Corporate real estate faces unprecedented challenges amidst the rise of remote work and economic uncertainty, with a staggering surplus of 232 million square feet up for sub-leasing, twice the level before the pandemic. While some owners may be tempted to sell, experts caution against it, predicting a dramatic slowdown in investment activity and potential distress sales in the coming years. Amidst this turbulence, the question arises: How can companies navigate the uncertain future of corporate real estate to make strategic decisions that safeguard their financial stability and long-term viability?

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McKinsey report details how hybrid work is 'here to stay' and the ripple effects on real estate.

McKinsey & Co.'s latest report underscores the profound challenges cities and commercial real estate sectors face in adapting to the long-term ramifications of hybrid work models. With office attendance down by 30% on average compared to pre-pandemic levels, a pivotal question emerges: How can urban stakeholders and developers innovate to repurpose underutilized office spaces and foster sustainable urban development in the era of hybrid work? As cities grapple with rising vacancy rates and shifting demand dynamics, the need for adaptive, mixed-use infrastructure becomes increasingly urgent to ensure resilience and revitalization in urban centers.



Companies Requiring Full-Time In-Office Are Struggling to Recruit New Employees.

As companies grapple with the decision to implement in-office mandates or maintain flexible work policies, emerging data suggests that the latter may hold the key to sustained growth and talent retention. The Flex Index reveals that firms offering flexible work arrangements are experiencing faster expansion rates compared to those enforcing full-time in-office requirements. Yet, amidst this shift, questions linger: How will companies balance productivity and connectivity in a hybrid work environment? And what role will flexibility play in shaping the future of talent acquisition and organizational success?

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Don't be an ostrich.
Be the swan.



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