

Copyrighted Material



Future Work

How Businesses Can Adapt and Thrive in the New World of Work

Alison Maitland & Peter Thomson



Copyrighted Material

Pay depends on their performance and the volume of service they provide. Some clients pay a simple rate, generally 25 cents per minute of talk time, some pay a base rate in addition to a bonus for commission and some pay entirely on commission.¹⁹ Such 'e-lance' businesses are open to criticism over their pay rates and lack of employment rights, benefits and job security. However, LiveOps says that 'an average agent can make well over minimum wage' and points to the flexibility that freelance operators have.

Agents can choose where they work, although calls can only be routed to their regular business line, not re-routed if they are traveling. They can choose when to provide their services, which can be in blocks of just 30 minutes, and it is up to them whether to develop their skills or not.

Maynard Webb, chairman and CEO of LiveOps, argues that this work model does not replace existing models but creates opportunities for people who do not want to, or cannot, work in the traditional way. 'There is a huge need just for a solution for part-time remote work and we are pleased to be solving this today.'²⁰

With a large dispersed and independent workforce, Webb says it is necessary to find ways of building 'a self-sustaining community'. 'We provide our contract workforce with access to resources to interact as a community, motivate each other and self-regulate their own businesses' performance.' There is a LiveOps University, which runs e-learning programs, and there are discussion groups on topics such as building a successful business and creating performance-based goals.

Despite past proposals for legislative changes that would make it more difficult for such companies to rely on an army of independent contractors rather than employees, LiveOps told us its business model was not under threat. In March 2011, it announced a partnership with the city of Newark, New Jersey, to create new work opportunities and said it was looking at similar partnerships with other US cities and states.

At what might be considered the other end of the work scale, **Eden McCallum** is a UK-based management consulting firm that draws on a pool of 400 independent consultants and matches them to clients' projects, but does not employ them directly. Launched in 2000, it has attracted highly qualified professionals who want more control over their working lives while maintaining their earning power. About half the consultants previously worked for big firms such as McKinsey, Bain and Boston Consulting Group.

As founding director Liann Eden explains, strong interpersonal skills are as important as ever in managing the consultants, even though this network model is based on looser affiliations than the traditional employer-employee contract. They still need feedback, reinforcement and a sense of belonging. 'Being very clear in our communications is very important in

this network model,' she says. 'We've got very good at setting clear expectations about the frequency and nature of the work up front. They know exactly where they stand. They know our standards.'

To ensure effective communication, the firm uses a contact management system that records every contact with each consultant, every project they have done and every client they have worked with. It also captures all the information about and feedback on the consultant from interviews, references and project debriefs. This means that the in-house team can interact knowledgeably with the consultants, almost as if they were staff.

The firm also runs regular information and training events for the consultants to meet, exchange experiences and stay on top of developments. 'That's where they get a sense of identity,' says Charlotte Cameron, the partner leading the firm's consultant-focused activities. 'People say it's great to feel part of something. We also get consultants together to tell them what we're planning for the future of the firm. It's about sharing information with them so that we as an organization are not a black hole.'

Trust is a big part of the relationship, as the firm's founders discovered. After they launched in 2000, they were worried that some of their growing pool of consultants might bypass them and seek work directly from their client companies or vice versa. They required them to sign a contract saying they could approach the clients only through Eden McCallum. 'Two to three years in, we realized that the consultants and clients aren't interested in one-off transactions,' says Eden. 'The consultants want to work with us as a conduit to lots of interesting clients and projects. Clients want to work with us to solve many different issues, not just what one consultant can do. Over the past 10 years we've done over 1000 projects and I can count on one hand the number of times someone tried to go behind our backs.'²¹

In summary

We are on the cusp of the next big transformation in the model of work. Today technology allows us to work very differently than we did even a decade ago, and the new generation joining the workforce is not the only one demanding a new deal. Demographic and social trends, particularly the changing role of women, all point to the need for a fresh approach to work. We are poised for a revolution in working practices.

In Chapter 3 we show how future work will emerge as a product of these changes, built on a model of individual autonomy and a culture of trust and responsibility.