



**“THE INFLEXIBILITY OF OUR HISTORIC MONDAY TO FRIDAY, 9-5, 37.5HR WEEK NO LONGER MEETS THE CONSTANTLY EVOLVING NEEDS OF A MODERN BUSINESS, NOR THE PEOPLE WHO WORK WITHIN IT.**

# The Future of Work in the Digital Age

**WHAT’S MORE, THE NOTION OF BEING TETHERED TO A FIXED GEOGRAPHY, IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO TALENT, IS NOW COMPLETELY OUTDATED.”**



**Keir Greenwood has been elected to the GSA Council as a talent and the future of work evangelist. Keir is an experienced client and operations leader, with wide ranging business competencies, developed over many years in the outsourcing industry. We asked him some questions before he joined us to speak at our Symposium this June.**



***What is the way to approach disruptive technology? Should firms embrace the competition or work to suppress and remove it?***

Disruptive is a term often overused when describing something that is just different, though ironically (as an adjective) often means troublesome. Most innovations, iterations or advancements in technology happen because there is a better way of performing a connected process or function and, with that in mind, business should be embracing with both metaphorical arms. The notion of suppressing them, at least to me, suggests that the organisation is too rigid to adapt to a changing market or need, in itself a bigger problem. Energy invested in avoidance or suppression could be far better spent in enhancing and exceeding.

***Will the digital economy drastically change the structure and architecture of organisations and presage serious change in the way we work? How will this affect organisations?***

Once you filter the prolific hype (good and bad) around the digital economy, there exists a clear statement of intent around meeting the needs of business and industry and, of equal importance, the needs of the modern and emerging workforce. I spent a decade in the recruitment and staffing industry, for a company that created the very notion of temporary work, back in 1946. The archives show that, as a new way of working back then, not everyone supported it and yet allowing a worker to trade their skills with the highest bidder, for an agreed duration, in an agreed location, for a fixed price became and remains a global business worth billions.



What we have been experiencing, for some time now, is the 2.0 version of that skills-based ecosystem, fuelled by globalisation, rapid technological advancement and the coming of age in our Millennial and Z generations. The inflexibility of our historic Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, 37.5-hour week no longer meets the constantly evolving needs of a modern business, nor the people who work within it. The notion of being tethered to a fixed geography, in terms of access to talent, is an outdated one.

My own organisation has demonstrated over 20 years that utilising technology to take the work to the worker releases latent skills and broader demographics that can be better suited to the needs of a changing business. Physical proximity, whether in environment or management, is no longer required. Organisations are rapidly recognising that, in order to embrace disruptive technologies, their infrastructure needs to be agile and that includes their human capital.

***Will the digital economy change the relationship between an employer and an employee as each has new criteria for success?***

It already has but, again, this is not a new phenomenon. Take the IT contracting market. Decades of specific skills being delivered to meet a specific need for both the worker and the business. Employment not being necessary is the biggest change to that relationship. Clearly there will always be employment, but that may no longer be the preferred or majority structure used to access human capital. As Robotic Process Automation and Artificial Intelligence absorbs routine tasks and rules-based decision making, the skills of the worker will become more specialised and likely in greater demand because of a shortage. The equity in that relationship will likely swing, based on the market for that skill, leaving the upper hand with one side or the other, just like any demand based economy. There is a huge amount of focus on employment alternatives, with the media feeding the frenzy depending on their perception of the pros and cons of these models. It is obvious that current employment legislation cannot serve to protect these new alternate workers and with the European Commission and the Taylor Review seeking to address what a new legislative framework should look like, industry should anticipate wholesale changes, regardless of the relationship.

***Is the challenge for organisations in the modern economy more about understanding the data than their product?***

This is a tough one to answer. I think they remain intrinsically



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linked, but perhaps the data is pushing itself to the top spot. By that, I mean every industry is facing disruption from smaller 'start-up' players. Young, agile, legacy-free and ambitious companies keen to better their elders in any given vertical. Clearly the product is critical in order for an organisation to create the why of its existence, however it is the data that will determine virtually everything else. Suitability, popularity, competition, declining markets, emerging audiences, emotional reactions, social referrals etc. In a technology driven, global market just having a great product no longer guarantees success or longevity.

*Is the customer still first in the digital economy? How can organisations make sure they highlight the importance of customers and not just their data?*

The customer will (or should) always come first and with an increasingly challenging competitive landscape, they are becoming increasingly difficult to retain and consistently satisfy. As a consumer, I have the whole world as my shop window and whether B2C or B2B, that remarkable choice can rapidly turn a loyal customer into a transient one. In recent years, the role of Chief Customer Officer became more prevalent in the C Suite, and none too soon. Having the customer being represented on the board is a critical investment and ensures that the evolution of a company, its products or services, can be viewed through the customer lens. The encouraging thing, as a result, is that the prolific amounts of data can help to truly shape that view, offering ever increasing insights into the behaviours, opinions and expectations of that customer base.

*We spoke to Keir Greenwood, Vice President & General Manager, Europe, Arise Virtual Solutions, at the GSA Symposium to discuss the future of work and human capital in the digital age, click overleaf for the full interview.*