

**ECONOMIST
IMPACT**

The interconnected future:

Four scenarios for work, collaboration and communication in 2040



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About this research

The interconnected future is a report from Economist Impact, commissioned by Webex by Cisco, exploring key global trends for the next 20 years and their impacts on work, collaboration and communication.

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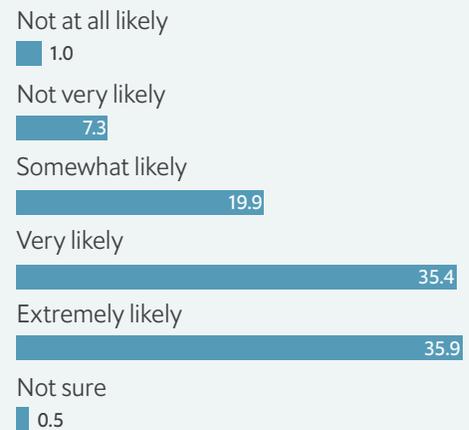
Introduction

Massive changes to the basic infrastructure and cadence of daily life are well under way. Across areas like global demography; geopolitics and macroeconomics; social services and governance; climate; automation, jobs and education; corporate responsibility and worker power; and connectivity and interaction, the fabric of human life on earth is being reknit. These are all the focus areas of a sister report by Economist Impact on *megatrends for work, collaboration and communication in 2040*, and each poses unique opportunities and challenges that society must face together. The collective responses to these will shape our future.

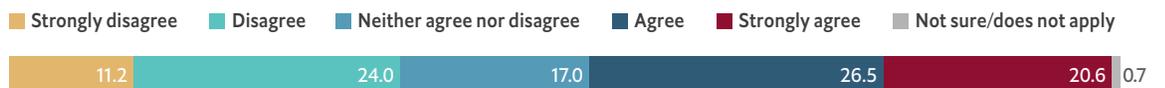
This **Scenarios Report** offers four versions of what the world could look like in 2040. Each represents a path that the world may take over the next 20 years, driven by systematic forces and individual choices. They offer food for thought for executives and policymakers planning for the future, and it is the hope of the research team that they will provoke reflection and action.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

The world is radically different from the world of today (%)



My businesses struggles to adequately prepare for the future (%)



Methodology

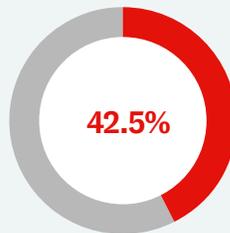
Scenario development

The identification of key trends impacting work, collaboration and communication led to the development of these four scenarios. Exploring these trends became the foundation for the first piece of this project, titled [The interconnected future: megatrends for work, collaboration and communication in 2040](#).

From the trends examined in the first report, the research team used an additional filter to select those that: hold particular importance and potential impact for the future of work, collaboration and communication; and are marked by high uncertainty regarding their paths. The courses of these trends are indeterminate, with a variety of plausible future outcomes.

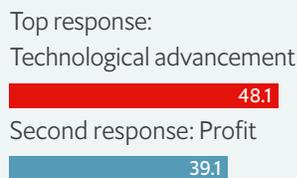
Which of the following do you think will most radically impact your business's strategy over the next ten years?
(select up to five)

Top response: Increasing speed of technological advancements



From this subset, an iterative, inductive approach rendered three principal scenario drivers: **global openness or isolationism; climate action or inaction; and increased or decreased worker power and autonomy.** These are defined in the Appendix. Inductive approaches rely on observations of patterns in trends, the emergent possible futures from their combination and the relationships between them. Given the fundamental importance of technological change in shaping work, collaboration and communication, all scenarios assume moderate to rapid technological advancement leading to a meaningfully different technological landscape in 2040.

Which of the following are the most important for your business to focus on to be successful over the next ten years?
(%, select up to five)

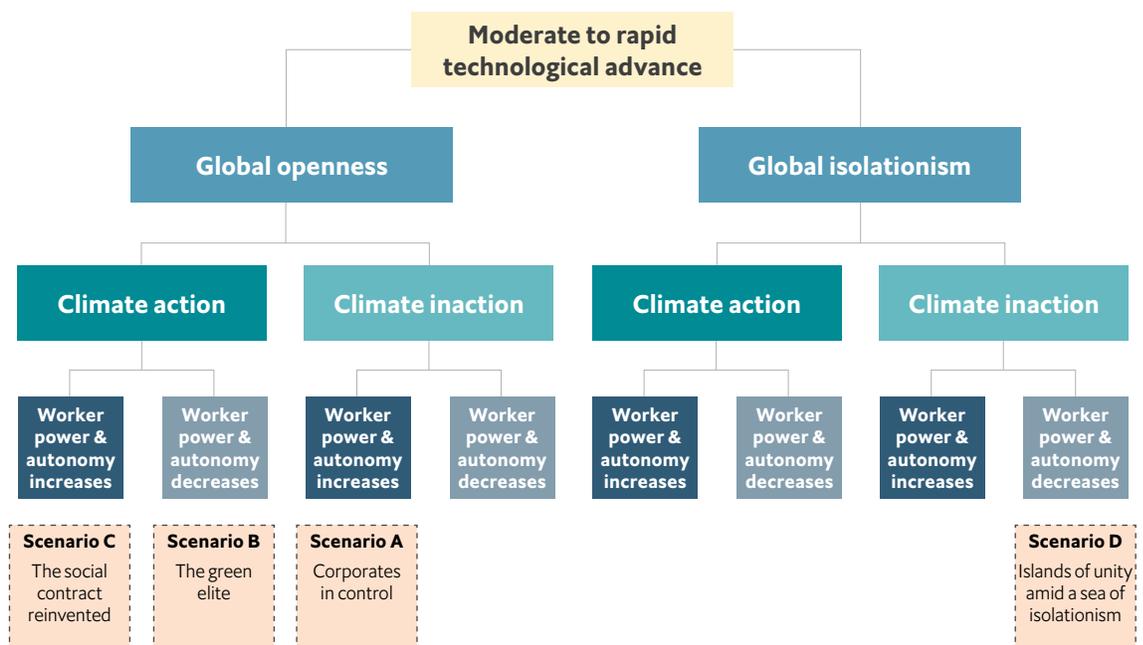


These three drivers form the starting point for the scenario narratives. Following driver identification, the research team combined deductive (structure first) and inductive approaches to select the four scenarios out of all possible combinations of drivers that were deemed most plausible, impactful and of mixed likelihood (see Figure 1). The scenarios are not designed to be strictly realistic but to present plausible visions of the future. While the drivers will necessarily impact one another, each combination of drivers is independent of any other.

Expert workshop

An expert workshop was then held in which a panel of seven academic and industry experts explored, evaluated and critiqued the scenarios. Input from this workshop was used to refine the scenarios; better understand their pathways; improve understanding of the interactions among drivers, and between drivers and other trends; and establish the limitations of the scenarios. Select quotations from this workshop are shown alongside the scenarios, providing commentary and critique.

Figure 1: Tree demonstrating driver combinations and scenarios.



What scenarios can and cannot do

Scenarios can provide useful insights for better understanding today's world, our roles within it and how tomorrow's world may be shaped. However, they also have limitations, as noted by the experts in our exploratory workshop, who enriched Economist Impact's scenario methodology in a few meaningful ways.

The first relates to its inherent simplification: while the three drivers that the research team selected can reasonably be expected to significantly impact the world, the question remains as to exactly how they will do so. A discussion of "global openness", for example, opens the floor to questions of migration, trade and finance, but also a host of other affected variables that may or may not be high impact. In addition, the drivers are interrelated, with each impacting the others. The scenarios below cannot encompass all plausible outcomes. Thus, for each selected combination of the drivers, the research team has chosen a single, clear, plausible version of the future. The differences between scenario outcomes are largely explained by assumptions regarding: 1) differences in attitudes and beliefs—for instance, the elites toward climate change or companies toward their workers; 2)

the relationship between the public and private sectors—particularly the global balance of power and control; and 3) the relationships between political leaders and systems (eg, democratization vs authoritarianism, isolationist political parties in power versus globalist political parties in power).

The second consideration emerges from the research team's use of language. "Technology", for instance, means many different things to different people. "Worker", while meant to be inclusive in this report, can be reasonably seen as excluding many, or only including some at some times. In addition, meanings can change and be changed over time. Terminology is important, and the words used in the scenarios, and their implicit definitions, have implications for the nature of the outcomes presented. Regardless, it is the research team's hope that these scenarios offer an expansive rather than restrictive view of four potential futures.

Survey

In addition to building four scenarios, Economist Impact fielded a survey of 412 executives during March and April 2022, half from the US and half from Western Europe. This survey examines the future of business through the lens of work, collaboration and communication, focusing on executives' priorities for their firms' upcoming decade, their sentiments toward specific visions of 2040, and broad feelings regarding the world to come. The results of this survey are interspersed throughout the four scenarios below, linking them back to the present moment and offering additional context and perspective.

This survey examines the future of business through the lens of work, collaboration and communication, focusing on executives' priorities for their firms'.

Four scenarios for 2040

In light of the methodology and its inherent limitations, we present four high impact yet plausible scenarios for the future. Each of these scenarios include:



Framing and
key assumptions



An exploration
of life in 2040



An overview of the scenario's
impacts on the world
of work, collaboration
and communication

Scenario A: corporates in control



Framing and key assumptions:

Global openness	Global isolationism
Climate action	Climate inaction
Worker power & autonomy increases	Worker power & autonomy decreases

- Global openness and increasing interconnectedness enable the ongoing expansion of multinational corporations, which employ a growing proportion of the world’s working population.

- As unequivocal evidence emerges that favorable working conditions improve productivity and drive long-term profit, globalized management practices develop that promote worker power and autonomy, coinciding with worker demands. Around the world, newly unified workers support legislation that promotes improved baseline labor standards.

- Large companies hamper environmental regulations and fall well short of their own public climate targets. This prevents climate-change mitigation at the pace needed to avoid dire climate impacts.

This is a world in which highly co-ordinated, economically interdependent countries see a consolidation of corporate power along with technology-enabled worker flexibility, but a worsening climate and its ramifications harm the world’s most vulnerable populations.

Relaxed financial agreements and legal frameworks led to the massive, rapid expansion of multinational corporations.



Corporates in control:

As the covid-19 pandemic of the early 2020s subsided, some feared that countries would continue to look inwards, dissuaded from global co-ordination and interaction by a hodgepodge response to the greatest public health crisis in recent memory. Yet this was not the case—and, in fact, the opposite proved to be true. Nations were invigorated with a sense of global responsibility and made renewed commitments to trade, investment and political agreement.

One country to take such a step was the UK, which voted overwhelmingly to rejoin the EU in

2026, faced with dwindling economic prospects, a struggling labor market and brain drain en masse to the continent. Leaders across the channel accepted this final referendum with open arms.

As governments unified across borders, so did businesses. Relaxed financial agreements and legal frameworks led to the massive, rapid expansion of multinational corporations, which continued to grow more powerful and draw from labor markets around the world. These firms now employ, directly or indirectly, a growing share of the world’s population. These developments were supported by increasing international interconnection, allowing many new workers to join global corporate ecosystems.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

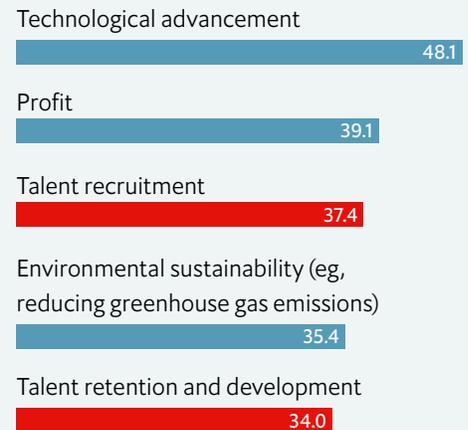
Global market power is increasingly dominated by a small number of firms (%)



Global best practices on management were standardized across the majority of these powerful firms, and led to a drastic shift in the typical approach taken towards talent management. As evidence continued to emerge that worker performance and retention were promoted by improved working conditions and increased worker autonomy, the dominant global corporations developed paternalistic attitudes towards employees—providing even the rank and file workers with more generous pay and benefits, as well as flexible schedules and locations. However, this paternalism has more recently led to controversial practices at some of the supercorporations, which are now using “emotion sense” technologies based on artificial intelligence (AI) to assess employees’ mental states and feelings through brain and body tracking under the pretense of worker wellbeing.

Which of the following are the most important for your business to focus on to be successful over the next ten years?

(%, select up to five, top five responses)



As evidence continued to emerge that worker performance and retention were promoted by improved working conditions and increased worker autonomy, the dominant global corporations developed paternalistic attitudes towards employees

“Our narrative around technology, and how technology is going to change society in the next 20 years and impact jobs, is going to be the important driver of whether we’re in a more open or closed society in terms of our attitudes around immigrants and global openness.”

Monica Gamez-Djokic
Assistant professor of technology leadership and innovation, Purdue University

Between 2030 and today, as automation technologies have become more widespread and efficient, firms have invested in global educational systems, aiming to develop workforces suitable for the needs of the modern corporation. The internationally dominant multinational corporations that now employ much of the global workforce continue to reinvest their profits in upskilling and reskilling programs for workers being displaced by new technology, as well as in partnerships with secondary schools and universities. An emerging cross-national infrastructure for talent, supported by a harmonized taxation scheme, has further enabled flexibility for employees of the multi-nationals. This has allowed workers to move both laterally

and vertically within their organizations, acting both to minimize layoffs and maximize profits. It has also helped many corporations establish more robust talent pipelines. Such investments have been met with a mix of praise and deep suspicion, as policymakers and activists fear that the increasing privatization of education will promote inequality and exclusion.

Newly unified cross-border workforces, unified by shared interests and experiences along with the ease of international communication, provided bottom-up pressure to improve conditions at some of the more recalcitrant firms—despite covert attempts by corporations to prevent labor mobilization in the early 2030s.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Workers collaborate closely with advanced technology to perform their jobs (%)



As a result, a growing number of countries have taken steps to formally enshrine the four-day workweek in national legislation. The US and the EU took the lead on this trend, making vast strides towards improving holistic employee health throughout the past decade. Large-scale studies investigating these policies have regularly shown the benefits to physical and mental well-being from the arrangement. Still, in much of the world, particularly in still-developing countries, workers outside of the formal employment system are excluded from such benefits.

Still, even with notable worker-friendly shifts to labor policies worldwide, there is a growing gulf between those outside of the supercorporation ecosystem and those within when it comes to pay or benefits, making such roles highly coveted. In recent years this has led to disaffection among the outliers, epitomized by the pan-European Teardown movement, aimed at curtailing the influence of the supercorporations.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

The amount of time the average person spends at work is substantively reduced (%)



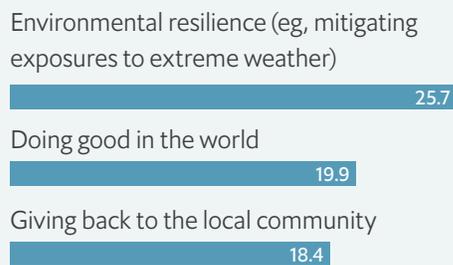
Members of this movement do have further just cause for their ire. Despite corporations' improvements to working conditions in the sake of self-interest, the shift to a "stakeholder" capitalism model—still a popular refrain—has become lip service. Around the globe, cronyism and behind-the-scenes lobbying have prevented more stringent environmental policies. A focus on profits over the planet has led to the current climate catastrophe: while many of the world's largest firms have repeatedly made ambitious climate commitments, they have fallen short in reaching them. In some cases, this failure can be attributed to a lack of effort, and in others to the intractability of a global economic system stuck in its old ways.

“Climate inaction leads to a desperate race to incremental comparative advantage... everybody’s competing even more, like a rat race to do the kind of destructive globalization that we know.”

Kalypso Nicolaidis
 Professor of international relations, the University of Oxford; governing body fellow, St Antony's College at the European Studies Centre

Executives could choose up to five of 13 options as the most important focuses for their business to be successful over the next 10 years.

The bottom three selections all focused on environmental and social sustainability (%):



“Acting in concert seems to be, as a background assumption, a good thing. But it is possible that acting in concert is not always a great thing.”

Sheila Jasanoff
 Pforzheimer Professor of science and technology studies, Harvard Kennedy School

The impacts of climate change are already being felt. Rising sea levels mean that coastal locales around the world are flooding during even regular storms. This has displaced vulnerable populations and forced governments to expend large sums of money to rebuild infrastructure and begin the process of moving settlements further inland. It has upended economic activity too, introducing an element of uncertainty for those businesses and workers operating in vulnerable coastal locations. Due to difficult growing conditions worldwide, food insecurity has become more common. Climate adaptation is now the norm, with global economic growth constrained and companies forced to spend enormously to secure global supply chains.

“This scenario could result in increased stratification, especially as people are compromised and need to move from where they are now to other locations.”

Carolyn Sponza
Principal, Gensler

“Global openness will be challenged in societies that experience a massive influx of refugees.”

Nikola Biller-Andorno
Director, the UZH Institute of Biomedical Ethics and History of Medicine; vice dean for innovation and digitalization, Medical Faculty; University of Zurichh

Low- and middle-income countries have been by far the worst affected by the accelerating climate disaster and face a double burden of displacement and economic strife. These countries' younger workers are migrating elsewhere en masse. They're moving not only to high-income countries but—since their work can now be completed from an ever-increasing number of locations—also to other middle-income countries that offer more secure political and environmental climates. Most of these migrants are supported by relocation funds from their companies. The majority of the world's less privileged have not been nearly so lucky.



Key impacts on work, collaboration and communication



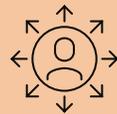
- Paternalism is the new standard, with companies offering more generous pay, benefits (including flexibility) and autonomy in support of performance and retention. However, a massive expansion of technology-enabled employee monitoring has arrived in tow.



- Companies promote educational initiatives and international migration to supply themselves with highly trained workforces, but some policymakers and activists are skeptical of the private sector's role in all corners of life.



- Despite some pushback from corporations, unified cross-border workforces successfully advocate for improved working conditions worldwide, and the four-day workweek is gaining headway across the US and the EU.



- Even with more jobs that can be done from anywhere, workers from low- and middle-income countries, especially those vulnerable to climate change, are migrating in large numbers to countries that provide more stability.

Scenario B: the green elite



Framing and key assumptions:

Global openness	Global isolationism
Climate action	Climate inaction
Worker power & autonomy increases	Worker power & autonomy decreases

- Global openness and increased interdependence help support co-ordinated global climate action, which in turn fosters interdependency. Global elites back climate action to protect their portfolios and firms.

- Technology promotes global integration and the rise of international workforces, but drives a race to the bottom for wages and working conditions, which governments fail to manage. Work becomes increasingly precarious.
- Climate-friendly business booms, but inequality continues to expand.

This is a world in which global economic and political integration functions in tandem with climate action. Advancements in technology, along with extensive global interaction, drive corporate models that build green profits for corporations but leave workers in the lurch.



The green elite:

The march toward global integration continues today, despite hiccups on the path to economic and political openness during the 2020s and 2030s. Transitions of power in Russia, and later in China, have led to a new wave of international co-operation. Trade has expanded worldwide, and as new hubs of production grew in South-east Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, global value chains expanded their webs, creating more and deeper economic linkages. As a result, more workers are now enmeshed within the global economy.

The consensus is now clear: these transitions have been facilitated by the breakthrough on global climate co-ordination in 2025. Fifteen

years of a strict international treaty system have forced countries to work together in support of climate mitigation and streamlined co-ordinated climate technology development. Exponential growth in the scale and maturity of carbon capture and storage and an accelerated transition away from fossil fuels have been the hallmarks of this new era.

Fifteen years of a strict international treaty system have forced countries to work together in support of climate mitigation.

To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

Accelerating effects of climate change (%)



Global openness and climate change mitigation are clearly mutually reinforcing. National interests remain paramount, but pressure from the global elite—interested in protecting their portfolios and firms—along with the mounting threat of climate catastrophe, have created extraordinary action in the enactment and enforcement of climate treaties over the past 20 years. Maintaining commitment to these treaties has promoted more open diplomatic ties between the nations of the world, supporting further economic integration. Though climate change has had an adverse impact on global markets, headwinds are so far much lighter than economists predicted them to be. This may turn out to be the saving grace of 21st century progress. Economic downturn has largely been mitigated by a co-ordinated, rapid shift toward sustainable industry and clean energy. This transition has further supported productivity and public health, improving economic dynamism and workforce participation. Green jobs are the norm, and many of the fastest-growing industries in the world revolve around environmental technologies, financing and markets.

“Even if we take further action on climate change, we will inevitably experience some disruption and devastation—we are already experiencing fires, floods and storms. However, a lack of further action on climate change will be truly devastating. It will result in significant migration and will have a major impact on investments and on commerce.”

Jill Duggan
Executive director, Environmental Defense Fund Europe

“Having a perspective of, ‘if we take climate action now, we may have a chance for a good future together,’ will mobilize the energy for the push that’s needed.”

Nikola Biller-Andorno

Connectivity has also been an essential part of global transformations. By 2030 90% of the world had gained access to the internet, and today this figure nears 95%. For the first time since the dawn of the internet, global digital ecosystems have become closely intertwined, with a vast suite of websites and apps used by almost everyone around the world. China’s efforts to corner the global digital ecosystem since dropping its digital walls in the late 2020s have proven successful. America’s global dominance in search engines and social media has for the first time seen a successful challenge as Chinese stalwarts like Baidu and WhatsApp close the gap in total users.

“It’s very important not to get caught up in the reduction of technology to its virtual elements—in popular parlance technology is seen as information, communication and digital...[people] forget there’s a material dimension to tech.”

Sheila Jasanoff

Such widespread digital access has undoubtedly fostered global integration. But it has brought its own set of challenges, particularly around cyber-security and large-scale misinformation and disinformation. Global cyber-security incidents have more than doubled in the past ten years, with an increasing number of high-profile ransomware attacks that leveraged major firms’ connectivity to prevent them from conducting business. With increasing digitalization of operations and so many points

of access, unprotected companies face immense risk. In addition, regulators and businesses have struggled to keep pace with the refinement and mass availability of artificially generated imagery, video and audio. Take, for instance, the current situation in Nigeria. Opponents of the governing People’s Democratic Party have relied on free-to-use online tools to churn out lifelike videos of top political leaders in compromising situations, a tactic that was first popularized in the lead-up to the 2034 US presidential election.

Businesses can adequately set standards and norms around the ethical use of advanced technology without government regulation (%)



American respondents are significantly more likely than Western European respondents to agree.

“Increasing AI in the workplace to take over the more tedious and routine aspects of people’s jobs could have really positive consequences for the psychological wellbeing of individual workers.”

Monica Gamez-Djokic

Still, these technologies have played key roles in the ongoing mid-century global economic transformation. Throughout the 2020s and 2030s, high-income countries around the world grappled with aging and declining populations, turning to technology to bolster productivity. Artificial intelligence and robotics have supplanted many

workers, but millions worldwide are applying these technologies at work or joined the myriad new companies that have emerged around them. Quantum computing has become a cornerstone of R&D departments, supporting improvements in operations and product development.

The digital world is getting more secure over time (%)



To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years? Select one for each.

Rapidly ageing populations in high- and middle-income countries (%)

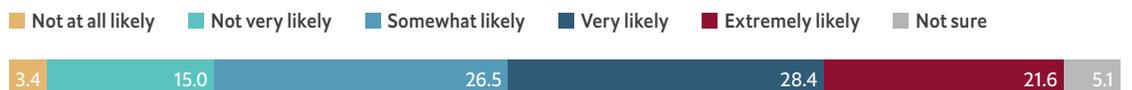


Technological advancements



Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Quantum computing technologies render existing modes of communications insecure, disrupting global society (%)



“Do not separate the human and the non-human dimensions of technology. That is, you’re not going to get a technology without its workers and its producers, and its sufferers and victims too, for that matter.”

Sheila Jasanoff

Beyond the expanding breadth of connectivity, it is also the speed and form of connection that have reshaped today’s world of work. For instance, 7.5G, and interactive technologies—particularly in virtual or augmented reality, neural interfaces, and advanced touch-based interfaces and feedback, or “haptics”—have allowed more and new types of work to be done from anywhere. This corporate

“anywhereing” has unmoored global industry from traditional adherence to place and time. Offices remain important hubs of business activity, but only for core activities and corporate retreats. Hybrid work became the global norm during the 2020s, and after the pandemic of 2036 pushed workers out of offices and factories for the second time in two decades, they simply have not returned.

To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

Increasing interconnectivity (%)



Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Humans are more closely integrated with technology (eg, implanted technologies, neural interfaces, biometrics) (%)



People are able to work for firms anywhere in the world regardless of where they live (%)



American respondents see this as significantly more likely than Western European respondents

“Technology here could be as much a tool of liberation as a tool of repression.”

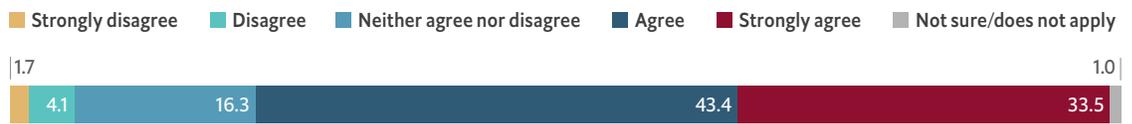
Marwa Daoudy
Associate professor of international relations, Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service; Seif Ghobash Chair in Arab Studies, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University

For jobs that still require in-person labor, expanded immigration has been a boon for businesses, with sentiment regarding the role of immigrants in society becoming more positive across many high-income countries. Even nationalist groups in France and Japan are extolling the value of open paths to temporary migration as a means of protecting economies and promoting national greatness, although citizenship remains blocked for the unskilled.

However, the number of activities that require actual human intervention is much lower than it was a decade ago, and many roles that do require people are being filled by a rotating cast of far-flung workers. Contract, temporary and gig work became

the norm in much of the world during the 2030s, thanks to the now-ubiquitous digital marketplaces and brokers that match businesses with workers. These have nearly supplanted traditional human resources departments in many industries. For the majority, basic ideas about what constitutes work are shifting. It is slowly being redefined as something done on behalf of an ever-changing cast of contractors. Armed with a pair of internet-enabled smart glasses and a glove-and-arm-sleeve combination that sends and receives touch, motion and temperature feedback—a worker in rural Ecuador can log into a shift at a factory building appliances in Thailand. With the same set of tools, a student in Mogadishu can work part-time driving tractors at an Ethiopian wheat farm.

Increased freedom of people movement (through migration, visa access, etc) is positive for the world of work (%)



Western European respondents significantly more likely to disagree

To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

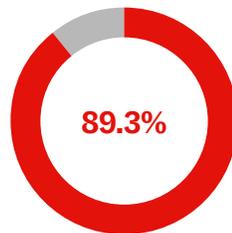
Non-standard forms of employment (eg, contract workers, temp workers, gig workers) (%)



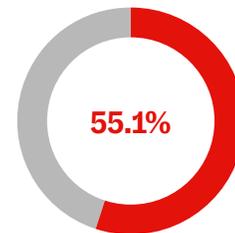
While this flexibility has led to new opportunities for businesses and workers worldwide, it has created a global race to the bottom for pay, labor rights and working conditions. Workers have been increasingly forced to compete for base wages without an employer-provided safety net. Some countries, such as El Salvador, have sidelined this problem in the interest of economic growth, and others, such as Sri Lanka, have yet to solve it despite halting policy efforts. By contrast, for a secure executive class, “soft” interpersonal skills have become more important than ever, met with a rise in international credentialing for talent development, brainstorming, collaboration and teamwork. These requirements have, by all accounts, improved the quality of the work environment for the few permanent employees that remain, but

they have also reinforced existing societal power structures through exclusionary qualifications.

As the globalization of labor markets has reduced inequalities between countries, it has concentrated profits: the wealthiest in the world are even wealthier than before and an internationally mobile class of plutocrats has emerged. In addition, the value of so-called women’s work, namely care and household labor, is still not reflected in the marketplace or in policy with social mores continuing to hamper women’s workforce integration. Women’s labor-force participation remains under 50% globally. The poor global record on gender equality has dampened global economic growth and contributed to the revival of a powerful international women’s movement pushing for more than nominal equality.



of executives agree that “interpersonal skills (eg, teamwork, empathy, communication, management) are important for success in my organisation”



of executives agree that “there are barriers to success for employees from underrepresented groups (eg, genders, races/ethnicities, diverse abilities, or ages) in my organisation”



Key impacts on work, collaboration and communication



- With the worst of the climate crisis averted, new forms of interactivity and improved connectivity enable “anywhereing”, as labor markets become truly global and digital. Immigration pathways are opened for those still performing in-person work.



- Contract and temp work are standard. Marketplaces and platforms for work create a race to the bottom in wages and hours for low-skilled workers that policymakers in many countries fail to address.



- Misinformation and disinformation are rife, fostered by artificially generated imagery, video and audio, leading to growing political issues.

Scenario C: the social contract, reinvented



Framing and key assumptions:

Global openness	Global isolationism
Climate action	Climate inaction
Worker power & autonomy increases	Worker power & autonomy decreases

- Global pressure drives countries to take rapid action on climate change, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle of climate action and political and economic openness.
- Radical state intervention in support of a new green economy also expands the public appetite for state intervention in other domains.

- As open migration, new technology and corporate policies enable many workers to work from almost anywhere on their own terms, governments provide social supports that renew worker power and prevent exploitative corporate practices. The balance between free time and work is reinforced, and women’s economic empowerment is promoted.

This is a world in which countries, conscious of their extreme interdependence, band together to radically reimagine the existing economic system as one that benchmarks ecological health alongside traditional profit indicators. Concurrently, a renewed focus on human rights and health leads to powerful and seismic shifts in individual self-determination.



The social contract, reinvented:

The acceleration of climate change in the 2020s shook the world into action. Mid-decade, an unlikely union of the global elite and large, co-ordinated groups of citizens pushed governments to do more. These efforts led to a series of international breakthroughs on climate change, beginning with the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention. In the resultant Brussels Agreement of 2026, a wide array of prominent signatories—including the US, the UK, Germany, India, Brazil and South Africa—committed to rethinking global growth: first by turning the Nationally Determined Contributions (countries’ commitments to greenhouse gas emission reductions) into binding obligations; and second by significantly accelerating these commitments. This treaty, and those that followed, have ushered in a new era of long-term sustainability over short-term profiteering. Led by the global powers, nations

“[Climate action] doesn’t need to be co-ordinated in a global sweep, but it does need to happen in all the major economies.”

Jill Duggan

have taken concerted action to combat the effects of climate change, focusing on the world’s most vulnerable and marginalized populations. Climate impacts are still being felt but have been tempered from early century forecasts. The ecological health of the planet has become an indicator of success in this global system, assessed through standardized national accounting of a robust group of measures and evaluated every 2.5 years at the recurring Brussels Summits.

To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

Increased focus on environmental sustainability (%)



Western European respondents significantly more likely to report this as a challenge compared with American respondents

“I think increased connectivity will help us cultivate values such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination, global solidarity and caring. I think it sounds so obvious, but unless we really live those values in combination with a sense of self efficacy, it will be hard to get where we want to get just because technology is available. Values need to need to complement our technological abilities.”

Nikola Biller-Andorno

Global interdependence has grown tighter in recognition of this shared responsibility and liability, which in turn has sustained worldwide economic growth. Even if divisions remain, the global powers have placed an emphasis on integrating emerging economies. Inclusive trade and migration partnerships grew rapidly during the latter half of the '20s and first half of the '30s, with many of the world's regional trading blocs reaching agreements to merge systems, and even workforces in some cases, greatly reducing global barriers. Most of the world today is constantly online. Advances in AI have allowed for almost anyone to communicate with one another via live translation, instilling a sense of global unity, even if a newly shared political consciousness has increased the scope of worldwide, interlinked partisan movements. International standards for identifying AI-generated or altered media have alleviated misinformation and disinformation, one of the main risks from this connectivity.

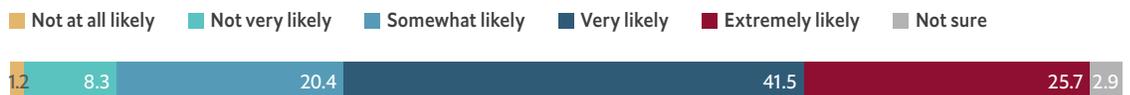
Since 2030 governments around the world have relaxed visa regulations in broad acceptance of both migrants and refugees. A treaty

established in 2035, spearheaded by the US, the EU, Canada and, in a radical policy shift, Japan, has vastly expanded access to visas for both skilled and unskilled workers from low- and middle-income countries. Freedom of movement legislation continues to expand now, with growing efforts to create harmonized labor standards that would allow for the portability of academic and professional expertise.

Jobs have flourished in renewable energy, sustainable product development and design, and adaptable and resilient architecture. Expanded access to labor has helped maintain growth in high-income countries, although brain drain is a prominent concern in countries with many emigrants, even if remittances and global diaspora networks typically provide benefits in turn. While backlash to immigration, trade and globalization policies persists among more reactionary political groups, public and government sentiment remains firmly on the side of cosmopolitanism, especially when governments have taken measures to protect and support workers.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Hyperconnectivity drives inclusivity and improves global prosperity (%)



In general, the world has taken a turn toward stronger state social systems. Robust public-sector action on climate change and the economic revitalization that followed have renewed public support for government-driven initiatives. This has led to enhanced labor protections across the world’s high- and middle-income countries. In addition, some European and South American countries have implemented universal basic income pilot programs with resounding success. An Australian rollout of the four-day work week in 2030 led to national trials across Europe and South-east Asia.

Adult education and reskilling are now seen as industry standards, which has staved off significant worker pushback. International treaty bodies established in the early 2030s (intertwined with migration agreements) have been important players, putting in significant effort to develop effective restructuring and upskilling schemes

for the hundreds of millions of people displaced from non-green industries or by labor-replacing technologies, particularly AI and robotics.

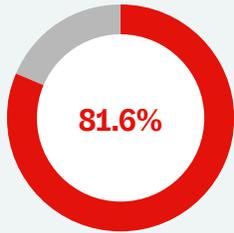
“There is going to need to be a period of retraining. In this outcome, there will be a lot of locally based jobs... the end result of a world that looks very seriously at taking action on climate change is jobs that are more locally focused.”

Jill Duggan

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Advancing technology displaces workers (both white and blue collar) and creates widespread unemployment (%)





of executives agree that “improved employee autonomy would help my company thrive”

These labor policies have supported employment flexibility, which has steadily increased since the covid-19 pandemic of the 2020s, with new advances in digital technologies and increased corporate promotion of models of work that are flexible in time, location and style. In the biggest US labor policy shift in decades, for instance, a Danish-style “flexicurity” model is now providing generous unemployment benefits in tandem with educational programs. Thanks to these models and rising mobility, many individuals can live where they choose and work how and

when they want for companies that support such flexibility. This global mobility has also led to a flourishing era of international labor unions, with global representative bodies pushing back against exploitative labor practices and banding together to negotiate for improved hours and compensation.

At the same time, attitudes towards women’s roles in the workplace have shifted radically. Persistent inequalities in household and care labor and slow growth in women’s labor force participation eventually reached a breaking point. Mass global protests and “care outs”—in which millions of women brought those that they were providing care for into public spaces—pushed matters to a head in 2032. In 2034 the European Commission piloted a program in Germany to regulate and remunerate care and domestic work, in addition to vastly expanding existing support structures for working parents. Though substantial government investment was required, policymakers watched with great interest.

To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

Increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (%)



Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Nonstandard forms of employment (such as freelance, gig and temp work) are dominant (%)



Economic opportunity is expanded for those traditionally engaged in care provision (such as care for older adults and children) (%)



“Part of the pathway between workers’ autonomy, workers’ empowerment and climate change has to do with democratic input.”

Kalypso Nicolaïdis

The resulting economic gains from this set of policies made headlines around the world. Now, 15 more countries have eagerly applied to enter the pilot scheme, with others implementing their own care and household worker programs. As a result, flexible and inclusive systems for valuing care and household work are quickly being codified into legislation around the globe. Women, comprising the vast majority of previously unpaid domestic and care workers, have seen a surge in their access to capital and financial freedom—revitalizing once-stagnant local economies by providing labor and new employment options. Global democratization efforts have been especially valuable in supporting

these initiatives, with political parties around the world winning elections in the past few years behind their promotion of “women’s work” policies.

Taken together, these trends mean that today, while the share of workers in full-time jobs has decreased globally, the global middle class has rapidly expanded, as has the share of corporate income that ends up in the hands of workers. Still, much work remains to extend this increased prosperity to more people. In addition, even if billions have experienced work models that provide increased flexibility and freedom, billions others remain tethered in place.



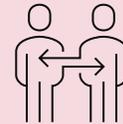
Key impacts on work, collaboration and communication



- Workers around the world are integrated through advances in technologies and policy schemes, leading to an expansion of global society, interconnection and mobility.



- New ideas of how work should look have taken hold: expanding flexibility is the norm, enabled by government support and workers’ movements. Education and reskilling see widespread promotion from corporations and international treaty bodies.



- Care and domestic work are starting to become regulated and remunerated, as policymakers recognize the widespread economic potential that they can unleash.

Scenario D: islands of unity amid a sea of isolationism



Framing and key assumptions:

Global openness	Global isolationism
Climate action	Climate inaction
Worker power & autonomy increases	Worker power & autonomy decreases

- Many large companies automate, and in the face of economic headwinds, fewer replacement jobs are created. Workers are unable to effectively advocate for their own interests. A global recession persists.
- Local and city governments have become more important, especially in combating climate change.

• Nationalist interests prevail, and declining general international co-operation stifles meaningful progress on climate change mitigation, rather than countries uniting around this particular issue or enacting strong measures without global co-ordination.

This is a world in which countries are increasingly isolated, retreating to self-sufficiency amid a lack of global co-ordination. This self-sufficiency contributes to a lack of traction on climate change mitigation, which fails to mature. In this environment, worker power and autonomy do not develop substantially.

“In my view this is the more likely scenario; but if there is a crisis, there is a momentum for transformation.”

Marwa Daoudy

“It’s kind of hard for me to try and think of a world in which we’re not having that climate stress, because we’re already seeing that now. And this is going to be a lot worse in 18 years’ time. What would that look like?”

Jill Duggan



Islands of unity amid a sea of isolationism:

Throughout the 2020s, nationalist isolationist political leaders gained power across much of the democratic world, while autocratic leaders saw increasing value in shoring up domestic interests at the expense of international connection. Some individual countries took strong stances on climate change, with others making grand gestures that amounted to only marginal improvements. Ultimately, this disunity led to tragedy. Year by year, the impacts of global inaction became clearer, with expanding food insecurity; rising sea levels and flood tides; and an increasing number of extreme, unpredictable weather events impacting hundreds of millions around the world and slowing economic growth. Intra- and international migration, drought, and food insecurity have also contributed to rising sectarian violence. Political and business leaders continued to extoll the need for the mitigation of climate change even as they did little to change the situation. In some

places, flooding that was once thought to take place only every 100 years is today fast on pace to occur every five years, or even one year.

The piecemeal dismantling of the World Trade Organization in 2032-35 was the nail in the coffin for the extended era of international value chains. Though the UN system persists, it has been a shell of its former self since the Security Council was scuttled in 2036, and the General Assembly and Economic and Social Councils today have but a fraction of their past capacity. Countries have turned inwards or to regional partners. Similarly, while some bilateral and regional trade agreements remain strong, growth in international trade has stagnated. Africa is one exception. The growing isolationism of much of the rest of the world created incentive for developing countries in the region to band together; the ratification of a long-gestating continent-spanning common market has offered a springboard to a new era of pan-African co-operation.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

The global economy contracts as a result of climate change (%)



These changes have created winners and losers among the global order. Since 2030 inequality among countries has backslid and international development stalled. Between then and today, high-income countries and the EU raised barriers that have made it more difficult for other countries to provide anything but raw materials. The average cost of a car imported from South Korea to the US doubled between 2032 and 2036. This self-sufficiency has led to emerging local hubs of innovation, particularly in Nigeria, Kenya and Indonesia, but much of the world—including those countries—remains poorer than it would have been with a close-knit international order in place.

These barriers have been extended to people, too.

International migration, one of the major drivers for the return to nationalism and isolationism, declined for the first time in decades beginning in 2031. And it has continued to drop since, due in large part to high-income countries and the EU shutting their borders. Digital borders sealed shut as well. The EU, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, and the Philippines, among others, have joined China in walling off their digital ecosystems in the pursuit of a mix of privacy, controlled information and the prevention of foreign influence. In most countries, high-tech surveillance is now standard, with a stream of information from cameras, drones, phones, smart contact lenses and implanted computers providing information either to governments—or straight to advertisers.

American respondents significantly more likely to report this as opportunity compared with Western European respondents



Q10. To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

Widening economic inequality and class disparity (%)



Increased rate of global migration (%)

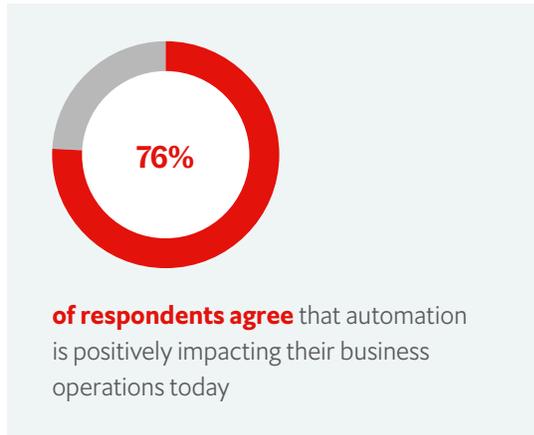


Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Hyperconnectivity leads to declining privacy and inescapable, always-on advertising (%)



American respondents think this scenario is significantly more likely than Western European respondents



These shifts, in aggregate, have rapidly localized workplaces, labor pools and, in many cases, the markets for goods and services. Some developing countries have seen a short-term gain to their high-skilled workforce from reduced migration, thanks to decreased brain drain. Still, the negative impacts of declining global economic activity and remittances have counterbalanced and superseded any gains.

Though some pundits proclaimed that the decline of internationalism would bring power back to the people by removing harmful foreign competition, workers have instead lost power, especially in high-income countries. Facing declining working-age populations, stifled supply chains and advancing technologies at lower and lower

prices, companies spent the past decade replacing humans with automation. This has benefited the global corporate leadership class and shareholders, but only in relative terms. Internationally, efforts to retrain or relocate displaced workers for these new jobs have been ineffective, insufficient or unwanted. A persistent global recession stretches on, capital markets are slowly drying up and unemployment around the world remains high, which has led to political instability, conflict and rising popular sentiment against large companies.

These dynamics caused the wave of massive US protests in 2037 and the rise of the worker-oriented People’s Party. This populist party resonated across the country and looks to be the first in over a century to break the stranglehold of US two-party politics. Forecasts predict that up to 25% of the votes in this year’s US election will be cast for their candidates, though policy success has been fleeting to date.

International disunity and isolationism have strengthened the role of countries’ regional and local governments: cities have become especially important in a world with urbanization rates nearing 70%. Many employees, even given the ability to work from anywhere within their country or region, have still chosen to remain in cities for their community, vibrant cultural activities and dating pools (particularly relevant for younger employees).

To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years?

Increasing urbanisation (%)



“Out of great challenges can come some great innovation ...I’m not saying it won’t be painful, because those solutions will have to come at great cost.”

Carolyn Sponza

Countries lagging on climate change mitigation and adaptation—such as the US, China and India—have seen local stakeholders become the bearers of the climate mantle. International networks of local leaders are meeting regularly to share best practice and discuss common challenges. Innovative, cost-effective solutions to the challenge of climate adaptation are emerging and spreading. Direct action is increasingly frequent, with global citizen

networks of activists and urban shapers using a rotating series of private, encrypted platforms to co-ordinate their actions, playing an often dangerous game of cat and mouse with regulators and censors. In the face of climate change, philanthropists, action networks and socially minded corporations have poured money into climate adaptation and support systems for the ensuing raft of climate migrants, providing a glimmer of hope.



Key impacts on work, communication and collaboration



- Worldwide, digital ecosystems and communication are fragmented and dogged by surveillance, leading to a lack of trust in communication platforms and a turn to more private, encrypted platforms.



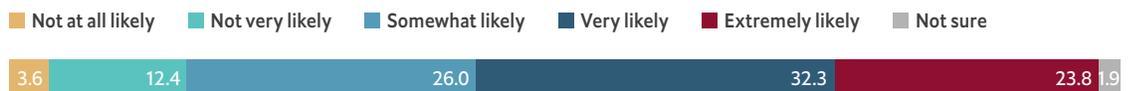
- Many workers displaced by advances in automation find themselves in perilous conditions, without support or clear opportunities for re-employment amid climate-driven global recession.



- Labor pools have rapidly localized, and as a result regional hubs and cities have grown in prominence and importance for workers and international networks.

Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenario is?

Climate change forces mass migration, as many parts of the world become unlivable (%)



Conclusion

Each of these scenarios represents a set of vastly different global responses to emerging trends. In each case, people’s lives—including how and where they work, collaborate and communicate—will alter irrevocably, and the physical landscape of the planet will shift in turn. Technology will develop and shape these futures, operating as a non-neutral force, with its direction and impact determined by the decisions we make today. No scenario is wholly positive or negative, but they are not equal either: some clearly lead to greater wellbeing than others. To reach these better futures, co-ordinated efforts will be required across several frontiers, with an eye toward the interplay between drivers. Progress in one area, such as climate change, does not automatically bring progress in others, such as workers’ rights.

For this reason, the means through which outcomes are achieved are almost as important as their ends. Global interconnectedness can lead to both climate action and climate disaster. The former can lead to the consolidation of wealth and power among the world’s elite, or it can foster a more egalitarian future. The balance between these outcomes will hinge on myriad factors, such as the relationships between companies and states, the attitudes and beliefs of the global elite, and trends in global political systems and leadership, which themselves are all interrelated.

Businesses shape how society develops and uses technology (%)



Policy and corporate decision-makers must consider these many pathways, and the futures they engender, as they benchmark success. With a deeper understanding of the possibilities for the future and the intersections of forces at play, leaders can make choices that will drive society toward a better tomorrow. The decisions they make now will ripple across the world to come.



Considering alternative visions of the future can influence the decisions that businesses make now (%)



Through collective effort, people can change the course of history (%)



Appendix: Driver definitions and pathways

The drivers can be defined as follows:

Global openness or isolationism:

Global openness:

Global economic and political integration increases. Trade and international investment flourish. Tolerance for migration rises significantly.

OR

Global isolationism:

States are increasingly self-reliant; economic and political interdependence has regressed. Growth in trade and international investment declines. There are strict regulations on freedom of movement and visas for migrants.

Global response to climate change:

Climate action:

Nations and companies act in concert to address global climate change. Outcomes end up among the best cases of present forecasts. Climate mitigation is extensive, though adaptation is needed as well.

OR

Climate inaction:

An extension of the status quo. Nations and companies do not act or co-operate to address global climate change. Outcomes end up among the worst cases of present forecasts. Climate adaptation is paramount, with insufficient or piecemeal efforts at mitigation.

Worker power and autonomy:

Worker power and autonomy increases:

Worker power and autonomy improve as governments and/or employers enable employees to pursue their individual and collective best interests and offer more forms of support. For example (among other options), care and domestic work are increasingly compensated; there is widespread support for flexibility in employee location, time and model of work.

OR

Worker power and autonomy decreases:

Worker power and autonomy decrease, as governments and/or employers prevent workers from pursuing their individual and/or collective best interests, coupled with decreasing flexibility and support.

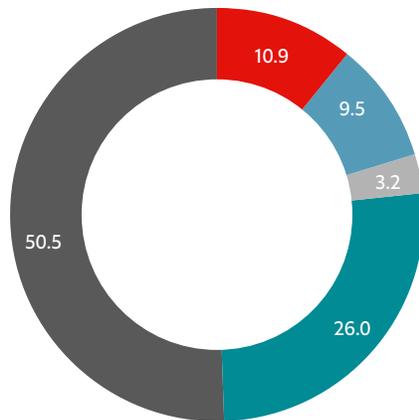
Full survey results

Figures may not add up to 100% in some cases due to rounding or because more than one option could be selected.

Q1. In which country do you live? Select one.

%

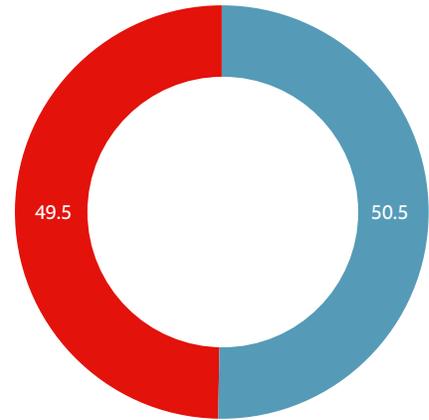
- France
- Germany
- Netherlands
- UK
- US



Q1. In which country do you live? Select one.

%

- Western Europe
- US



Q2. Which of the following best describes your title? Select one.

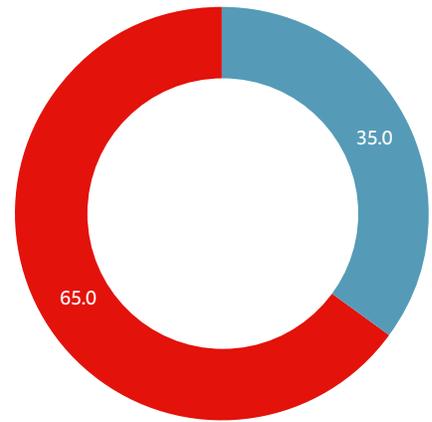
%



Q2. Which of the following best describes your title? Select one.

%

■ Non-CxO ■ CxO



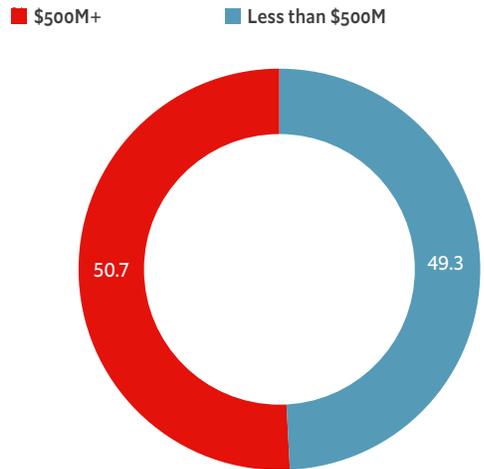
Q3. Which of the following best describes your main functional role? Select one.



Q4. What is your organisation's revenue? Select one.



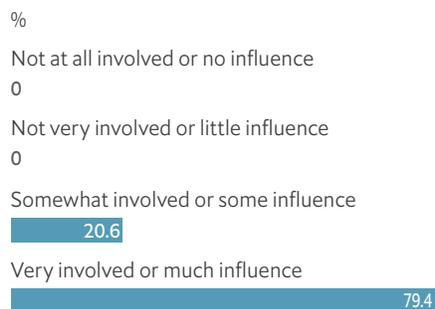
Q4. What is your organisation's revenue?
Select one.



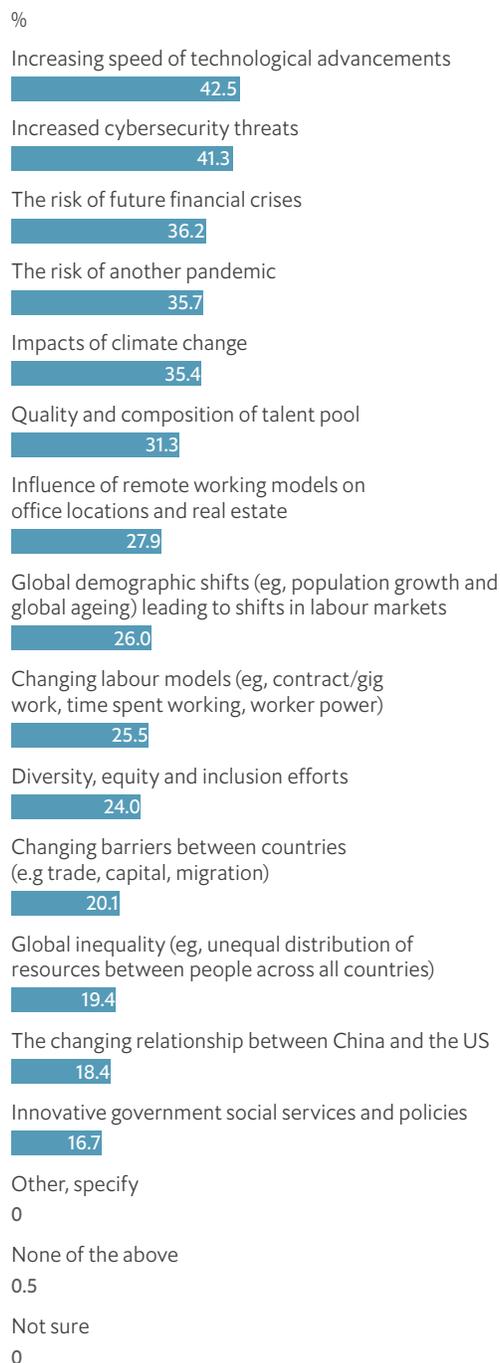
Q5. What is the primary industry you work in?
Select one.



Q6. To what extent are you involved in or have influence over decision-making as it relates to corporate strategy for your organisation? Select one.

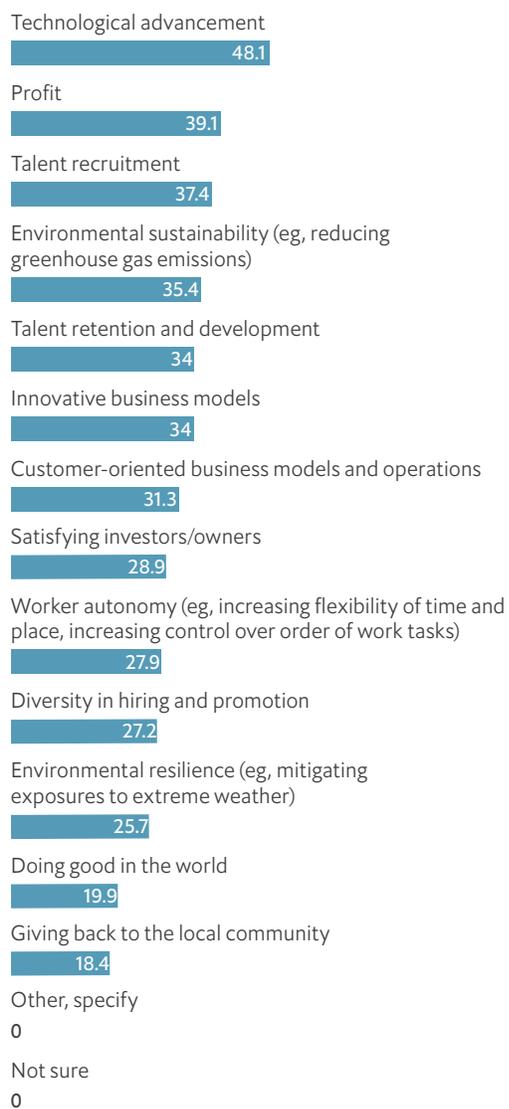


Q7. Which of the following do you think will most radically impact your business's strategy over the next 10 years? Select up to five.



Q8. Which of the following are the most important for your business to focus on to be successful over the next ten years? Select up to five.

%



Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Select one for each.

%

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree Not sure/does not apply

Automation is positively impacting my businesses' operations today



There are barriers to success for employees from underrepresented groups (eg, genders, races/ethnicities, diverse abilities, or ages) in my organisation



Interpersonal skills (eg, teamwork, empathy, communication, management) are important for success in my organisation



Improved employee autonomy would help my company thrive



I believe employees in my firm could be just as productive working fewer hours per week

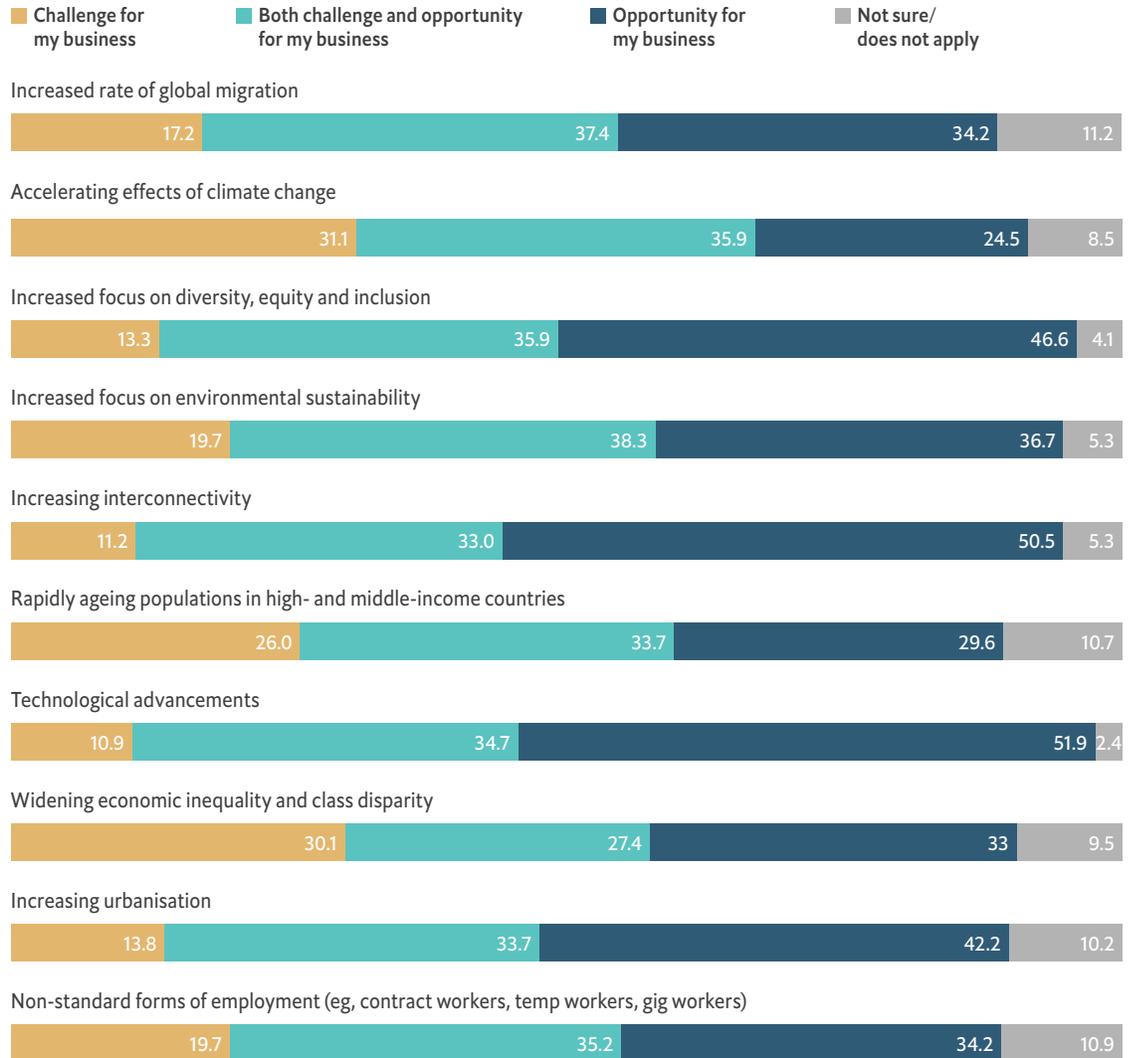


My firm's core value proposition will be different in 20 years from what it is now



Q10. To what extent do you believe the following forces represent a challenge, an opportunity or both to your business over the next ten years? Select one for each.

%



Q11. Which of the following do you believe most foster collaboration in the workplace? Select up to five.

%

Effective knowledge management (eg, clear processes around location and format of shared work)

46.1

Flexibility of work schedules and locations

45.9

Employees with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences

45.4

Tools that allow for real-time (i.e. live) communication

43.0

Employee understanding of co-workers' expertise

39.3

In-person meetings and/or workshops

39.1

Tools that allow for synchronous and asynchronous work, co-creation and design

34.0

Psychological safety in the workplace

30.1

Social events for employees

28.2

Organisational structure that creates cross-firm links

28.2

Tools that allow managers to monitor workers

23.3

Other, specify

0

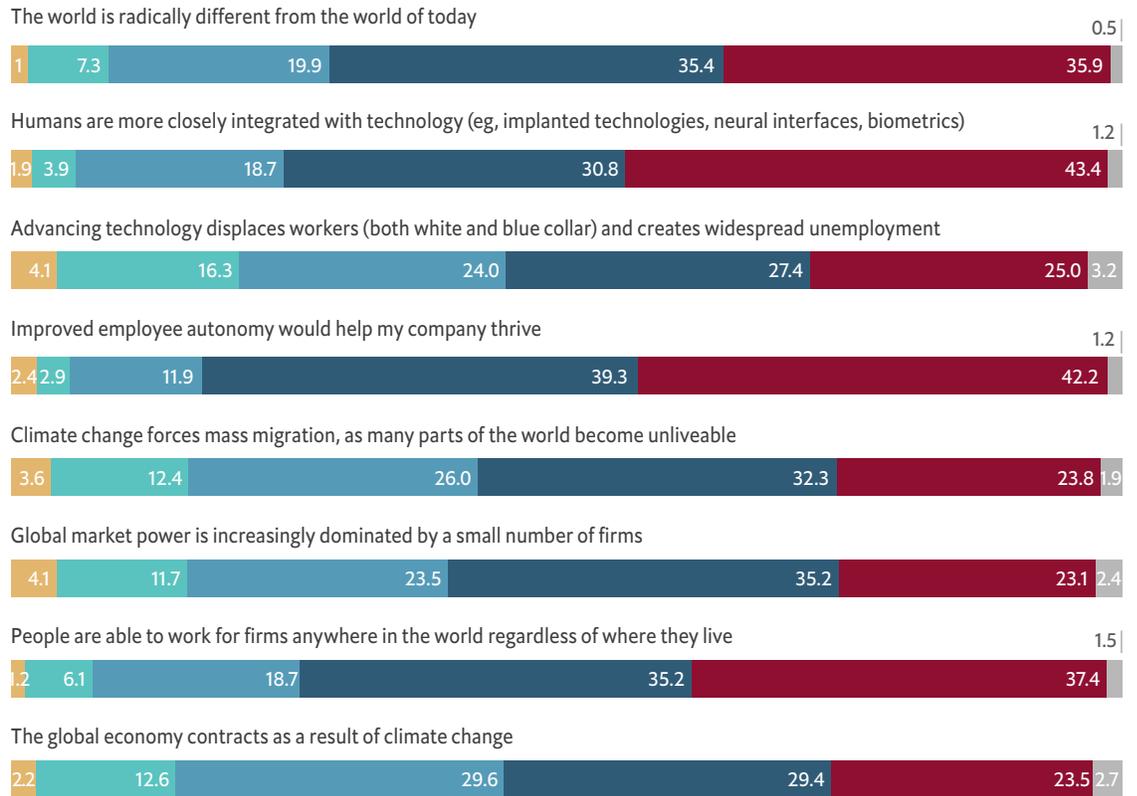
Not sure

0.2

Q12. Looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenarios are? Select one for each.

%

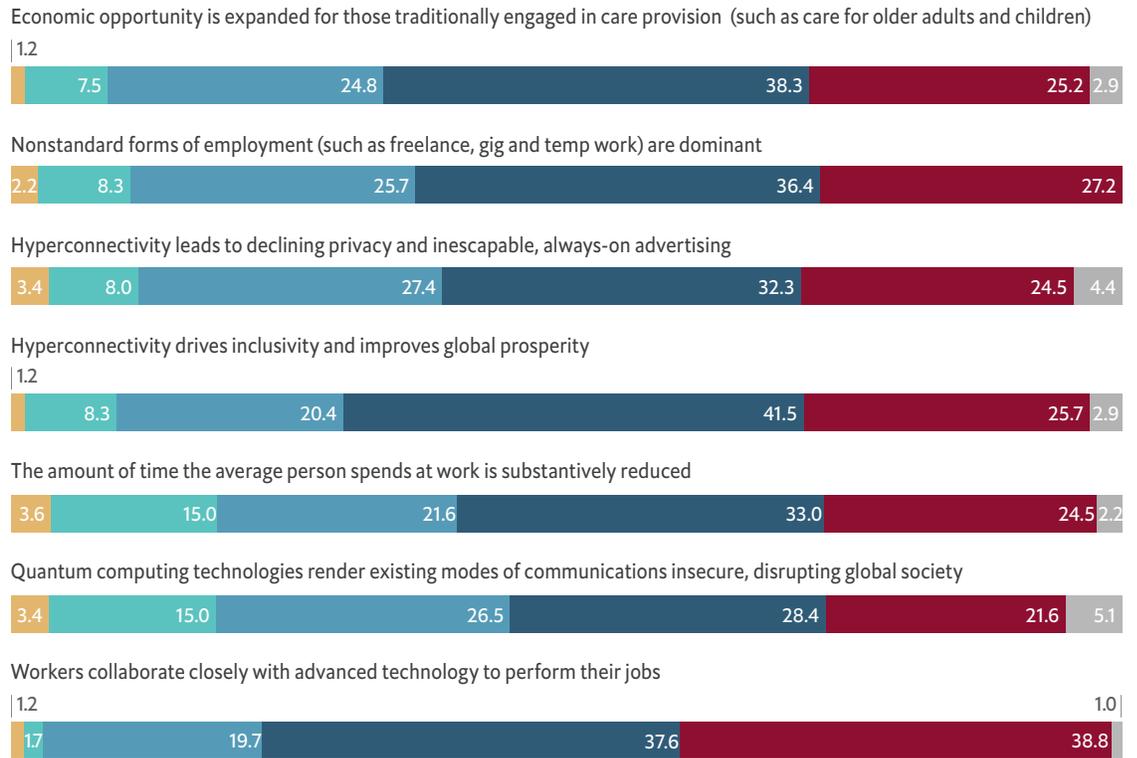
■ Not at all likely
 ■ Not very likely
 ■ Somewhat likely
 ■ Very likely
 ■ Extremely likely
 ■ Not sure



Q13. Again, looking ahead to 2040, how likely do you think the following scenarios are? Select one for each.

%

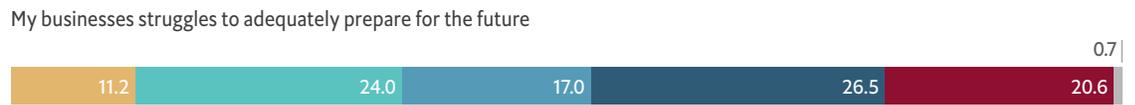
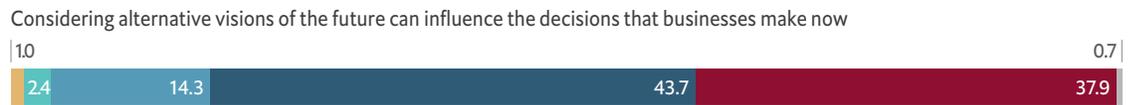
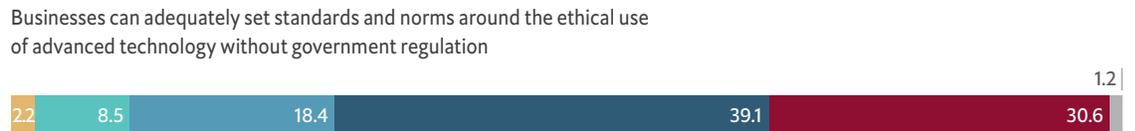
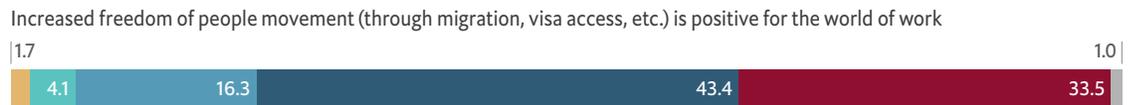
■ Not at all likely ■ Not very likely ■ Somewhat likely ■ Very likely ■ Extremely likely ■ Not sure



Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Select one for each.

%

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree Not sure/does not apply



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