Workplace futures: How technology is changing the workplace and how workers are transforming technology.
'In the workplaces of pre-internet technologies, the average work day ended when the factory gates or office doors closed. The contemporary information worker labours in a ‘factory’ where the gates never close and with work continuously and tantalisingly close to hand around the clock.'

Jeremy Myerson, director and chair of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art, and co-editor of Time & Motion: Redefining Working Life
Our working lives are at a point of inexorable change. Technologies are disrupting our traditional work patterns and new systems of collaboration are debunking the value of accepted hierarchies, as Aruba Networks discovers in its collaborative white paper with global trends and insight consultancy The Future Laboratory.

In the near future the term ‘office’ will be obsolete and the drab surroundings we associate with the executive life will be erased as a new model for work emerges. This emerging vision of the workplace will facilitate flexible working patterns in a society in which nine-to-five working is increasingly the exception rather than the rule.
An age of change

In 1817, Robert Owen, founder of the eight-hour movement in the UK, coined the slogan ‘Eight hours labour, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest’ in order to regulate the hours that factory employees were subjected to.

Now, nearly 200 years on, that maxim of the industrial revolution is being revised amid a cloud and data revolution, as workers shift from the age of leisure to an age of Bleisure (business + leisure) and usher in new ways of working, collaborating and communicating.

‘In the workplaces of pre-internet technologies, the average work day ended when the factory gates or office doors closed,’ says Jeremy Myerson, director and chair of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art, and co-editor of Time & Motion: Redefining Working Life. ‘The contemporary information worker labours in a ‘factory’ where the gates never close and with work continuously and tantalisingly close to hand around the clock.’

‘Against the backdrop of these changes,’ says The Future Laboratory co-founder Chris Sanderson, ‘new ways of doing business and designing offices are irreversibly changing a landscape that has taken more than 200 years to develop.’

‘In contrast,’ he says, ‘cloud-based technologies and the increased use of the humble mobile as our work tool of choice, is ushering in a new social, cultural and corporate paradigm.’ Based on this, within a decade, we are set to witness the:

- Birth of Bleisure (business + leisure) thinking and spaces
- Growth of the Frictionless Office
- Emergence of a Third Industrial Work Revolution
- Dawn of the Age of Everyware
- Appearance of the Fractional Ownership Corporation
- Impact of the GenMobile work ethic
- Realities of the Personal Information Economy
- Birth of the new Flexecutive
- Development of new Bleisure Hives
- Debut of the Symbiotic Corporation
- Opening of the Convergent Workhouse

As our report shows, when these changes kick in we will be looking at a workplace that is more federated and collaborative, less hierarchical and less location-specific as more of us clock on by logging in.

‘We are no longer simply business people at work and private people at home,’ says Martin Lindstrom, author and brand futurist. ‘People are checking personal emails at work and work emails at home. The lines between work and play are merging on all levels.’
The Birth of Bleisure

While the notion of a place of work will remain a constant, more and more of our offices will resemble the offices of technology companies such as Google and Kickstarter, where a village hall approach is favoured over designs that discourage interaction, openness and chance encounters. Indeed, architects of the Bleisure revolution now use terms such as ‘serendipity corners’ and ‘chance-encounter corridors’ to describe the subtle social engineering they are employing, as laptops, mobiles and tetherless working allow people to move more freely within a building.

Google’s London HQ borrows cues from British culture, with private working rooms such as the Velourmptious Snug, a green, padded room that emulates the classic English pub, an area that is designed to simulate the privacy and feel of working from home, and a chintzy homage to a grandmother’s living room.

Each room is designed to foster its own form of productivity, whether that is intense concentration to meet a deadline, or simply somewhere to be comfortable and retain clarity of thought.

Adobe’s office in Palo Alto also borrows design cues from non-work environments in order to get the most from its Bleisurite teams. Aspects of the interior create habits that would traditionally be acted out in leisure time. Meeting rooms are constructed in the same way as private booths in US diners, creating a ritual that teams associate with conviviality and relaxation. Elsewhere in the space, rocking chairs are positioned in open spaces to facilitate moments of idleness.

These work spaces are being created to reflect the needs of the Bleisurite worker: long tables that encourage ideas dining, the notion that teams can dine on ideas, discuss projects; ‘digital crannies’ where individuals can work in so called ‘solitaries’, or areas where you are left alone when using them; and ‘nature terraces’ that encourage team-orientated ‘huddles’, group sessions designed to generate ideas and kick-start innovation.

‘We are finding ourselves at the end of the adaptive range of our industrial society,’ says Alan Moore, founder of business think tank SMLXL. ‘We are being overwhelmed by a ‘trilemma’ of social, organisational and economic problems that are bringing an inherent complexity into our world. This is causing fault lines to run through our working lives, and corporations are having to re-assess the nature of work and how they operate from day to day.’

Author Daniel Sieberg’s self-help book The Digital Diet even shows people how to cope with this trilemma by tempering their use of technology. The Digital Diet provides a step-by-step dietary approach that ensures that our digital lives are enabling, rather than inhibiting, thought and activity. The RescueTime app is a tool to help teams cut down on time online when they are relying too heavily on the internet and stifling their own creativity. The app monitors where people spend time online, forcing them offline at certain times. It claims to rescue an average of three hours and 54 minutes of productive time per person per week.

Just as Bleisurites need the occasional break from technology, so they need a break from each other. Susan Cain, author of the 2012 book Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking, is creating a remedy for excess collaboration by working with interior designers Steelcase.

Together, Cain and Steelcase are creating a set of five modular room constructions called Quiet Spaces that can be deployed in any open-plan office to alleviate the pressure of continually being in the company of others.

‘There is a mountain of research suggesting that radically open offices are a problem,’ says Cain. ‘Meanwhile, there are many surprising advantages to introversion, and we undervalue the strengths of quieter, more cerebral, people. In work environments, we admire the principle of collaboration, but we must also appreciate the value of solitude and the creativity that it brings.’
The Frictionless Office Space
A recent article on trends and insight network LS:N Global suggests that hotels will become the new default offices, as ‘frictionless foyer’ brands such as CitizenM and The Ace Hotel Group introduce a range of Bleisure-like offers, from SocietyM, a co-working space, to the Marriot’s LiquidSpace app that enables you to search for vacant tables, work spaces or meeting zones in the hotel’s inventory.

On a more practical level, Impact Hub Westminster, developed by architectural practice 00:, is an ideal example of this new-generation frictionless space. The space is one of an international network of hub spaces for those who work in the creative industries, whose work demands that they travel a lot. The work space facilitates the free flow of ideas, with open tables, talks and events. Joining the Impact Hub is like joining a gym where the emphasis is on community rather than corporation.

Design studio Khan Project in Seoul takes the frictionless office to the nth degree. The space is completely white, stark and has a complete lack of visual noise. Design teams can meet and disperse anywhere in the office in a completely open layout.

Office workers are feeling the benefit of switching from a fixed-space arrangement to a fluid office layout, as wifi, faster broadband speeds and cloud servers facilitate movement and encourage workers to log on any time, anywhere from their own devices.

Russell Hookway, network and telecommunications manager at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Information Systems Division, has instigated a flexible working environment in the council’s offices, with significant results.

‘We used to be a traditional business with silo working, people sitting in the same place for up to 25 years, and working with the same team throughout. This became a rather stale environment,’ says Hookway. ‘We are now moving to a more open environment in which collaboration is key, where people can hear stories from adjacent teams and assist with any issues.’

In this new office environment – collaborative, flexible and open – brands are placing emphasis on community and adopting a more employee-centric model of working. With this, we are seeing hubs, villages and communities, rather than departments, headquarters and hierarchies.

This is why Daniel Pink, author of Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us, argues that, for ‘cloud collaborators’, work is no longer a curse: ‘We often thought of work as something you do to earn money to buy leisure. Work will become a profitable hobby rather than drudgery.’

This cloud and data age scenario is leading to a revolution in which employers, start-ups and managers are using a range of new practices that favour collaboration over competition, productivity over presenteeism and invention over inhibition.

‘The rise of mobile technology, cloud computing and wireless is facilitating the flexible work space,’ says Hookway. ‘Our office is more social and productive, and there are more meaningful exchanges now that we have open desks. Everyone has a laptop, a smartphone and a locker rather than cluttered desk drawers and immovable desks.’

But as our spaces are changing, so too are what we produce in them, says Sanderson, referring to the swift and stealthy onset of the so-called Third Industrial Revolution, a time when 3D printing becomes mainstream.
The Third Industrial Work Revolution

As the cost price of 3D printers falls, and the software used to program them becomes simpler to use, high-performance fabricators will enter the home in a more meaningful way, he believes.

The size and growth rate of the 3D printing industry illustrates how suddenly the Third Industrial Revolution will be upon us. In 2013, 3D printer sales, materials and associated services reached $2.5bn (£1.8bn, €1.5bn) worldwide, according to research firm Canalys. This figure is expected to rise to $3.8bn (£2.8bn, €2.2bn) in 2014, before reaching $16.2bn (£11.9bn, €9.6bn) by 2018.

‘This is a market with enormous growth potential now that the main barriers to uptake are being addressed,’ says Canalys senior analyst Tim Shepherd. ‘Crucially, prices are falling, making the technology an increasingly feasible option for a broad variety of enterprise and consumer uses.’

By allowing us to ‘micro-fabricate’ products locally, and on a very bespoke level, 3D printers will lead to the collapse of traditional manufacturing. It will also see the role of the worker merge with that of the designer, prototyper, manufacturer, even the distributor and retailer.

Projects such as Mash Up by Dutch designer Diederik Schneemann show the new power shifts that will occur on the back of the Third Industrial Revolution. Schneemann took a series of iconic designs including the Rietveld chair, and remixed them, adding new tweaks to the design to open a debate around ownership of form in a world on the brink of a 3D fabrication revolution.

‘We are facing a crisis point in design equivalent to the one the music industry had when streaming sites such as Napster started giving tracks away free,’ says Schneemann. ‘When anyone can download a design, print it and make it their own – who can own a shape or a form?’

As the Third Industrial Revolution kicks in, jobs will become blurred, careers more about being creative, collaborative and cloud-based – the 3Cs of future work practices – while ‘factories will be transformed into facteliers, high-concept, artisanal style showrooms, where you choose a product, touch a screen, make adjustments and print it’.

In this vision of the future, Sanderson says that the same printers, thermoplastics and digital raw materials will be used and adapted to print anything from a table to sections of the human face – and that is the real shift we are not prepared for.

‘Simply put,’ says Sanderson, ‘we are witnessing the death of the sector-based work space and industries. The rapid prototype designer, drawing on the right data from the cloud, will be able to customise, design and print anything, from the same machine and in the same space.’

Mirroring the era before the industrial revolution, when artisans would sell their products in the shops over which they lived, manufacturing will come home, as people print rather than buy products.

‘This will happen slowly, as there are tricky accessibility hurdles concerning the software in 3D printing,’ says Nicholas O’Donnell-Hoare, chief designer at 3D printing practice Saint-H.

‘But in around 10 years’ time, the 3D printing revolution will begin suddenly as people print household components to slow our throwaway culture, before moving on to more complex and significant products such as printable electronics.’

Sanderson argues that these changes will be even more profound. ‘Essentially, we are witnessing the collapse of traditional hierarchies in industrial spaces and organisations,’ he says.

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Towards a more direct relationship between designer and manufacturer, and a more direct relationship between customer and provider, where the provider is also the creator of the product.

‘This will require a new way of thinking about work, where the designer is not just a creator but also a manufacturer, and the manufacturer is not just a producer but also a designer.’

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Dawn of the Age of Everyware

As cloud computing is changing the physical nature of our work spaces, the way we connect to them and the number of objects we connect to them are also changing what we mean by work in the future.

In January 2014, Samsung’s president for North America Gregory Lee declared this to be the ‘year of the Internet of Things’. His prediction is echoed by findings from IDC, which state that by 2015, 37% of the world’s labour force, or 1.3bn people, will identify as mobile workers. The company also predicts that 1 trillion networked devices will be connected worldwide by 2025.

The Age of Everything, a term coined by urbanist Adam Greenfield in his book Everyware: The Dawning Age of Ubiquitous Computing, will mean that anything electronic will be linked to the web.

As a result, a range of predictive devices will be able to communicate with one another to make our working lives increasingly seamless.

‘I’m imagining I walk out of my front door with my device. My device locks the door behind me. It starts my car. It pays for my coffee at Starbucks. It knows that when I get in my car and I say I’m going to Starbucks, it has my order waiting for me when I get there,’ says Mani Zarrehparvar, president of mobility technology firm Visage Mobile.

‘It recognises that I’m late for a meeting and changes my meeting because it knows – from my location – that I’m not going to be at the office in time for my video conference meeting so it changes it to a voice call.’

Interior designers Control Group created a phygital (digital and physical) office space for asset management company Brookfield in Manhattan that offers a glimpse of what work will be like in the Age of Everything. The digital infrastructure includes a 50-feet screen that shows key words associated with Control Group such as ‘global reach’. As visitors read them, Kinect-like technology cues the smartscreen to show more visuals and elaborate on the text. Intuitive meeting rooms also allow conference calls and Powerpoint presentations to be started with the touch of a button.

‘Work, and the functions of work, will therefore become more sentient, anticipatory and predictive as the Internet of Things anticipates our movements, objectives and work patterns,’ adds Sanderson.
The Fractional Ownership Corporation

As The Future Laboratory predicted at the turn of the decade, a new rebellious spirit is taking hold and creating counter-intuitive solutions to our biggest problems. These unexpected, collaborative and often frugal agents of change are altering the ways in which we value work.

‘In the future, people will increasingly barter, exchange, borrow or rent rather than want to own products. We are moving to a time when access will be more important than ownership,’ says Lauren Anderson, chief knowledge officer at Collaborative Lab.

Consider brands such as room rental business Airbnb, vehicle rental service Zipcar, car-sharing site Lyft and possession rental site Open Shed. All are service- rather than product-based business models, and operate as platforms, marketplaces and forums rather than retailers.

In this world of Fractional Ownership, collaborative consumption model businesses are the facilitators, enabling you to access other people’s products and possessions, for which they take a percentage of the hire fee. The model is working. Research firm Opinium estimates that the sharing economy is worth £310bn ($520bn, €383bn) worldwide.

Creating collaborative consumption business initiatives is enabling people to pursue more flexible working patterns, according to Airbnb, which reports that 42% of Airbnb hosts are self-employed, freelancers or part-time workers, many of whom say Airbnb helped them pursue these careers.

And many corporate brands are emulating this model, using the internet and the rise of barter culture, Fractional Ownership and skills-exchange networks to re-invent the traditional notion of the global corporation.

The #GenMobile Work Ethic

Many of these changes are driven by #GenMobile Millennials, as Aruba Networks has called this group – mid-20s to mid-30s Betapreneurs such as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg who believe that brands need to be increasingly weightless, connected and present in all aspects of our lives if they are to have any real impact. Similarly, they expect the world to work and think like they do, in ways that are collaborative, connected, creative, but also local, artisanal, agile and socially and civically aware.

#GenMobile Millennials, for instance, think business can do more to address society’s challenges such as resource scarcity (68%), climate change (65%) and income equality (64%), according to Deloitte. When deciding whether to accept a job offer, 78% of Millennials are influenced by how innovative a company is.

For them, innovation means companies that allow them to work not just remotely, but on their mobiles, their core work tool. A recent survey of the #GenMobile tribe by Aruba Networks suggests that nearly half prefer non-traditional working hours, that is, outside the usual 9:00am–6:00pm. Nearly a third (29.3%) of those prefer to work during late evenings. Almost two-thirds (63%) believe their mobile devices help them to manage their lives.

This generation is ringing the changes around the workplace.

In their short history, smartphones have revolutionised our working practices. At present, 36% of US workers frequently check work emails outside of normal working hours according to Gallup. The same survey found that 76% of respondents found this to be a positive behaviour.

JWT Amsterdam’s new office design is in step with the #GenMobile work routine. The space is designed with this demographic in mind, and features Think spaces where teams can position themselves away from desktop screens and near windows that overlook Leidse Square.
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The Personal Information Economy

As we progress from the industrial age into the cloud and data age, the most valuable commodity of the 21st century won’t be coal, diamonds or oil, but data sets that enable businesses to pre-empt consumer behaviour. As a result, a new wave of business practices are taking hold that range from stewardship of data to harvesting data from co-workers, clients, and even competitors, to enhance productivity.

Personal.com is a new service that enables people to take control of their personal data and store it in a vault in the cloud. This is one of the first in a wave of data concierges that store people’s personal information, and place it out of the reach of businesses that monetise it free.

The New Flexecutives

A new psychographic is emerging in which employers no longer dictate to workers, who instead are forming flat work structures that suit team members who are collaborative, creative, conversational, collegiate and critical.

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Logistics company Ryska Posten’s office by Vida centres on the idea of a micro-village that changes the emphasis from traditional hierarchies to collaboration by grouping areas according to function rather than seniority. Crucially, the design enables teams to have ‘great fun at work’, according to the architect.

With the decline of fixed working structures, in which people are in the same position in an office day after day, we will discover new ways to work in temporary jobs, yet occupy full-time roles.

‘We have left the full-time employee- or head count-driven talent environment, and we are now in an open-talent economy,’ says Gyan Nagpal, author of Talent Economics: The Fine Line Between Winning and Losing the Global War for Talent. ‘In the open-talent economy, maybe 30–50% of your capabilities will come from full-time workers, but the majority will be outsourced to free agents.’

The rise in freelance work is in a transitional period as we adapt to Flexecutive business, according to Sara Hill, founder of The Jobshare Project, a group of business leaders committed to bringing flexible collaboration to the workplace. In this era of Flexecutive working, independent agents will be brought together to complete a task – design a product, launch a brand, engineer a start-up – and then disbanded when that task is complete.

‘The biggest trend we are seeing is enabling people to work in flexible job designs,’ says Hill. ‘Senior roles are becoming much more about project-based work. Many brands stumble at this prospect, of placing people in long-term temporary opportunities. There will be a significant trend towards job-sharing; that is, working together part-time in a full-time role.’

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The New Bleisure Hive

The future office will be a manifestation of our new attitudes to work. Zoned areas in which workers can alternate between business and leisure will be an office mainstay. The future workspace will look less like an office and more like a multi-purpose apartment or leisure park. Social media networks will become Bleisurite business tools as we turn to open and closed networks to manage our increasingly blurred office and leisure routines. In this version of the future office networks will be used to offer feedback, share ideas, co-create products and improve social cohesion. But the growing use of the virtual will still drive us back to the live and the real.

Jean Nouvel created Office for Living for the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan to present a vision of how the future office will be more humanistic, and geared towards creating chance meetings, moments of serendipity and a feeling of togetherness. The interior includes a sleeping area, a gym and a sitting room, along with conference rooms and co-working areas.

‘In 30 or 40 years’ time we will be stunned to see just how unlivable most of today’s offices really were,’ says Nouvel. ‘Grotesque clones, standardisation, totalitarianism – never the merest hint of being pleasurable places to inhabit.’

This description is the antithesis of Facebook’s planned office construction envisaged by architect Frank Gehry. The new HQ, planned for construction in 2015, will be a one million-square feet Bleisure Hive where engineers will be able to eat, sleep, relax and work. A rooftop park will have running tracks, tennis and basketball courts, a vegetable garden and an area of woodland. A central square will have cabanas, barbecue pits, and even an area designed as a playground for the dogs of team members.

Symbiotic Organisations

As open-source culture continues apace, and innovators understand the value of sharing rather than withholding ideas, Symbiotic Organisations will arise that will become greater than the sum of their parts. By sharing space, ideas will be spread, absorbed and brands will be assimilated.

The Supernova store by design agency Kemmler Kemmler at the Bikini Berlin shopping centre sets out to be ambitious, symbiotic and unafraid of failure. Different brands take up residence at the Supernova store to create a temporary experience for visitors. ‘Designers must be less afraid of failure,’ says Katharina Kemmler, creative director and co-founder of Kemmler Kemmler. ‘There is a chance of big success, but the idea is that you test things out and either they work or they don’t. The main thing is to learn from one another.’

Advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy has created the Portland Incubator Experiment, or PIE, an incubator that supports technology entrepreneurs, and follows the model of a symbiotic organisation. Wieden + Kennedy enlisted the help of its big-name clients such as Coca-Cola, Nike, Target and Google to support the incubator, which feeds into the work of the start-ups. ‘Symbiosis is the perfect term to describe the relationships in the incubator movement,’ says Rick Turoczy, co-founder of PIE. ‘Big brands want to be nimble, think disruptively and iterate quickly, and start-ups, by their very nature, do this.’

Daniel Burrus, author and technology futurist, agrees, and believes that this symbiosis will bring us to a greater level of interdependency. ‘The best way to create ideas is to share the best ones we have. Taking this abundant approach, rather than a scarcity approach, helps all of us.’
The Convergent Workhouse

As space is increasingly at a premium, previously unassociated brands and sectors will come together to occupy shared spaces. In this way they will be able to pursue individual, bilateral and collaborative business goals. Crucially, the workplace will be about cross-pollinating ideas. The rise in popularity of co-working spaces in urban centres attests to the value of sharing ideas with other businesses categories. Nine out of 10 co-working spaces are expected to attract more members this year, according to The Global Coworking Survey, while 75% expect to increase their earnings.

At present, the Convergent Workhouse is suited to freelancers and start-ups eager to cut rental costs and to network with other entrepreneurs. But Beau Button, founder of collaborative workspace The Dojo in New Orleans, believes that it is a matter of time before they are adopted by larger brands. ‘These spaces are melting pots of creativity. They generate a level of synergy that results from the proximity and collaboration of like-minded people. New relationships are developed. Ideas are challenged. Problems are solved.’

And this, of course, will be the real goal of business in the future, to generate value as well as developing products.

It is about designing virtual and real systems that allow co-workers and collaborators to generate a new kind of social, cultural and commercial currency — one that is agile, weightless, innovative and always open to embracing the new, the next and the most advantageous in terms of future opportunities.

Technology has allowed these things to happen, freeing us from the very physical and restrictive demands of wires, cabling, desktop and cumbersome storage systems, and enabling us to live in the cloud. But this is only the beginning of the journey.

As teens and early 20somethings enter the workplace with no memory of the world without the cloud — these are teenagers, after all, who find desktops as outlandish as fax machines and regard laptops as cumbersome technologies used by their parents — we can only imagine how they will once again alter the environment in which we do business, concludes Sanderson.

But one thing is certain, he believes. The future is collaborative. It is cloud-based and, more than anything else, it is increasingly about brands, businesses or corporations being more cultural, artisanal and using the seamlessness of technology to facilitate what we believed technology would prevent us from doing — becoming more intimate, local and social.

If the 20th century was about using technology to build a global corporation, believes Sanderson, the 21st century is all about using it to build a more social and human one.

To learn more on how to deliver the Future Workplace, visit www.arubanetworks.com.
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Chris Sanderson, co-founder, The Future Laboratory