

MTEV8: What's the Future of Work – and How Should We Feel About It?

Transcript

Rachel Salaman 00:05

Hello, and welcome to the last in the current series of the Mind Tools Expert Voices podcast. I'm Rachel Salaman, host of all the Expert Interviews in our toolkit.

Jonathan Hancock 00:15

I'm Jonathan Hancock, a senior writer and editor at Mind Tools. And we're back together to explore our archives – in search of answers.

Rachel Salaman 00:23

Yes, and the question we've set ourselves this time is a big one, because it's about the future. What's next for the world of work? What do our experts think we need to be ready for?

Jonathan Hancock 00:36

And how should we prepare ourselves for it? In this podcast, we'll both choose experts with things to say about coming trends, opportunities, challenges... We'll get their ideas about what's going to change, but also what **isn't**.

Rachel Salaman 00:51

And we'll hear what all of this means for the workplace of the not-too-distant future. We want to whet your appetite for the-full length Expert Interviews, and give you plenty of food for thought today, about... well, tomorrow! [Laughs]

Jonathan Hancock 01:05

[Laughs] Yes! Well, I'm looking forward to this. Welcome to Mind Tools Expert Voices: "What's the Future of Work..."

Rachel Salaman 01:10

"... And How Should We Feel About It?"

Jonathan Hancock 01:19

So maybe we should just start by quickly outlining our plan here today, Rachel.

We both listened back through to some of the key Expert Interviews in the archive, in particular looking out for futurists – because you've talked to a few of those. But also, many of the experts do have obviously future-facing themes and ideas. And we've tried to pick out the big themes: the threads that run through it, and the messages that keep coming out about the future, and things that we need to be thinking about. And we've picked some key themes, haven't we? So you've got three, and I've got three.

Rachel Salaman 01:49

That's right.

Jonathan Hancock 01:50

And in theory, this should set us up well, for at least some questions. We may not have all the answers... but we've certainly got lots of things to mull over today, and some big things to tackle as we think about what the future might hold, and maybe how we can start feeling about it.

So let's start with my three. And first of all... well, I thought this is a big theme that comes through so many of the interviews: **change**. And, in particular, the **pace** of change. I guess it's something that we feel, don't we, just instinctively, in our day-to-day lives, our working schedules. But as we look at the world around us, I think it's fair to say things are changing faster than ever. And April Rinne made that point very clearly. She's a futurist – one of Forbes magazine's 50 leading female futurists; quite a title! – and she wrote “Flux: Eight superpowers for thriving in constant change.” Now, one of the big themes I took from that interview was about the relentlessness... and also the rapid acceleration... of change.

April Rinne 02:50

So on the one hand, we know that change is relentless, there's more change every day, lots of change, etc. etc. It's not just change, though; it's also the pace of change. And the pace of change has never been as fast as it is today. And yet, it is likely to never again be this slow.

So if you just pause and let that sink in... you know, it's kind of exciting and kind of terrifying.

Now, think about what society typically tells us to do, when the pace of change increases, or when things go faster. We are supposed to run faster; we are supposed to keep up. And you know, I'm all for striving and trying to move forward and trying to make progress and all of that. But if you map these two trends to one another... so let's just say today, from this day, every day moving forward, we know that the pace of change will be faster, and society says just keep running faster... What I've just told you and everyone listening is that, for the rest of your life, you're just going to need to run faster.

At best, this is major burnout across the board. But at worst, this is just more like none of us reaching our full potential. So when we learn how to slow down... and when I say run slower, I do not mean do nothing, I do not mean stop, I mean run at a sustainable pace, so that you can actually see what's happening around you – you can actually... You're running slow enough to notice what really matters.

Jonathan Hancock 04:19

She said “let it sink in.” And I did, because that was such a lovely way of putting it, I thought: that change is faster now than ever, and it'll never be this slow again in the future. Wow.

Rachel Salaman 04:28

Well, yeah, that caught me in my tracks too. There was a lot in that clip, wasn't there?

Jonathan Hancock 04:33

Yeah, and that idea – that counterintuitive concept – of moving more slowly as things get faster around you... And I was thinking, like on a day-to-day level... that rings very true with me, that if I've got a day where things are rapidly accelerating and everything's changing and almost on the verge of getting out of control, sometimes I'm actually saying to myself, "Slow down and try and spot the important things. Prioritize." And it is really hard! And if it's hard for me to do in the middle of my working day, how hard is it going to be for all of us to do, as a working culture to do, as change accelerates?

Rachel Salaman 05:06

Yes, we have to actively make sure that we're trying to do that.

Jonathan Hancock 05:10

But what **are** the important things? Maybe that will come out in some of our interview clips that we hear today. But I was thinking as well about some of the resources we have in the Mind Tools toolkit about VUCA. Have you heard about that? Do you remember VUCA? It's Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. Four big, complex – in themselves – complex concepts... but it does feel like we live in a VUCA world. And sometimes the important things can drop through the cracks of all of that rushing and change and volatility. So, go slower is April's message.

Faisal Hoque was somebody else that sort of jumped out at me from your bank of interviews. He's a serial entrepreneur and author. And you'll remember you spoke to him about his book "Lift: Fostering the leader in you amid..." – guess what – "... revolutionary global change." Another key change expert. And Faisal was very clear that really the only constant is change, and that the world will continue to feel more and more turbulent. But among it all – for people with the right mindset, at least – he sees opportunities.

Faisal Hoque 06:19

I think there is enormous opportunity for learning, enormous opportunity to create new businesses, enormous opportunity for innovating new products and services. There's enormous opportunity to serve the public and be a servant to public services. You have to be very empathetic to what's going on outside of your world. And kind of thinking about that first and then saying, "OK, what can I do for those outside worlds?"

So for example, you know... I mean, you've seen somehow some of the restaurants reinvented themselves during pandemic with the hope of serving people, not just from a "commercial need" point of view, but also people who needed the food and needed to eat, which is very... so fundamental. So you see some of how these people reinvented themselves – and, as a result, helped others, but also kind of thrived in that kind of tight economic condition, right?

But others have been left kind of on the wayside because they couldn't reinvent. So there's opportunity to serve people while you're being successful as an individual, and it comes from having the lens of other people's need first, and then, "How can I add value in that ecosystem?"

Jonathan Hancock 07:42

We certainly saw that in the pandemic, didn't we? And that ability to pivot, it seems, and to just subtly maybe shift your service to suit changing need. It sounds like that's going to become more and more important.

Rachel Salaman 07:54

It would be nice to think so, wouldn't it?

Jonathan Hancock 07:55

Yeah. And you know, what, I felt a bit more positive when he talked about service, because I was wondering: is there a kind of inherent selfishness sometimes in our response to change? It's like, right, "survival instincts." There was an element of that, I guess, in the pandemic. But also, like he said, often it was the companies that thought away from their own profits, their own immediate survival, and actually thought about service that maybe did particularly well. So possibly there is that side to prioritize, actually... The more you can serve other people, maybe the more you'll be able to stay afloat in times of change.

Rachel Salaman 08:29

You know, that really reminds me, Jonathan, of an Expert Interview I've just recorded, which is due for publication in August, I believe, with Sally Susman, who is Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Pfizer. And we talked in some detail about Pfizer's response to the pandemic, and their incredible achievement, really, to get the vaccine out so quickly in the way that they did. And it really did sound, from Sally's point of view, as if it was all about service: they were being driven by service. And that led them to this incredible innovation that actually helped turn the tide of the pandemic.

Jonathan Hancock 09:06

How interesting. Well, I look forward to hearing that when it comes out.

Well Alec Ross is another big thinker on these topics. He was Hillary Clinton's Senior Advisor for Innovation when she was Secretary of State. He wrote "The Industries of the Future." And, well, in terms of change, he had some very interesting things to say about **where** in the world the next big opportunities are likely to come from.

Alec Ross 09:30

We live in an increasingly global, interconnected world. And the ability to play on a 196-country chessboard is growing ever more important. So in the same way in which people who began working in business in China, say, 10, 12 or 15 years ago, benefited enormously from a decade plus of robust economic growth there, I think that there are vast numbers of other countries that will be quickly developing over the next decade.

I think about Sub-Saharan Africa, for example. I think that, you know, for people my age, the sort of "blink impulse" is to think of Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of conflict or development assistance. But I think that there's a new reality through much of Sub-Saharan Africa, which is it's not a place rooted in conflict and a need for development and assistance. Rather, it's a fast-growing market that's going to have a very good next 10 years.

And so I think that the willingness and ability to get some good, old-fashioned ink stamps in your passport, and work internationally in today's frontier markets, which will be tomorrow's developing markets – and today's developing markets, which will be tomorrow's developed markets – will help position people to be quite competitive in the industries of the future.

Jonathan Hancock 10:55

It's interesting, because I think sometimes we assume that we see change all too clearly. And it's obviously fast around us. But he was saying... that “blink impulse”: be careful that you don't miss things that have changed. You might just be assuming certain things about markets or areas of the world. But actually, look closely, the change has already happened.

Rachel Salaman

That's really good advice, isn't it?

Jonathan Hancock

And he mentioned “frontiers,” as well, which was a word that several of your experts brought up: where these changing frontiers are going to be, and different sorts of frontiers. I thought that was an interesting aspect of change. You've got the frontier markets there.

And Wayne Visser PhD talked about some of the frontiers of the past. He mentioned to you about the Wild West – so, the frontiersmen and women in those days. Then the new frontiers of space. But then the next significant frontier. What would that be?

Well, I'll give you a clue. Wayne is Chair of Sustainable Business at the Gordon Institute of Business Science in South Africa. He's written 23 books, including “Sustainable Frontiers: Unlocking change through business.” And he is pretty clear about the next significant frontier. He says we're going to have quite a battle on our hands to get the world changing for the better.

Wayne Visser 12:06

So today there are many of us that talk about sustainability as being that next frontier. And it's... quite simply, it's important, because if we don't get it right, then things start to collapse. Ecosystems start to collapse on which we depend, societies start to collapse, communities start to disintegrate. You know, if you look at the range of issues we're tackling under the broad banner of sustainability, they are the things that define what it means to have a good quality of life. So that's why it's important. We want life to be better for all of us.

I like the quote by Lao Tzu, who was the philosopher behind Taoism in the East, who said: If you don't change direction, you may end up getting to where you're headed. You know, that's... At the moment, we're headed very rapidly towards a cliff. And it's up to us whether to change direction. But at the moment, the evidence is we're just stepping on the accelerator.

Jonathan Hancock 13:08

Quite a cautionary note there from Wayne, I thought! It made me think I've been talking quite glibly, in a way, about change. It's getting faster, and there are these opportunities, as well as challenges. He's saying, just be very careful that change doesn't mean everything disintegrates.

Rachel Salaman 13:22

Yes. And I do think that's a subject that is not going away.

Jonathan Hancock 13:25

So that's my first big theme that I selected from our archives – about the pace of change.

The second theme – yet another complicated one (I think they're all going to be difficult issues, with lots to think about today!) – is about technology. In particular, AI – Artificial Intelligence – and robotics, which are two themes that quite a few of your expert guests talked about. What's it all going to mean for us – in particular in the workplace?

Well, going back to Alec Ross, for a second, he talked to you about the impact of connecting robots to the Cloud. Because he marks that out as being a really significant point. When I think back to the old sort of... they feel like science fiction now, but those old TV shows that used to look ahead to the future. We'd all have homes cleaned by robot butlers and that kind of thing. And it was... it was kind of self-contained robots, wasn't it, that had whatever technology they possessed **inside** them. There came a point not so long ago when suddenly we connected the robots to the internet, and the "hive mind," as he puts it., and suddenly they can do an awful lot more! He says that's something that we should be thinking about right now.

Alec Ross 14:32

There have been some recent developments – in mathematics, for example – in the modeling of belief space, which will allow robots to go from being dominantly two-dimensional beings to three-dimensional beings. And I think that the advent of cloud robotics, where robots don't have to have millions of dollars' worth of hardware and software in them to have almost human-like capabilities, but rather – so long as they are connected to the hive mind of the Cloud – they have powers of cognition. I think that these two things are enabling the creation of robots that look like they come straight out of science fiction, and we'll mainstream them in the years to come.

Rachel Salaman 15:15

[In the interview] So what are the implications of that for workers – and, particularly, managers?

Alec Ross 15:19

The way, you know, it's interesting... I think that this on the negative side, on the scary side... I think that we're going to see displacement of labor, and new forms, new forms of labor.

So, in the past, robots and automation have largely replaced blue-collar labor. Now that robots are increasingly able to do work that isn't merely manual and routine, but increasingly cognitive and non-routine, I think that we will see the beginning of displacement of some white-collar labor. You know, the kind of work for example that my father did, as a country lawyer, where most of what he did for 40 years

was prepare big stacks of paper for people to spend 30 minutes signing when they bought or sold a house. It's white-collar work, it does involve some measure of cognition, but it's... I believe that that kind of labor can be substituted by Artificial Intelligence and robotics.

On the positive side, I do see robots taking out work that is dull, dreary or dangerous. Human labor will be able to be focused on that which is uniquely human, and will take – and should be able to take – a lot of the repetition out of our life.

Jonathan Hancock 16:33

He took quite a balanced view, I felt there... talking about the advantages, the hope of AI improving lots of things at work, but also the dangers and the things that we need to be thinking about right now.

Rachel Salaman 16:44

Yes. And that... although that's a balanced viewpoint... the two sides are not balanced in their risk and implications, are they? Because if we lose millions and millions of jobs, that's massively destructive; whereas if we're helped along a little bit [laughs] on the other side, that's quite nice... but it doesn't really have the same impact as losing livelihoods all over the world, millions of them.

Jonathan Hancock 17:10

And I thought Tim Baker had some really interesting insight to add. He wrote “Bringing the Human Back to Work.” And he made a fascinating point about being robotic versus being human.

Tim Baker 17:23

So for the last 100 years we've become more like the AI that threatens to take our jobs. And so it's kind of... we're in a very interesting stage where we're worried about AI taking our jobs, but yet we ourselves as human beings have become more and more process orientated. And, dare I say, robotic! And so, I think, human beings have got to reinvent what humaneness actually is.

And I think the vehicle to do that is through conversation. We've just got to make work more interesting for people. I just think that we've got to start, I guess, engaging people with the actual work that they do, not just through extrinsic rewards.

Jonathan Hancock 18:07

Yeah, it's interesting: is the bulk of the stuff that we're worried about losing actually just the robotic stuff that we've just got used to doing that we shouldn't do anymore?

Rachel Salaman 18:16

Yes, it's a very interesting point. Quite a relief to hear him say that, actually! Because there's something that rings true about that, isn't there, about us being humans? And somehow focusing on maintaining our humanness is really important.

Jonathan Hancock 18:31

And what we'll have to do to achieve that in the workplace. Because I guess when times are tough, maybe the tendency is just generally to remove those human moments from people's working lives.

And that causes all sorts of other problems then, doesn't it? Whereas we should, he says, be thinking about putting the human back in, and making sure that there's a place for the social side of life – and also for the bits of jobs that only – well, at the moment, I guess – only humans can do.

Well, Tracey Follows is a futurist with lots to say about technology and that kind of change. And she wrote “The Future of You: Can your identity survive 21st Century technology?” Well, like many futurists, Tracey believes that many bits of tech that seem like distant science fiction will actually come into use pretty soon. For example, this idea she talked about of directly connecting technology to your brain.

Tracey Follows 19:29

The brain-computer interface – this idea that we can link our brains to a computational device, or use technology to infiltrate the brain and perhaps send messages to outside or external devices – is further down the line than people think. And I think that will probably enter the workforce again earlier than people think, maybe at the beginning of the 2030s. And I think again that's, you know... that's going to let a lot of people do things that they perhaps haven't been able to do before. It'll be able to replace some elements that people might have lost through accident or illness and things like that. So again that is incredibly positive.

Of course, it's then going to move on to augmentation. So able-bodied people will be... will use it to augment their own abilities or their own cognition on top of what they already have as human beings. And, you know, there's a lot of ethical conversations to be had around that.

Jonathan Hancock 20:32

In that interview, she definitely got you grappling with some ethical considerations, didn't she?

Rachel Salaman 20:36

Yes, she did, definitely. And her book has a really neat structure. Each chapter has a heading which ends with the word “you.” So it's “Knowing You,” “Watching You,” “Creating You,” “Connecting You,” “Replacing You”... And some of the visions that she had for the future were really quite dystopian, and others less so, I'm glad to say, yes.

Jonathan Hancock 20:58

There are clearly some advantages, and clearly some things to be worried about – and to try and make some... maybe some early decisions about. But that's always a difficult thing to do.

But it'll actually take us on nicely to our next theme, and the final of my three themes in today's episode, which is about collaboration. Because she definitely saw the importance of technology in that, and some big changes for the future in terms of how we collaborate. She remembered a conversation that she had with Audrey Tang, who is the Digital Minister for Taiwan. And they were talking about a particular type of collective intelligence powered by technology – and it involved improvements in democracy.

Tracey Follows 21:39

You can “upvote” or “downvote” on some of the ideas that the government might have. And that's a way of trying to get some sort of consensus around some of the ideas, and build some consensus, and... get a feel for what the population like, don't like, as a majority would kind of sign up to.

And there are other platforms where individuals or citizens can suggest their own ideas. But also, she was talking to me about how she would go out to even the remotest areas of Taiwan, whether it's up in the hills or down in the coastal areas, and go out to some of these villages and small towns, and take a telepresence wall, so that she could beam the cabinet into that space. And what's fascinating about that is that these digital tools are therefore being used to take the government out to the people, not to get the people to be given access to the government, if you see what I mean. And so it really flips it on its head.

It's these tools – these digital tools – are being used to help, I guess... in a way to help the citizens keep an eye on and interact with the government, rather than have the government interact and keep an eye on the populace.

Jonathan Hancock 22:56

So definitely new scope for collaboration there. It made me wonder, in the workplace... because that was obviously on a political level... but in the workplace, could that be a way of improving democracy and connection, say, between the C-Suite, the board members, and people in their teams, so that there could be a bit of upvoting and downvoting about certain issues, or a bit more access to... from both sides: you get access to the boardroom **and** access to where the work is going on?

Rachel Salaman 23:22

Yes. And I can just imagine some board members sitting there going: “This company is not a democracy! Never was, never will be!” [Laughs]

Jonathan Hancock 23:32

[Laughs] Well, they might have to change the way they think about that. Because this theme of collaboration... it really stems from a thread that appears in quite a few of the interviews about how we're going to have to work together in new ways and more open ways. And there's going to need to be more trust.

But again, that obviously brings some worries and some potential dangers. David Weinberger is a leading thinker in all things tech-related. And he's been an internet advisor to presidential campaigns. He's a writer, or he was a writer in residence at Google, and a fellow at both Harvard and the U.S. State Department. And he wrote a book called “Everyday Chaos: Technology, complexity, and how we're thriving in a new world of possibility.” Now, he took his knowledge of the tech to that level of connection – and what he calls “interoperability.”

David Weinberger 24:24

On the internet, it's common to put your... if you're a software developer, to put your software out as open-source, meaning that anybody can reuse it without asking permission. Or “open” in the world of

academics – open-access publishing – where you post it on the web, and anybody can reuse it without asking permission. There is a sort of a pattern here.

But all of this, again, is a form of “unanticipation.” It's a form of interoperability. Because interoperability means that what you have designed for your system can be reused by other systems and works really well – works in unanticipated ways, it's put to unanticipated uses, and often can be used without asking, even asking permission to do it.

Without interoperability, the internet would just be discrete, closed lumps and clumps of data and content. But because the internet, in its root and essence, is about the sharing of data and content, that makes interoperability the very heart of the internet itself.

Jonathan Hancock 25:32

Do you like the sound of a bit of interoperability? Are you open for that?

Rachel Salaman 25:36

Well, you know, when I talked to David, I remember struggling with trying to fully understand what he meant by it. And I think I still do a little bit. I mean, it is more or less collaboration, isn't it?

Jonathan Hancock 25:50

Yeah, I guess we're seeing it in terms of AI and putting that open-source code out there for people to play around with and then suddenly thinking: Is that safe? Because there's an element of that at the moment, isn't there? Like, have we let, you know... opened Pandora's Box? Have we just let it all out there, and people can be doing all sorts of things to what might have been a good idea at the start... but how is it being used, and where is it being taken? So I guess there's a new element of possibility and risk.

Rachel Salaman 26:20

Yes. And that opens the door to the massive subject of regulation, doesn't it, which we're not dealing with today. But I think if you do have that level of collaboration and openness, you do need regulation, because human nature, unfortunately... it cannot always be trusted to put others first.

Jonathan Hancock 26:40

Wow, so that was quite a lot to get through in our first half. But those are my three key future-facing themes, discussed from a variety of angles by our Expert Interviewees.

Change, they say, is only going to happen faster, but **we** need to slow down, to stop ourselves and the world from burning out, to remember what's important, and to seize some exciting new opportunities. Tech like robots and AI will remove many boring jobs. So we'll have to recapture what's special about being human, and make our bits of the work more interesting.

And the future is open-source. And as we just heard, “interoperable,” maybe. We'll have to embrace new types of collaboration, and be open to our ideas being used in ways that we can't even imagine yet. Are you ready for this brave new world?! And we're only halfway through!

Rachel Salaman 27:28

Well, it's all a bit scary, to be honest! Lots to think about already. And I'm only going to add to that in a moment, with three more visions of the future from the Mind Tools Expert Interview archives. And then we'll round off with some feedback on our last podcast, to hear what a couple of our listeners made of "quiet quitting" and "quiet firing."

Jonathan Hancock 27:51

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Rachel Salaman 28:15

So, after your three massive trends, Jonathan, I'm now looking at another three, and how to deal with them in the workplace – or at least prepare for them.

So let's kick off with mental health and wellbeing. One of our recent Expert Interviews was with Morra Aarons-Mele, the host of the successful podcast called "The Anxious Achiever." And she's the author of a book of that same name, subtitled "Turn your biggest fears into your leadership superpower." She cites a study from Mental Health America, which found that, from 2019 to 2020, the number of people seeking help for anxiety and depression increased 93 percent. Can you believe that, Jonathan?

Jonathan Hancock 29:01

So it sounds like that's just going to keep going up as well.

Rachel Salaman 29:04

Yes, it really is very worrying. And in the workplace particularly. Mind Share Partners' 2021 "Mental Health at Work" report showed 26 percent of full-time U.S. workers reported experiencing at least one poor mental health symptom in that year. That's up from 59 percent in 2019 – so again a massive jump just in a year or two.

So what can we do about it? Well, perhaps we can stop seeing it as a problem. Here's Morra talking about how anxiety can actually be a gift – with some caveats.

Morra Aarons-Mele 29:43

I mean, lots of people out there have anxiety that is preventing them from getting out of bed. I've been there. They're having anxiety that's so bad that they're having panic attacks and they can't function in their day-to-day life. I've been there too. And so, for them, anxiety is not a gift; it's a curse. And it's something that they need to work on. And the good news is, there are many, many evidence-based treatments that allow us to work on it.

So anxiety is a complex gift, because – like all hard things, like all things that make us different in a world that doesn't prize people who are different – it's something that we need to learn to manage, to

understand, to have a relationship with. When we work through it, when we face the hard things, we unlock so many gifts: self-awareness, resiliency, empathy, compassion... an ability to respond well in a crisis, an ability to create a plan.

But I cannot tell you that there's just a magic wand I'm going to wave and make your anxiety into something great. It's very complicated, and it can be a mental illness. And we all need to learn to look our anxiety in the face and work with it.

Rachel Salaman 30:56

So are you convinced that anxiety can be a gift, Jonathan?

Jonathan Hancock 31:00

Wow. Well, I think it **can** be. And I think she's really good at looking at both sides of it. And no wonder she can keep making podcasts about it and write a whole book about this, because she's got a really clear vision of how awful it can be – and also how it can sometimes be that extra spur to doing a good job and achieving high-quality work.

But, you know, it is such a difficult thing even to talk about. And I wonder how managers can be expected to talk about it with any great sense of safety. Because as soon as somebody comes to them, either saying they're anxious, or seeming anxious... you know, the danger of a manager saying, "... but there might be something good in that," or "... can we unlock the positives in that?"! I just think that's a real minefield.

What she has also convinced me of, though, is that this is something that we need to think about. If those figures are to be believed, this is going to become so much more of an issue for individuals, for managers, for organizations... and we've got to be prepared for it. But, personally, I'm not quite sure how we tread carefully enough to talk to people about their anxiety.

Rachel Salaman 32:00

Yes. Well, the psychologist Cary Cooper may have some tips for managers. He's the Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at Manchester Business School, University of Manchester in the U.K. He's written more than 250 books. And I talked to him about one called "The Healthy Workforce: Enhancing wellbeing and productivity in the workers of the future." And it's co-written with Stephen Bevan, who's head of HR Research Development at the Institute for Employment Studies. For Sir Cary Cooper, it's all about taking health and wellbeing seriously – beyond what you might call "healthy perks," like free yoga and Pilates at lunchtime – to the point of designing and implementing strategies around it.

Cary Cooper 32:50

We've left the fruit and Pilates lessons. And we're now into thinking about health and wellbeing: employee health and wellbeing as a strategic issue for organizations. Many organizations in the U.K. and Europe and the U.S. now have directors of health and wellbeing, some who even report directly to the CEO, some who report to the HR director, and some who report to Occupational Health. This is the big change. It's now become a big, big issue.

Rachel Salaman 33:25

So this is one of these big trends, apparently: directors of health and wellbeing. I've never come across one myself. Have you?

Jonathan Hancock 33:28

No, I haven't – although I have seen that become more a part of people's role within the kind of “people and culture,” you know, the old sort of “HR” space in organizations. So, not yet – but you can definitely see how that's going to be important. You know, I was saying that I haven't got an answer to it. Well, **they're** the people that are going to **have** to have the answers, aren't they? They will need to work out an approach to talking about anxiety and talking about mental health.

Rachel Salaman 33:50

Yes. And Cary told me what impact having a director of health and wellbeing – and a strategy – could have across organizations. For example, they're going to need to hire new kinds of managers.

Cary Cooper 34:06

You're going to have to think about how you select managers and recruit them in the future to ensure that they have parity between their people skills and their technical skills. Because... you know, we do in the West, in the West for sure, throughout the whole of Europe, North America... many developed countries... you find that people get promoted and recruited based on their technical skills, not their people skills. Well, that's becoming a big issue.

If, in the future, we're going to have hybrid working – and we are: all the evidence of that direction now, in most developed countries, and even developing countries – how are you going to, as a manager, manage people, some who are going to be in the workplace, some are going to be working from home? How are you going to recognize when they have mental health problems, where they have unmanageable workloads, unrealistic deadlines? How are you going to do that? Unless you get “socially sensitive,” “EQ'd” line managers, this is not going to be successful.

Rachel Salaman 35:04

It's almost like the more we move away from a human way of working, as we were discussing in the first half of this podcast, the more important those human skills are – to make us all feel human.

Jonathan Hancock 35:16

That's right – and the tendency to think we've got to up our technical skills, because tech is becoming a bigger and bigger thing. And actually, he's saying there, just make sure you're putting even more – much more – effort into the human skills, what used to be called “soft skills” (horrible phrase!) but, you know, soft skills, people skills. So, obviously great news for Mind Tools, because that's our area of specialty! You've got to have those people skills, and you're going to need them more and more in future.

Rachel Salaman 35:42

Yes, it's really good to be reminded of that. And Cary also pointed out that giving people control over their work is really important to maintain their mental health.

Cary Cooper 35:52

Another, I think, important issue is the whole issue of having autonomy and control. And being managed in a way that... where the line manager gives you more autonomy and control to manage your life, your work life, as... given the nature of the role you play.

In other words, an important part of any healthy workplace is to ensure that there's a good "psychological contract" between the employer and the employee, and/or your boss and you, giving you kind of the autonomy you need to do your job and feel valued and trusted and managed properly.

Rachel Salaman 36:29

You know, that idea of a psychological contract that Cary mentioned there reminded me of what we heard from Yael Zofi in our episode on what makes a great team today. Remember her? She's the founder and CEO of AIM strategies, a human capital consulting firm, and she's the author of "A Manager's Guide to Virtual Teams."

And she talked about the importance of "team codes" and "team charters," which are strong, shared policy documents, if you like, that enable people to feel safe and valued, working autonomously and remotely. And although those are probably written down and stored somewhere, so you can look at them, and Cary's "psychological contracts" are more likely not to be written down, it's the same idea of a strong bond of trust between the worker and the managers.

And that actually brings me nicely to the second big trend I'm looking at today, which is flexible working – which inevitably involves some remote and hybrid working, which we heard Cary talk about a moment ago as well.

Jonathan Hancock 37:40

Yeah. And so much has changed so quickly there. So many of the old rules of work have gone. And in the gap, I think, a lot of this anxiety has probably filled that space. People aren't quite sure what the rules are anymore.

Rachel Salaman 37:53

Yes. And this trend has really taken off, as you say, since COVID-19 closed down offices all over the world. There are benefits, but there are also challenges, too. Here's Yael Zofi.

Yael Zofi 38:06

Working "anywhere, anytime" has its advantages. It also has some of the challenges of social isolation or feeling like I'm by myself or finding it difficult to establish team spirit and motivate people, or building trust, when there is that distance.

There's also greater risk of misinterpretation or misunderstanding occurring. You know, when you and I are "in person," it's much easier to understand the context and what's going on and what your desk

looks like and how your day is. When we're not, that could be a greater chance for misunderstanding and feeling less connected.

Rachel Salaman 38:47

Does that chime with your experiences, Jonathan?

Jonathan Hancock 38:50

It really does. It felt like such rapid change that like, overnight – literally overnight, in some cases! We just went from working all together, all at the same time in the same physical space... to working different hours in our own homes, bedrooms, kitchens, garden rooms, wherever... completely spread out all over the world. Great in loads of ways, like she said there, because you've got access to all sorts of new talent and you can work in ways that suit you and your family. But I think that a lot of the problems are coming through now.

And it goes back to anxiety, I think, and people being isolated... not quite sure how to switch off at the end of the day... the stresses of having your family around, you know... For all that it's good that you can be there to do the school run and things, and be around for pets and stuff, that does bring stress.

So I personally feel that I've benefited a lot from it. But I do think that it's a work in progress for me. And there are days when it works brilliantly, and other days when it's just very difficult to be working from home.

Rachel Salaman 39:48

Yes, well, I completely agree with that. But one person who really truly believes in the opportunities of virtual work is Liam Martin. He's the chief marketing officer at a fully virtual company called Time Doctor, and the co-author of a book called "Running Remote." I asked him how he tackles some of these challenges. And in this clip from our Expert Interview he talks about the need to create a level playing field, so team members don't find remote work difficult just because they don't, for example, have a dedicated home office.

Liam Martin 40:24

Creating a space for every single worker to be able to do their best work, I think, is going to be more important as we move forward. I do have my own home office in my home. But we have plenty of people that work in our organization that don't have access to a committed space. And they have the ability to be able to work at a co-working space if they choose. So we offer co-working-space stipends.

We also do testing for people's internet connections. If they have less than five megabits up and down, and a ping rate of below 50, I believe [laughs] if I remember the process document correctly, then we upgrade their internet. And we basically just augment that for them on their behalf. So there are all these things that we're trying to do to be able to equalize that bias.

Rachel Salaman 41:14

I thought that was really interesting – that they, as quite an advanced remote-working company, recognize that the company actually has to do things to make virtual work **work**.

Jonathan Hancock 41:27

You have to make it fair. I thought that was such an interesting view of equity as well. How easy it is to forget that not everybody has that space, not everybody has the same access to internet. And whether it's existing workers or people you're looking to recruit, you've really got to think about how you make it fair.

Rachel Salaman 41:43

Yeah, and it's not something you hear much about, usually. One of the advantages of working virtually, though, is that your work speaks for itself. Natural human biases that can cause problems face-to-face are eliminated, or at least greatly diminished, we hope. Liam has a great story about how this can work.

Liam Martin 42:04

I have an old friend of mine called Faheem. And he was a top designer on an online platform called Fiverr – so one of the best designers in the world. And one of the things that no one knew about Faheem is that, number one, he was from Bangladesh, in Dhaka. And number two, he has cerebral palsy. So he can only move his hand very, very slowly with a mouse. He would have never been accepted inside of a lot of these in-office, on-premises organizations, simply because of the bias that he held with him.

But when you remove those biases, when you remove that he's from the developing world, and when you remove that he has a physical disability, and he's just allowed to compete openly, he actually succeeds – much more so than everyone else that was able-bodied. And for me, that's a world that I want to live in.

Rachel Salaman 43:01

Such a great story about one of the benefits of the growing move towards remote working, I thought.

Jonathan Hancock 43:07

Absolutely. But once again a challenge for people to be seizing that opportunity. Don't just assume that you'll have access to this wonderful, rich pool of talent around the world. If you don't say the right things in your job adverts, if you don't make your recruitment process fully accessible, you just won't get those people, will you?

Rachel Salaman 43:27

No, that's a really good point.

We can now pivot on the bias idea towards our third big trend, which is longevity. Because older people have traditionally experienced discrimination – or at least stereotyping. And that's becoming increasingly outdated as people are living longer all over the world. And we have a couple of longevity experts in our Mind Tools Expert Interview collection, including Susan Wilner Golden, who wrote a book called "Stage, Not Age." Here she is talking about the need to rethink older people's place in the future workforce.

Susan Wilner Golden 44:07

The key is to stop thinking of all older adults as just one type of person. Their traditional stereotype was declining, frail, elderly. Rather, people are living with much greater health into their longer years. And now we think about health span as being so much of importance, rather than just your lifespan, how long you're living. But people are living healthier lives, and they can be productive and are productive and contributing, and being creative.

So, it's much more important to think about what **stage** of life they're in. Are they in their “repurposing” stage, in a “new renaissance” stage... ? But not certainly all older adults are in the same stage.

Rachel Salaman 44:49

And this idea of stages that Susan mentions – that came up in our Expert Interview with Andrew Scott, the co-author of a book called “The 100-Year Life,” and another one called “The New Long Life.” They're both co-written with Lynda Gratton – and we have a Book Insight review of both of those books on the Mind Tools site, don't we Jonathan?

Jonathan Hancock 45:11

We do – it's absolutely brilliant. But then I wrote it, so I would say that, wouldn't I?! [Laughs] They're actually really good books. I've found them fascinating to read. Some of the statistics they've got about predictions of longevity... it's just mind blowing, really: what it's going to mean, as you've been saying, for the future of work, for the future of society.

Rachel Salaman 45:28

And it was a great pleasure and privilege to talk to Andrew Scott about this. He thinks this trend is going to have an enormous, maybe the biggest, impact of all on the future.

Andrew Scott 45:40

It's funny: the more I think about this topic, the more I think it's actually the most profound change that's going to happen. So there will be huge economic, social, demographic, and personal changes.

The majority of the debate so far has been around financing lots of older people in retirement. But in effect, what is important about 100-year life is you're going to redesign every stage of your life as a consequence. And basically, we will live our lives in a totally different way, with whole new stages and ages of life emerging as a consequence.

Rachel Salaman 46:13

So I think it's probably worth digging into what Andrew and Susan mean by “stages.” You may have noticed in Susan's clip there she talked about a “repurposing” stage and a “renaissance” stage. And in fact, in her book, she says there's no fixed number of stages for any one person, but it's often in double digits. And Andrew Scott sees things developing in a similar way.

Andrew Scott 46:38

There are lots of different options, but you will basically no longer have a three-stage life. We paint lots of seven- or eight-stage lives, actually.

And a little bit more about that: if you have two or three different careers during your life then, of course, in between those careers, you're going to have “transition” periods. Now those transition periods may be time off, time raising family, time looking after parents, or time reskilling and learning a new network. So every kind of new stage automatically brings a transition stage as well.

So you have a lot of stages – certainly more than three. And that also adds some very interesting issues. Because if you think of the three-stage life, there's only one way to arrange your life: education, work, retirement. You can't work and then educate and then retirement... you can't retire first... so you have to do it only one way. But if you have five- or seven- or nine-stage life, then there's loads of different ways of arranging it.

Rachel Salaman 47:32

So that sounds really exciting, from an individual's point of view – loads of choices and options. But what about from an organization's point of view? How should companies handle employees with multi-stage lives, who are living and working for so much longer? Here's Susan Golden.

Susan Wilner Golden 47:51

First of all, they should commit to the fact that they're going to have a five-generation workforce. And that's not... that's brand new. That's just happening now. And that people are going to want to work longer, but they may want to take career breaks, so they should be able to support career breaks.

Companies that have done this well are offering now programs in America called “returnships,” where a company that has an employee that took time off for caregiving or for rejuvenation or for a sabbatical come back for 16 weeks, and they have a... it's a paid program that retools them, upskills them, has them be continuous learners. And at the end they're offered a position. And the employee or former employee can see if this is a good fit for them at this time. But it's valuing a person even though they took this career break, and it could be anywhere from 10 to 15 plus years – people recognizing that people will need that.

And then companies should be thinking about investing in lifelong learning for all their employees. Either setting up funds for them, or creating opportunities for lifelong learning. Because there is no way your education in your early 20s can last a 60-year career span. And that will become more common.

People may not want to work all 60 years, as I said, because of caregiving breaks or sabbaticals, but they will be working over that period of time.

And the other thing companies can begin to recognize is: having intergenerational teams has been documented through research to be more productive, and they provide greater insights into product design. Having someone to design **with** – rather than **for** – is the mantra in the field. Because you may not know what the needs and wants of an older adult are, but your older employees may well. So that is a new framework: how employers can begin to think about this.

Rachel Salaman 49:38

I really liked that last tip particularly, Jonathan. And it has hints of your collaboration points that were made in your half.

Jonathan Hancock 49:47

I tell you, one thing it did make me realize, though, is that I'd been thinking of the office just getting more and more full with people. Every time you add a generation, it's like you've just got to cram more people in. They both make the point, though, that there'll be people dropping out at different times as well, in their vision of the future, because people will be going off to do family responsibilities, or they'll be traveling or going back to learning. So it won't be quite as crowded in the office as I'd feared! But it will be challenging for loads of different reasons.

Rachel Salaman 50:15

So some really interesting ideas around longevity there. And before that, we talked about mental health and wellbeing, and we heard from Morra Aarons-Mele about how anxiety can bring benefits to individuals, sometimes.

Professor Sir Cary Cooper stressed that organizations must take mental and physical health seriously, to keep people well and thriving into the future – moving beyond fruit and Pilates, he said. And this is a particular issue with remote work.

And we got some interesting tips from Liam Martin, about leveling the playing field for remote workers, so everyone can feel included and part of a successful team. And he told us about Faheem who is flourishing – thanks to never meeting his clients! So lots to think about there, Jonathan.

Jonathan Hancock 51:07

Yeah. We set off at the start saying we'll try and work out how to think about the future. I'm not sure how I think about it now! I'm going to need to go off... maybe I'll need to live and work that bit extra, that bit longer now, to process all of that stuff! [Laughs]

But I tell you what, it's made me think that we do have to think about it, however it makes us feel. We've got to start thinking about these things. Because, let's face it, they're all happening already! These aren't things that are off in the distance of some science fiction future of work; they're all happening **now**. And so how important that we have these conversations today... maybe go back and listen to those full-length interviews... and really start grappling with what all of this means for us, and the people we work with.

Well, go to mindtools.com, find out about subscribing, and you'll get access to hundreds of Expert Interviews, not just the ones that we've heard from today. But there are loads of world-leading thinkers who will guide you through the tricky things that we've been talking about.

Plus you'll get everything else in the toolkit. So whatever challenges you're facing at work, now or in the future, we've got resources to help. And we're adding new ones all the time, in a range of formats to suit your learning needs.

Rachel Salaman 52:16

And to round off this podcast – and this series of Expert Voices – a couple of bits of feedback on our last episode, which explored the phenomena known as “quiet quitting” and “quiet firing.”

Adele got in touch on LinkedIn from London, and she said, “Thank you for making the distinction between ‘quiet quitting’ and ‘just getting on with your job.’ It upsets me to hear people being stigmatized for not constantly going above and beyond,” she says. “The idea that they have quit when perhaps they've got other responsibilities outside of work, or simply get satisfaction from doing their core job really well, is terrible!” She says, “I think organizations should be much more positive about these people, because they're often the ones who stick around for a long time and actually drive the company forwards.” Great point, Adele.

Jonathan Hancock 53:10

Yeah – and how well that fits in with what we were just saying there about longevity as well, and not being able to stereotype people. And there'll have to be times in people's lives when they do take their foot off the gas a bit and maybe step out, do other responsibilities. If they're still doing their core job well, surely that's OK? They haven't quit – and they certainly don't deserve to be quiet fired!

Here's a final comment from Andrew, who's in Boulder, Colorado, who also listened to that last episode, and says, “Can I echo your warnings about quiet firing?” He says, “I've been in that position myself. It was clear that my manager and I had a clash of personalities. And although she had nothing bad to say about my work, she never offered me any development opportunities, and actively encouraged other people to take chances for advancement past me.” Wow.

“Well, it dawned on me,” says Andrew, “that she wanted me to leave, even though she would never admit it. In the end, a business reorganization split us up, and I ended up in a much better role – thankfully,” he says, “with a manager who encouraged me to develop my skills. So I never looked back. But your podcast made me think back to a very frustrating time in my working life,” Andrew says, “with the benefit of plenty of hindsight now, along with your experts' ideas.” And he finishes by saying, “Thank you!”

Rachel Salaman 54:32

Well, thank you, Andrew! And thanks to everyone who's commented on this series of Mind Tools Expert Voices. All eight of the episodes are still there, wherever you found this one. So please share the links with anyone you think might be interested in the topics we've discussed.

Jonathan Hancock 54:48

Yes, and thank **you**, Rachel, for eight fascinating discussions. So much to think about, from asking for more pay, through navigating psychological safety, to dealing with difficult people... to all these huge issues that we've tackled today. We'll look forward to many more top-notch Expert Interviews as you add another notable name to the archive every month.

Rachel Salaman 55:09

And keep your eyes and ears open for future podcasts from Mind Tools. Meanwhile, we'll keep making content in all our formats to help you on your personal journey into the future of work...

Jonathan Hancock 55:21

... which we hope you feel that bit more positive about and prepared for now. Thank you for listening!

Rachel Salaman 55:28

And from Mind Tools Expert Voices, for now, goodbye!