LIONS & TIGERS

Avoiding the All-Or-Nothing Workplace:

Enabling People to Operate at their Highest & Best Use

© 2023 Brea Starmer, Founder/CEO of Lions & Tigers

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Who This Is For

We built a playbook for leaders who are thinking about workforce innovation and need a system for change. Our Highest & Best Use Operating System™ maximizes human potential aligned to business outcomes, while guarding against burnout and exclusion.

This is an open-source playbook to empower leaders of knowledge workers with the information and framework they need to advance systemic work evolution. The data within is heavily influenced by Corporate America, but the themes apply globally.

The ~~Future~~ Now of Work

How I Lost My Job and Found My Way

It was a grey, rainy day in Seattle, Washington, eight years ago. As soon as I received the meeting request sent to 200 of my peers, I knew what was coming: a layoff.

I have been on both sides of layoffs – those being let go, and those deciding who to let go. Layoffs are such a common business practice now, they have become seemingly seasonal in the technology and startup space. Like getting a spring haircut. And yet, they are jarring and abrupt for the humans who must endure them.

In this case, I wasn't surprised by this reduction in force given our lack of product-market-fit and burn rate. But from a personal perspective, there couldn't have been a worse time: I was seven months pregnant with my first child.

You may have heard of the "nesting" stage for new mothers, and for me, it was entirely true. I prepared every detail of my upcoming arrival from pre-washed baby clothes, to a fully stocked nursery. But there was one thing I couldn't control: losing my work safety net at my most vulnerable time. I was scared and sad.

Without medical benefits or maternity leave protection, the deck was stacked against me. I am the breadwinner in my family, not my husband, so the pressure was immense. As I scrambled to set up interviews and try to land a job as a business leader, I faced pregnancy discrimination.

Here are just a few of the things I heard:

"Do you plan to come back after your baby is born?" (do you ask men?)
"What does your husband do for work?" (how is that relevant?)
"Our hiring process usually takes about four months…" (or just this time?)

Gotchaaa.

Without any options, I turned to freelance consulting to fill my employment gap. Overnight, I set up an LLC and created a rate card for my business strategy consulting services. I called on my network and landed three clients. I needed to self-fund a maternity leave, so I worked 60 hours a week until my due date. (Let me acknowledge the privilege I had to be able to do that, since 75% of American women would go broke while taking 8 weeks of leave.)

My equation for work shifted in those sleepless nights.

As this tiny baby stared up at me while fighting sleep in those early months, my work equation changed. And not in the judgey "you're-not-as-committed-to-work" assumptions those hiring managers made of me. I wanted to stay in the game and do my part, while being the caretaker my son needed.

I had an audacious work goal: I wanted to hold a leadership role, work part-time (25-30 hours per week), and still maintain my breadwinner status at home.

Turns out, I was hunting for sasquatch. Not one role offered both flexibility and impact. I was forced to choose – go all-in or go home.

As I spoke with other caretakers about the lack of options for us, it was clear I had struck a nerve. One conversation turned into five turned into dozens. I knew then that I was called to disrupt this imbalance. I could no longer be a bystander in a system that was systematically excluding caretakers, the backbone of our society.

I saw the start of a movement crying out for systemic work evolution and I wanted to make a dent in that history.

Why must work be a binary choice?

Although I started my founder journey wanting to advocate for mothers in the workplace, the last three years have widened my aperture. The pandemic and murder of George Floyd have laid bare the ongoing and excruciating role that racism, sexism, and discrimination plays in our lives.

As we continue to learn about healthy workplaces being the fertile ground of innovation, it is our collective opportunity to challenge the old, exclusionary practices that built the system we have inherited. The problem is that most of us work in All-or Nothing Workplaces: Full-time, or no time. Forty-plus hours, or zero hours. That binary model excludes skilled workers who are opting out faster than any other time in history.

It's bad for people. And, turns out, it's bad for business.

So, friends, what are we going to do about it?

Who could we include and what would they contribute if work wasn't All or Nothing?

The Workplace Isn't Working for Everyone

The all-or-nothing workplace doesn't always work. Take my friend, Joe Nguyen:

He was working as a technology program manager for a Fortune 100 company in early 2022. He was also a state elected official, having successfully won two election cycles in my hometown. And he was a father to three kids under seven. He was busy. When we met for coffee, I was surprised with what he told me. He said, "Although I'm busy, I don't feel challenged. I'm looking for more impact, and I want more control over what I say 'yes' to and how I structure my schedule. I'm thinking of leaving the stability of this job for the adventure and possibility of what's out there. Do you think I should do it?"

His employer had a choice: To keep him, they needed to offer flexibility and opportunity for greater impact. They risked losing Joe's unique lived experience and drive for innovation, exactly the profile wish list for every new hire across their company.

Ultimately, they lost Joe as he shifted into independent work, joining the millions of new entrepreneurs spurred by The Great Resignation.

Every day, I have conversations like this. The data suggest a broad workplace shift underway that the pandemic only accelerated.

The "Great Resignation"

More than 19 million US workers – and counting – have quit their jobs since April 2021. Our labor economy is experiencing a massive transformation. It's been called "The Great Resignation", "The Big Quit", and my favorite, "The Great Rethink". No matter what you name it, the movement underscores a shift in how people perceive work. And not just a few folks, a lot of folks.

We're Losing Those We Most Seek

Recently, I was at a roundtable of CEOs and was the only female executive present. I was encouraged to hear my male peers express their desire to improve diversity at all layers of their organization. This is consistent, since 73% of senior business leaders say they are highly committed to gender diversity. It makes sense:

Every 10% increase in intersectional gender equity yields a 1-2% increase in revenue.

However, many of them questioned how to achieve their diversity goals. And I challenged the group with this question: "How do we square a desire for diversity, innovation, and profit without acknowledging who is most likely to leave – and when?"

The Great Resignation is disproportionate in its effects. When looking at the demographic data of the 2020-2022 Great Resignation, here's what we see:

- Women led The Great Resignation, as millions of women quit, dropping their workforce participation to a 30-year low.
- Those in core caretaking years, employees age 30 to 45, increased their resignation rate by 20%.
- One-third of all mothers have scaled back, left their jobs, or plan to do so.
- Over 200,000 Black and Latina women have disappeared from the workforce since the beginning of the pandemic.

If we compare labor force participation along several identities, we see black female labor participation drop steeply in 2020 and has had the most shallow recovery, still down 2.1% from the high three years prior. Note that this chart is participation relative to identity; keep in mind the overall labor force is 77% white.
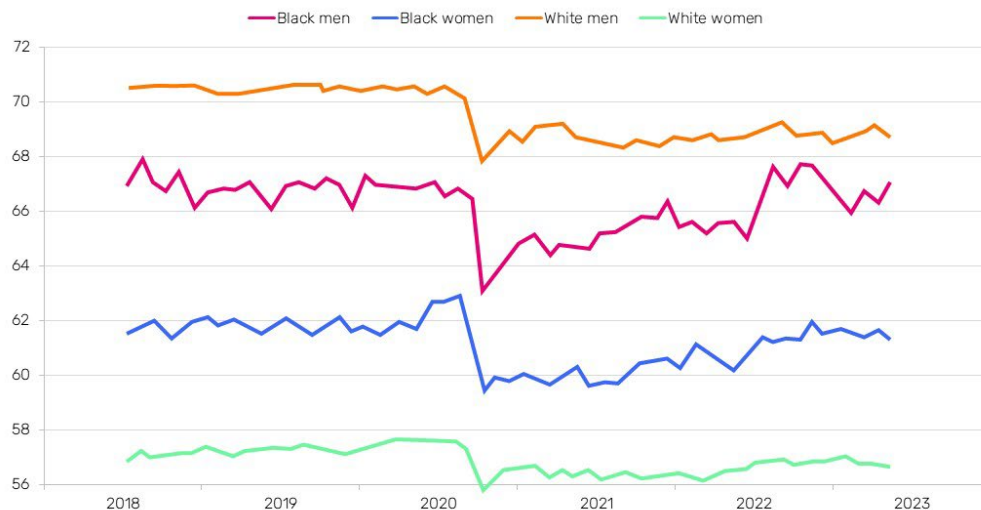
Why?

In order for us to collectively consider what changes we must make to better retain this valuable talent, we must examine the root causes of those resignations. Why did these folks drop out, opt out, or quit the traditional workforce? And why is it still happening?

When you examine sources like Pew Research Center's resignation findings, you'll see consistent themes:

Top reasons why U.S. workers left a job in 2021: Low pay, no advancement opportunities

Among those who quit a job at any point in 2021, % saying each was a _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ why they did so

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
Pay was too low	37	26	63
No opportunities for advancement	33	30	63
Felt disrespect at work	35	21	57
Because of child care issues*	24	24	48
Not enough flexibility to choose when to put in hours	24	21	45
Benefits weren't good**	23	20	43
Wanted to relocate to a different area	22	13	35
Working too many hours	20	19	39
Working too few hours	16	14	30
Employer required a COVID-19 vaccince	8	10	18

*Among those With children younger than 18 living In the household | **Question provided health Insurance and paid time off as Examples
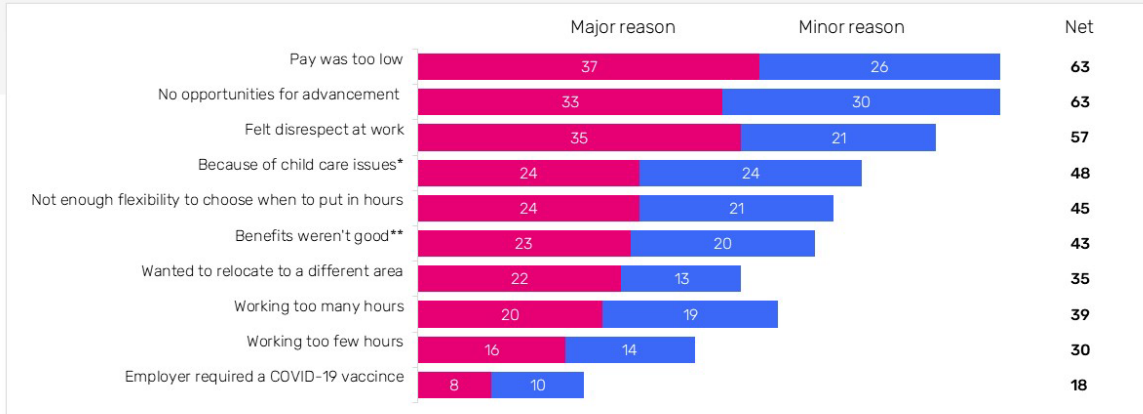Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding | Source: Survey of US. adults conducted Feb. 7-13. 2022

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Let me translate how I read this chart. In general, people reported leaving organizations for three primary reasons:

1. Being overworked without reward or recognition
2. Not being valued or, worse, being discriminated against
3. Not having enough flexibility

When we consider race and ethnicity in this data, there are notable differences. White respondents cited their primary reason for leaving as "lack of flexibility" 38% of the time, while 52% of those who identify as Black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races cite flexibility as the chief reason for their exit (14% higher).

Non-inclusive orgs are losing 39% of applicants.
When they perceive an organization is not inclusive, LGBTQ+ and racial- or ethnic-minority candidates are more likely not to pursue a job.
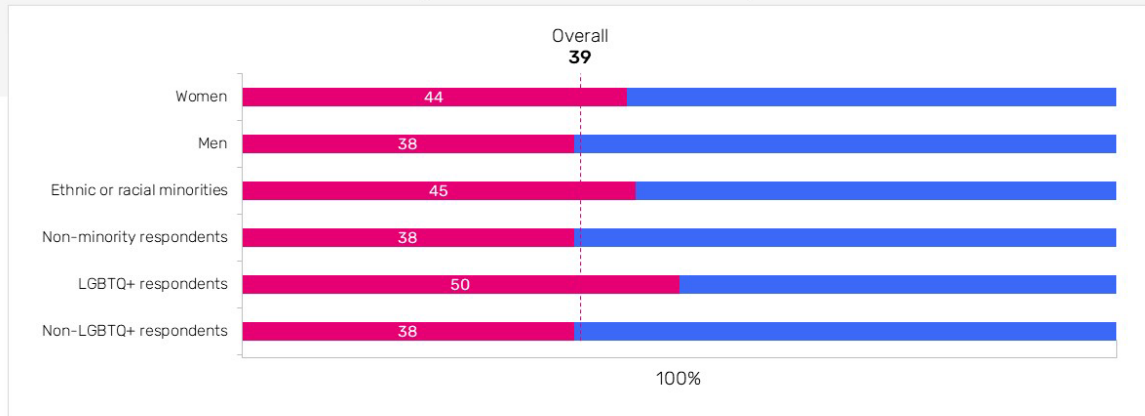
"Quiet Quitting" is real.

Employers are still at risk for folks who haven't quit (yet). According to McKinsey:

- 40% of workers are considering leaving their current jobs.
- Of them, 2/3 say they are willing to do so without another job lined up.
- 44% of survey respondents who left a job without another in hand say they have little to no interest in returning to traditional jobs in the next six months.

Where'd They Go? 50% Independent

Call them 'temporary workers', 'contractors', 'contingent staff', 'freelancers', or 'on-demand talent', either way they all represent a type of worker who is uncoupled from traditional employment.

Within 5 years, 50% of our labor force will be independent. To adjust, we must think more creatively about the workplace.

The COVID pandemic accelerated the movement from full-time worker to independent worker:

- **The U.S. Freelance economy is essential:** 70 million Americans are now freelancing in the U.S. as of 2022– that's 42% of our total workforce, up from 58 million in 2021 (36%).
- **This group is highly skilled:** This isn't just Uber drivers and gig workers. Last year, skilled workers provided the majority of the services in this economy including computer programming, IT, marketing, and business consulting.
- **Every generation is choosing freelancing:** While Boomers (55+) are the lowest enrolled at 26%, GenZ (18-22) is setting the pace at 50%. That means if your company only hires full-time employees you won't be able to hire half of the $7 Trillion earning economy entering the workforce today.
- **Demand for remote is permanent:** 94% of remote-capable workers now want hybrid or exclusively remote work options, according to a recent Gallup survey, and research shows they're largely more productive away from the office.

Bottom line, it is predicted that within 5 years, **50% of our labor force will be independent**. Half of us, y'all!

If we want business continuity, decreased attrition, and an ability to continue tapping in these critical voices, we must think more creatively about our all-or-nothing workplace.

We Must Adopt Blended Work Ecosystems

You can spend between one-half to two times an employee's annual salary to replace them over and over, or you can embrace the non-employee movement and build something more integrated.

Blended work ecosystems combine employees on payroll, contingent workers, and agencies. According to MITSloan, 75% of leaders consider these wide-ranging talent access points their complete workforce. Therefore, 'work ecosystems' are growing in importance, scope, and complexity.

The value proposition for building a more comprehensive work ecosystem include:

1. Access to a more diverse and inclusive workforce to increase innovation and value, as driven by independent talent demand.
2. De-risking the cost of hiring full-time employees in response to economic volatility, or in advance of uncertain business strategies.
3. Unlocking agility and speed in your talent pool so you can keep pace with customers and your competition.

The market is validating the movement toward distributed, on-demand work:

- 73% of tech companies already have integrated teams of freelancers and employees. (A.team)

- 25% of work done in the enterprise is currently done by non-employees. (HBR, BCG)

- 60% of respondents reported that it was "highly" or "somewhat" possible that their full-time workforce in the future would be much smaller. (HBR, BCG)

- 40% of business leaders reported that using new talent platforms helped the organization hasten speed to market, boost productivity, and increase innovation. (HBR, BCG)

- 90% of business leaders believed that external talent platforms would be somewhat or very important to their organization's future competitive advantage. (HBR, BCG)

Beliefs of how workforce and talent sourcing will change in future

Legend: ■ Highly possible ■ Somewhat possible ■ Somewhat unlikely ■ Highly unlikely ■ Don't know

Categories (top to bottom):
- We will continue to hire mostly full-time employees for "core" or "mission-critical" activities
- Our "core" workforce will be much smaller
- Talent sourcing platforms will take on more roles in providing benefits, training, and other services to freelancers
- The workforce will be more fluid, shifting between multiple employers and ramping up/down with much higher frequency
- There will be consolidation in the market; talent sourcing platforms will merge
- We will increasingly prefer to "rent", "borrow", or "shape" talent with other companies

X-axis: 0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80% — 100%

Note: The question was shown to business leaders who indicated they were "moderately" or "extremely" familiar with the area of sourcing talent/talent strategy and "aware" of at least one type of digital talent platform | Source: "The On-Demand Workforce Survey", Harvard Business Project on Managing the Future of Work and BCG's People & Organization practice, November 2019 to January 2020

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As with any change, there are barriers that need to be considered:

- Human Resources leaders are asked to recruit staff, however are rarely engaged in the acquisition of freelance talent, which is done by business unit leaders or procurement.
- There are risks with labor laws, worker benefits, organizational culture, and inclusion efforts if not implemented thoughtfully, could detract from equity goals.
- Defining the work product, the skills needed to accomplish the work, and credit for work completed is left up to hiring managers.
- There are few central approaches to managing strategically and operationally of this diverse, distributed workforce that crosses internal and external boundaries.

Even with these complexities, the market is moving this direction at a faster clip than previously anticipated. Approaching this change by building out a workforce ecosystem strategy will empower leaders to keep and meet critical workers in the workforce on terms that are mutually beneficial.

I believe that organizations that further embrace this more expansive definition of talent will spur the transition of The Great Resignation into a new era: **The Era of Sustainability**.

The Era of Sustainability: Measuring Impact Over Hours

There is an opportunity across the blended work ecosystem to reward performance for the outcomes we most desire – internal and external satisfaction, profitability, growth, etc. Rarely is our outcome related to how much time is spent. So why do we focus so much on it?

In traditional workplace cultures, we often use time as a proxy for performance: If you work more hours, you're worth more to the organization. Especially for those of us who grew up going into offices where "butts in seats" led to career progression, this is a hard habit to break. Time merely quantifies presence, not outcomes.

Counting hours merely quantifies presence, not impact. Now, we must focus on outcomes and release our dependence on controlling people's schedules.

The true risk of measuring time is that it's finite, and we are sacrificing our personal health in pursuit of productivity to master it. If we want to have successful businesses, the all-or-nothing workplace must change.

My friend Joe was working a day job that didn't fulfill his desire to have impact at scale. He wanted to show up with all his identities and know they were given in service of a broader mission. Being online precisely at 9am had nothing to do with his ability to perform in his job overall. He was on a corporate hamster wheel, trading his energy and time for a positive performance review.

Burning our finite energy to try to do it all is not sustainable.

Burnout is a feeling of being exhausted, worn out, or unable to muster the strength to continue at work. It's marked with mental health challenges and physical stress. It is widespread and is no longer acute. Globally, 7,000 of 10,000 knowledge workers recently polled reported feeling burned out. In the Era of Sustainability, we will prioritize our personal energy with reasonable output. We will balance the environment with our footprint on it. We will seek new solutions to old problems, with our connected community in mind.

Let's never talk about an attempt to achieve work/life balance again, mkay? Success for us now measures showing up for our commitments and our relationships in all aspects of our lives, incrementally making progress toward our goals.

What if we measure impact instead of hours?

If we release ourselves from the pressure of 9-to-5 and instead focus on business outcomes, we will create flexibility for when we work, making space for creative approaches.

If we release ourselves from the belief that being in the office translates to productivity, we will create opportunity for where we work, widening our talent pool to more geographically diverse people.

If we release ourselves from the opacity of workplace rewards and instead incentivized good behavior, teamwork, and service to customers, we will create fertile ground for new ideas.

In order for organizations to preserve individual energy and move to measuring impact over hours, we have designed a system that leverages the power and benefits of a modern workplace with a modern workforce. We call this solution "Highest & Best Use".

Reimagining the Workplace with the Highest & Best Use Operating System™

Highest & Best Use (HBU) is a system that aligns business priorities, and distributes work to the right talent, building a blended work ecosystem of belonging.

When people work on the right tasks aligned to their strengths and potential, we gain:

- Efficiency.
- More economic opportunity to more people.
- A balanced workload.
- Critical folks who stay in the workforce.

Using this tool, you can flip the All-or-Nothing Workplace on its head and start thinking in terms of impact, over hours.

This is as practical as it is idealistic. HBU is about maximizing business performance and results without burning out the humans responsible for our success. It breaks down the systemic barriers keeping people down or forcing them out. Organizations that practice HBU are building sustainable workplaces in service of both people and profits, because they know they are not mutually exclusive.

Let's dig in.

The Highest & Best Use Operating System

HBU is a cultural operating system that reimagines the way we work, distribute talent, and measure our collective success. It maximizes human potential aligned to business outcomes, regardless of identity, while guarding against burnout and exclusion. It rejects the idea that someone isn't a "culture fit" and screens them in as a "skills match".

When we apply the HBU concept to work, we create the ideal mix of individuals, organizations, and an extended work community – so everyone's capacity and skills are in balance. We aren't overtaxing the system and there is flexibility in how work is distributed.

The outcome is a blended workforce in the Era of Sustainability.

HBU OS is distinctive because it takes a connected and expansive approach to work distribution, shared objectives, and the way in which we work (and treat each other). It's more than a Human Resources tool, it's a leadership tool applicable across the business.

HBU OS is inclusive because it concentrates the work of employee teams on mission-aligned initiatives, while distributing work to non-employees who are opting-out of traditional employment, keeping diverse and innovative thinkers in our blended workforce.

The 3Ms of HBU

I've worked with thousands of people in my career spanning well-funded startups, privately-held agencies, fast-growing companies, Fortune 50 enterprises, and declining organizations. Across those experiences, I've codified the three elements to workplace culture that underpin the Highest & Best Use Operating System: The 3Ms.

Element 1: MAGNET
The Magnets are our attraction points. These are the principles that brings work to us and us together. The magnets across our ecosystem are the things we can count on, that we place bets on, that folks rally behind. Magnets may be the documented mission, or they are the attractive bits to which mission-oriented folks are drawn.

Element 2: MOMENTUM
You feel it. Momentum is the unseen force that enables our work and propels us forward. Scientifically, momentum is the measurement of mass times velocity of an object. This is true for organizations forming and growing, too. As a group or product gains traction, momentum keeps the group together and measures the collective impact.

Element 3: MAXIMUM
We don't often acknowledge our maximums, at home or at work. Maximums are our upper limits and boundaries we must respect to continue progress. Without documented maximums, power, and demands for more are unchecked and it gets difficult to measure progress. With maximums in place, we respect pace and performance.

Highest & Best Use Elements

MAGNET

Attraction principle, the mission that brings work to us and us together.

MOMENTUM

Unseen force that enables our work and propels us forward.

MAXIMUM

Boundaries we must respect to continue progress.

Applying the 3Ms to our Blended Work Ecosystem

Reminder: *HBU is unlocked with the idea that the efficiency gained by people working on the right task aligned to their strengths and potential, offers more economic opportunity to more people and balances workloads while keeping critical folks in the workforce.*

To illustrate this philosophy, let us examine an example of a work ecosystem model. In our simplified workplace model, we have three levels of authority:

1. Organizational Leadership
   a) Executive Team
   b) Board of Directors/Advisors
   c) Leadership & Management Teams

2. Contributors
   a) Employees/Staff
   b) Freelancers/Contingent Workers/Gig Workers/Contractors (Internal and External)
   c) Agencies/Professional Services Providers

3. Extended Work Community
   a) Investors/Shareholders
   b) Suppliers
   c) Partners/Channel
   d) Advocates/Media/Influencers/Referrers

Blended Work Ecosystems
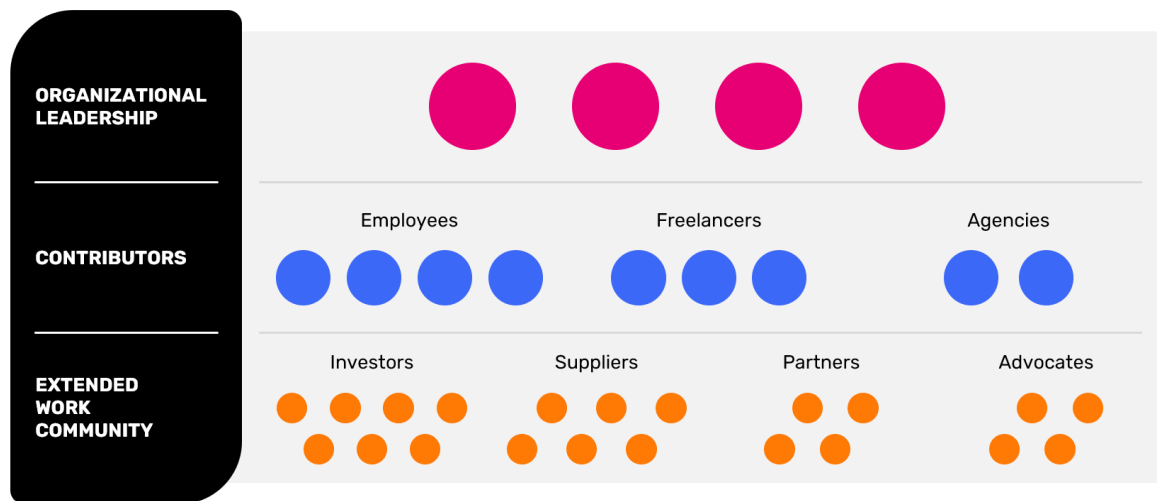
Our Process of Establishing HBU

We start with leadership and work our way down the organizational chart. Our process begins at the top because that is where power is held. Our workplace systems are rooted in inequity, power imbalance, and deals struck at the highest levels among shareholders, investors, and executives. It is this group's commitment to a new leadership approach that will cascade down through the ecosystem.

There is a place for bottoms-up organizing, unionization, and bargaining – but the HBU model is dependent on leadership buy-in for the most expeditious change.

The process, then is applying the 3Ms as follows through our three layers:

1. Highest & Best Organization (i.e. leadership)

2. Highest & Best You (i.e. contributors)
3. Highest & Best Community (i.e. broader stakeholders)

First Step: Highest & Best ORGANIZATION

An **organization** is defined as a team headed by a leader, united under a clear mission. This can span solopreneur to corporate executive with hundreds of employees.

Within an enterprise, when trying to define the border of your organization consider those who are practically aligned to a shared budget, a set of accountabilities, or under a specific leader with a distinct charter.

Leaders within the organization start the process, clearly identifying the group's mission, vision, and ways of working. They apply the 3Ms by properly assessing strengths, resources, and pace to set sustainable strategies.

MAGNET	MOMENTUM	MAXIMUM
Strategies	**Resources**	**Pace**
Strategies are the stated objectives or winning approaches that an organization intends to pursue.	Resources are the available monetary, time, political, network, and access points across the organization that allow work to happen. These assets unlock something for the organization to advance their mission.	The pace is the speed at which a mission-aligned collective can move without breaking systems or people. This is critical to calibrate regularly, often pacing down to alleviate burnout or up for a sprint.
Sample questions for leaders to examine this principle		
• Our team is aligned around our vision of… • Our product/service is better than any other option because… • We solve for our customers… • In the future, our offering will be viewed as… • We intend to go all-in on… • The three things we can't miss on this year are…	• Our budget is/will be… (P&L) • The human resources dedicated to this project include… (RACI) • The advocates for our offering include… (stakeholder map)	• We expect to deliver…. by when… • We will measure our impact by… • Our team agreements for how we work include… • Our contingency plans are…

Second Step: Highest & Best YOU

Honoring an individual is a cornerstone step in the HBU model. By meeting people where they are, we focus on their unique abilities and potential in alignment with business objectives. We don't squeeze square pegs in round holes and cross our fingers.

There is the added context of an individual's lived experience, which informs so much about how a person shows up for work. Certainly, things like privilege, grief, or caretaking responsibilities are ever present. As we remove bias and boundaries, we are better able to assess someone's HBU objectively.

Our goal here is to identify the work *only* they (ahem, you) can do.

No More Unicorns.

I know how much we love "unicorns" at work. But I've turned into an anti-unicorn advocate in my old age. How many times have we tried to find or be a "unicorn that can do it all"? *They can write, they can code, they can design our website on weekends, and they close deals in their sleep!*

No. No. Nooo. No more asking one person to do it all. Don't treat yourself like a unicorn either.

We can support these unicorns and prevent their burnout through auditing their HBU, focusing their work and time on that high-desire scope, and delegate the rest. In an HBU world, individuals apply the 3Ms by self-assessing their skills and energy with an honest account of their desired boundaries.

MAGNET	MOMENTUM	MAXIMUM
Skills	**Energy**	**Boundaries**
One's ability to do something well, an expertise. Includes potential to learn and grow new skills. We fundamentally believe that Skills will be our new labor currency in the future, so embracing what we have, what we yet to have, and how they translate is key.	Energy is the power and vitality available to perform work. Energy varies throughout the day, year, and seasons of life. This is the element we feel rather than see. It can be affected independently, and while in connection with others.	Boundaries are the physical, mental, and emotional limits a person possesses. We use them as a communication tool to protect one's health, or seasonal needs.

Sample questions for individuals to self-examine this principle

• I am best at… (current skills) • People often ask me about… (personal brand) • I possess these privileges… (DEI) • I am interested in learning next… (career growth)	• I have a desire to… (unmet curiosity) • I love to serve… (mission) • I see a need that is unmet here and I'd love to volunteer for… (leadership) • At this stage of life, I feel… (seasonality)	• I work best when… (accommodation) • I can agree to… (commitment) • I am most at risk when… (attrition assessment) • I'm unavailable to work… (limit)

Out/Down-Sourcing

In a blended workforce, we design contributor teams inclusive of employees and non-employees. This leverages the strengths of independent workers, agency partners, or other outsourced arrangements. When we bring in non-employee talent, we do so in support of the business outcomes defined by leadership, in service to the HBU of the employees. The whole ecosystem is aligned.

- "Downsourcing" is a concept where employees work on the most business-critical initiatives, delegating work to more junior, non-employee resources at a lower cost.

- "Outsourcing" is more expansive, and considers relationships with freelance specialists, agency partners, and consultants as a means to tap different talent, expand capacity during scale-up periods, or to institute functions at scale in managed service agreements.

An example view of a blended contributor work ecosystem, working in its Highest & Best Use:

Blended Work Ecosystems

LEADERSHIP

CONTRIBUTORS

FREELANCERS

● Employee   ● Non-Employee
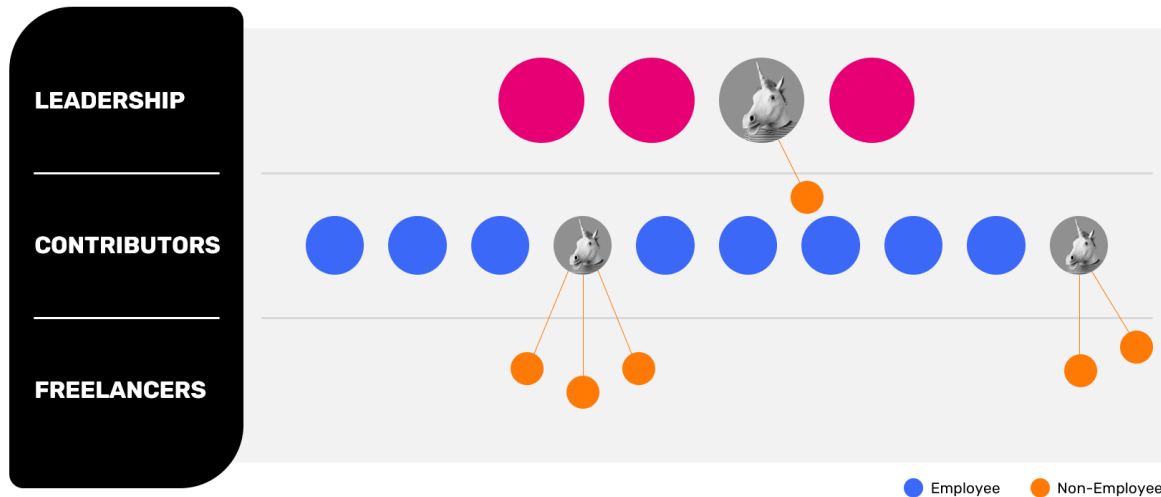
Third Step: Highest & Best COMMUNITY

We are now at the step where we unite stakeholders in a nation-building exercise. It requires great trust to be built in Steps 1 and 2 before we earn the right to ask our broader community to participate. As a reminder, our Community includes all stakeholders who have an interest in the mission's success: suppliers, vendors, advisors, partners, and external supporters.

Our biggest, boldest goal is to create a sense of belonging within this community of dedicated folks. The outcome of hard work we've already done, results in the benefit of accessing this larger collective of opportunity-granters. We've earned community activation, which extends a mission's impact like a soundwave far beyond the speaker.

Stakeholders apply the 3Ms by amplifying the message, enforce safe cultural norms, and measure impact collectively. The entire collective is either limited or unleashed by the maximum of trust in this extended community.

MAGNET	**MOMENTUM**	**MAXIMUM**
Culture	**Impact**	**Trust**
The culture is the environment that reflects the attitudes and behaviors of community members, determining satisfaction, relationship health, and progression. Culture changes and shifts based on the makeup of the community.	Impact is the measurable result of collective work, having a strong effect on an outcome. Measuring what we are doing in the world, how we are influencing customers' lives, the efficacy of our work, the return on our investment, and even the environmental consequences of our community – all require an immense level of insight and vulnerability.	An African proverb states, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Trust dictates the maximum a community can achieve. We acknowledge the delicate balance among connected-but-not-directed relationships, which all deeply rely on trust. In a healthy workplace, trust is the currency and – without it – the cap to how far a collective can go.

Sample questions to self-examine this principle

• We describe our culture as… • Up next, it will be… • Our Employee and Customer Net Promoter scores are… by demographic… • We are learning… • We are excited because…	• We demonstrate our impact by… (internal, external) • Our attainment of goals include… (OKRs, P&L) • Our partner/vendor strength is measured by… • We are recognized externally for…	• Our attrition/loyalty/ performance metrics are… (by identity) • We hold ourselves collectively accountable by… • Our adaptive work style means our new approach is… • When things inevitably go wrong, our plan includes…

Stitching It All Together: Your Ecosystem is Unique

When we overlay the 3Ms in our work ecosystem, we see how it builds out. The 3Ms taken as a whole cause us to assess and bring intention to the attributes of our ecosystem that are uniquely ours. For good or ill, the collection of these elements makes an ecosystem stand alone. And they may serve as a guide for the hotspots, opportunities, and risks that an ecosystem possesses.

In nature, an ecosystem is dynamic and ever changing. As new elements are introduced, connected parts within the ecosystem shift. In our blended and built model here, with a goal of everyone working in their Highest & Best Use,

we derive a similar dynamic ecosystem, each one distinct in how it prioritizes, responds, and adapts to the changing world around it.

As each part of the work ecosystem is connected, the congregate of these layers' 3Ms determine the Highest & Best Use sum of the parts.

- Each **Magnet** connects to showcase the most attractive elements across the ecosystem, tying together the individual skills from our people, the collective strengths of our offering in the market, and the community culture we have built with intention.

- **Momentum** builds from each person's unique energy they bring, the resources the organizations has to bear, and the collective impact the group has as a result of traction.

- Lastly, the **Maximums** keep us in bounds from healthy individual boundaries, maximized by the team's collective pace, which results in sustainable workflow for all stakeholders.

Here's how it looks when we see it built out:

Blended Work Ecosystems

		The 3 Ms	
	MAGNET	**MOMENTUM**	**MAXIMUM**
ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP	Strategies	Resources	Pace
CONTRIBUTORS (Employees, Freelancers, Agencies)	Skills	Energy	Boundaries
EXTENDED WORK COMMUNITY (Investors, Suppliers, Partners, Advocates)	Culture	Impact	Trust
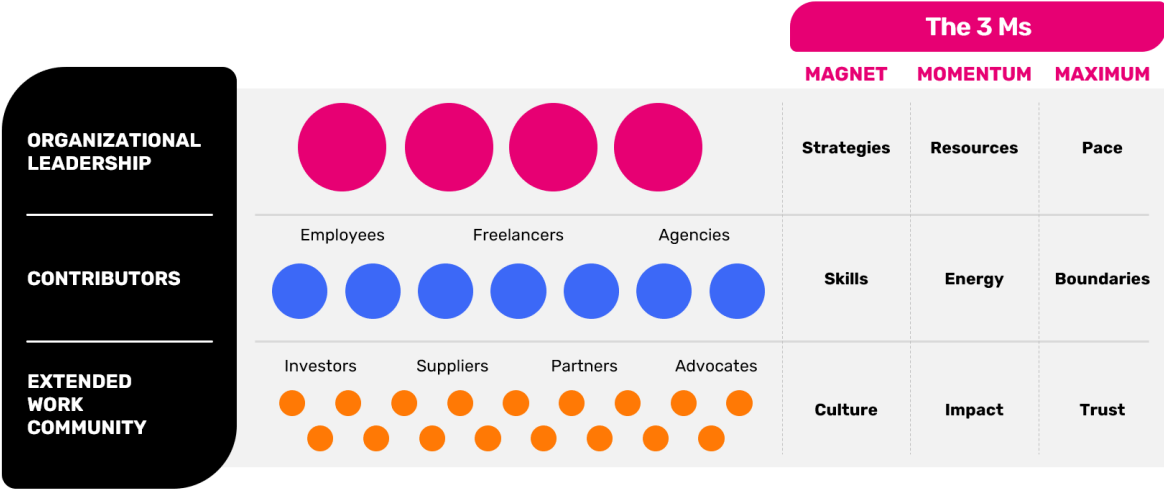
Let us root ourselves again in the data that proves inclusion impacts innovation. Inclusive organizations are six times more likely to be innovative.

Given that lens, when looking at the ecosystem as a whole, here are a few key questions to consider.

- **Compare.** What is the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) at each ecosystem tier (horizontal axis) and along each M (vertical axis)?
    - If we have weaknesses in a particular tier or column, why? What led us here? What is the natural conclusion if we don't make a change?
    - Given the economic realities of the year ahead for our customers and competitors, which of The 3Ms elements likely yields the greatest advantage for us?

- **Listen.** Across this map, the data shows us the ecosystem today. Whose voices are we leaving out of this assessment? What biases are present?
    - Do we have systemic barriers to bringing in voices different from the dominant majority?
    - Who could we invite in given the broad reach of a blended ecosystem?

- **Invite.** How can we open more opportunities for access? What strategies are most relevant for our unique ecosystem to include more and exclude less?
    - Among our employees, where can we honor maximums to create momentum?
    - Among our non-employees, what alliances can we build to create agility, reduce risk, gain amplification, and compete more?

LET ME BRING EVERYTHING TOGETHER RIGHT NOW.

- ➢ **Folks most responsible for driving innovation are leaving the workplace in droves.**
- ➢ **The people left in our workplaces are burned out and feeling disrespected.**
- ➢ **Independent Workers are the fastest-growing segment of our work economy and will eclipse employees within 5 years.**
- ➢ **Building a blended work ecosystem is the model of inclusion that keeps critical voices in our workplace by centering employees'**

needs and creating access to work for independent workers who we'd otherwise lose.

Unlocking HBU: High-EQ Change Management

Most organizations will need to change in order to shift their mindset and practices away from an All-or-Nothing workplace, and into an HBU workplace. This change management practice takes skill, time, and lots of communication.

My team has learned a great deal from Dr. Renee St. Jacques, especially about Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (aka "EQ") is defined as the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you. More and more, this has become a critical skill for both our leaders and our contributors at work.

"As a licensed psychologist and executive coach, I work with leaders who make change with a high degree of EQ. It's a challenge to balance making the right choices for the future of the business while centering the emotional, psychological, and relational needs of people. I first coach them to prioritize validation of how challenging change can be for individuals (no toxic positivity!). Then, they must generate clarity (clear is kind!). Finally, I encourage co-creation. The result? In my experience, I see these brave leaders win connectors and loyal followers for the years to come because they showed their genuine and effective care." – Dr. Renee St. Jacques, Coach at Lions & Tigers

Emotionally intelligent change management, then, is the idea that we move an organization or an entire ecosystem along a journey while managing the emotions of all of those involved. This is rarely done at work. Rarrrrrely.

Our model for EQ Change Management is aptly called TRUST:

T	**Transparency** – set our clear outcomes for all to see
R	**Relationships** – center those effected by change
U	**Uproot** – displace old practices, move in incremental and thoughtful steps
S	**Sustainability** – collectively choose new behaviors that endure and reinforce change
T	**Tribute** – reward positive behavior, continue to root out old ways

Blending Our Workforce: Natalie's Example

Let's play out how a leader interested in introducing a blended workforce would use the TRUST Change Management process.

"Natalie" is a fictional executive, based on a few client stories I've blended together:

Scenario: A Senior Director, Natalie, at a SaaS B2B company needs to build an expanded marketing team with a new charter. She currently has 4 full-time employees; one is about to go on maternity leave. Her team has just been asked to take on Loyalty Marketing, working with the Customer Success team. She has a budget of $1.5 Million.

STEP 1
Transparency
Clear outcomes

- Natalie researches recent employee and customer survey data, and makes it available to her team.
- She uses the *Highest & Best Organization* framework to document her 3Ms and publishes her findings for her team and managers to review.
- Natalie uses a consultant to facilitate an OKR planning session to align with the Customer Success leader resulting in co-created Objectives. She then cascades them to her team where they contribute to Key Results for their new charter.

STEP 2
Relationships
Center people in change

- She meets with each member of her current team using the *Highest & Best You* framework to check on their sentiment, career aspirations, and discusses areas they want to de-emphasize going forward. This process helps her identify who is ready for leadership projects, who needs to reskill, and where she can gain efficiency. This builds a scope of work for her to down-source.
- Natalie meets with members of her leadership team and ensures they buy in to her strategy, including HR to advocate for accommodations.
- Natalie meets with their customer advisory council to ensure their needs are being met by her team alignment.

STEP 3
Uproot
Incremental new steps

- Natalie brings in a Change Management and Operations consultancy to design a new operating model for her organization, from ticketing through production. Their process takes 3 months to design and 6 months to install, ensuring her team is engaged in each step.
- She taps in her DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion) and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) leads at the company to help design her team culture strategy to be inclusive and community-oriented.
- Natalie uses the *Highest & Best Community* assessment to determine her stakeholders, agencies, and alliances she needs to build trust with to succeed.

STEP 4
Sustainability
Reinforce change

- Since once of the data points on her employee survey was an issue with work/life balance, Natalie uses the scope she created for down-sourcing and engages a workforce design consultant to build out a staffing plan with a 6-person non-employee workforce.
- This flexible workforce provides 1/ the excess capacity to cover the increase in charter, 2/ the specialized skills needed to build out a Loyalty Marketing program, which her team was unfamiliar with, and 3/ maternity leave coverage for her employee.
- As a whole blended team, Natalie and her 4 employees + 6 independent workers met to document their Team Agreements of how they work together.

STEP 5
Tribute
Reward behavior

- Natalie's team is outperforming their peers, with higher sentiment and lower attrition. Natalie is recognized among the leadership team for her ability to lead through change.
- Among Natalie's team, she built a bonus structure to reward behaviors that uphold their team values, advance their 3Ms, and offer empathy to colleagues.

Building the Plane While You Fly It

I'm into this analogy because it's completely ridiculous. I sort of love the idea of a pilot with a half-built airplane behind her, mechanics frantically attaching parts while up in the sky, and then they all safely land at their destination, fully intact and seated as if none of that happened. If the Future of Work is like building a plane while you fly it, we are just starting our ascent, haphazardly bolting on early bits, unsure how they will effect the flight path.

To conclude this lengthy examination of our working world today and in the future, I want to give you some very practical guidance – and some bits that let you dream. Afterall, this plane isn't built yet.

Very Practical Advice for Proliferating HBU

If you've gotten to this point and are ready to start making change, that's great news. Now we need to convince your peers and leadership team.

HBU can't be achieved by one individual; it must be done in community, by a group of committed souls who want to work differently. I'm going to give you all of my HBU sales techniques. Please steal this ruthlessly.

How to Convince Your Boss or Peers You Need HBU

I've given you loads of market trends in Section 2 to start building a case. I recommend approaching it this way:

1. **Start with data.** Grab anything you can that builds a case for risk among talent, in product or sales, with a competitor, or with workplace health indicators. Look for unexpected data that tells a story, too, like opportunity costs, churn rates, missed attainment – anything that can be attributed to a cultural concern. Match this with pertinent market data and trends.
2. **Consider the 5-year business strategy.** It's important to root a business case in the business plan. Consider how the data you're analyzing effects the organization's ability to meet longer term goals.
3. **Build alliances.** Before proposing a change, no matter the degree, it's important to ensure you have support among your peers and other influential stakeholders. The plan will ultimately find much more success if these alliances have been built before embarking on a business case or the change itself.
4. **Anticipate objections.** It's useful to consider what objections you'll likely face and speak to them head-on given your current culture. Are folks going to be most fearful of protecting intellectual property, or onboarding outsourced workers, or the costs associated with more or less people, etc.?
5. **Start with a pilot.** Given that so many organizations are using coaches, consultants, or contractors, it's likely your team is too. Can you extend their work further? Consider bringing in a freelancer to fill in gaps that recruiting is struggling to hire. Start with a pilot and grow from there.

The P&L Benefits of a Blended Workforce

If one of the objections you are going to overcome is fear of increased budget, let me help. There are very distinct financial benefits to building a blended workforce.

- **Cost to Hire:** On average, firms spend $50,000 to $70,000 on hiring an employee when considering benefits and administrative costs. Alternatively, the cost to hire most independent workers or consultants are maintained by an agency partner.

- **Cost to Manage:** Organizations are required to provide health insurance, bonuses, payroll taxes, additional benefits, and overhead for operational and management oversight for employees. When outsourcing, all of that is layered into one payment rate.

- **Cost to Replace:** SHRM tells us that it costs 6 to 9 months of an employee's salary to replace them. That doesn't include the opportunity cost of that seat being vacant, especially if they are revenue generating.

- **Cost to Conclude:** Staffing up a team with FTEs to explore a product or service that doesn't yet have permanent product-market fit means future layoffs and severance costs, in addition to reputational risk. The cost to wind down a team of independent workers is a fraction of that of employees.

- **Gains in Being Skills Aligned:** Each employee's value isn't that of their salary, rather it's the sum of their total contribution and potential. Take for instance an Account Executive that costs $125,000 ($60 per hour). They can be worth up to $750,000 ($360 per hour) in what they earn in sales. Therefore, each hour of work we down-source or outsource to an independent worker at a lower rate than $360 per hour is efficiency gained.

- **Benefits of Diversity:** Harvard Business Review found that companies with more diverse teams have 19% higher revenues due to innovation.

Let's go really big here. Here is a comparison P&L between a traditional workforce and a blended one, with basic human capital costs:

EMPLOYEES ONLY			BLENDED WORKFORCE	
Number of Employees	15		Number of Employees	10
Salary (Average of $150K)	$2,250,000		Salary (Average of $150K)	$1,500,000
Overhead Costs (35%)	$800,000		Overhead Costs (35%)	$532,500
Total Cost	**$3,050,000**		**Total Cost**	**$2,032,500**

Total Hours Per Year	2,080		Total Hours Per Year	2,080
Less Vacation Hours (2 weeks)	(80)		Less Vacation Hours (2 weeks)	(80)
Less Holidays (2 weeks)	(80)		Less Holidays (2 weeks)	(80)
Production Hours / Employee	**1,920**		**Production Hours / Employee**	**1,920**
Total Production Hours	**28,800**		**Total Production Hours**	**19,200**
Cost / Hour	$106		Cost / Hour	$106

Number of Independent Workers	4
Cost for Year (Average $150K)	$600,000
Total Hours (2,080 Each)	8,320
Cost / Hour	$72
Agency	1
Cost for Year (Average $250K)	$250,000
Total Hours (5 ppl at 1,200 each)	6,000
Cost / Hour (2,080 hours)	$120

Total Cost	**$3,050,000**		**Total Cost**	**$2,882,500**
Employee Cost / Hour	**$105.90**		**Blended Cost / Hour**	**$99.39**
Total Production Hours	**28,800**		**Total Production Hours**	**33,520**

Conclusion: Savings of $6.51 per hour with a 16% gain in total production hours.

Human Resources vs Procurement: Who Manages the Blended Workforce?

Ownership of the blended workforce is a great debate to have. Fundamentally, each department has a role to play:

Business Units are the internal client who needs access to smart talent, quickly and in service of their organizational goals. They define the scope, budget, and hold accountability over the ultimate outcomes for their department.

Human Resources is traditionally responsible for employee talent acquisition, benefits, policy guidance, and strategic workforce planning. In this case, they bring qualitative metrics to bear, such as productivity, advancement, and quality of hire.

Procurement is traditionally responsible for contracting across the supply chain, managing vendors, and ensuring value. In this case, they bring quantitative metrics to bear, such as contract compliance, successful outcomes, and reduced spending.

Sometimes these charters can be in conflict. For instance, when Procurement is eyeing cost-cutting measures that impact how employees experience their employer. Or when HR and Business Unit leaders disagree on if a function should be done by employees or non-employees. Other times, they can work in concert. Lately, there has energy put towards increasing diversity across the ecosystem, including in employee and supplier recruitment with diverse backgrounds.

As we move forward, the opportunity for these departments to work together to build an ecosystem approach is here. They may consider collaborative recruitment strategies, onboarding and training, invoicing and finance systems, and consistent success measurements.

A Few Things to Dream About

I can't let you leave here without a bit of inspiration – I have to offer you some hope that these ideas aren't generations in the future. Let me share with you several examples of modern workplaces and trends designed with HBU dreams in mind.

Every Org Needs a "Gig Economy"

In a great example of digital disruption, there has been a rise in internal talent marketplaces. In these cases, employees are invited to join in a formal or informal marketplace made available to their peers to be picked up as fractional or fully dedicated to project-based work.

Unilever was a pioneering example when they launched their FLEX network in 2019, allowing employees to opt in based on their skills. Using AI and resource management technology platforms, buyers within the company can "shop" for talent. Along with the opportunity, they intentionally built a culture that empowers managers to evaluate and reward these "gig" projects that more than 20,000 employees have opted into.

Unilever unlocked 60,000+ hours of work in the first two months and 95% of employees are satisfied with the program.

Now they have launched a public version in the Netherlands, inviting freelancers in to directly work for their brand.

Schneider Electric is another example Josh Bersin highlights as best-in-class for internal talent marketplaces. Jon Younger recently published even more examples and highlighted benefits of this blended workforce.

Commitments to Diversity are Now Public

As of July 2022, all Fortune 100 companies have made a public commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. There is work to be done to ensure we have consistent taxonomy, reporting, and transparency into progress. To combat the "continued lack of racial and ethnic diversity in corporate workplaces,"

the Measure Up initiative was set to prioritize diversity disclosure and accountability as ways to ensure progress.

Diverse company lists like these make public the specific strategies and workforce implications for top-attracting corporations. A highlight from this effort is about one-third of S&P 500 companies now include DEI progress into their executive compensation. With this data, we gain more agency over where we choose to work, spend money, and support.

Furthermore, an inclusive approach to procurement seeks to address racial injustice through supplier diversity programs. These programs target underrepresented founders and minority-owned businesses and ensures they prioritize buying from them in their vendor ecosystem.

Portable Benefits for Independent Workers

One of the biggest barriers to folks entering into independent work is the lack of health benefits. Especially for women of color, most of whom are their family's breadwinners, healthcare benefits are critical to have secured.

Although we showed lack of benefits being a motivating factor for quits, it also is a reason people stay in a role long after they have lost motivation for the work.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, "Policymakers, industry innovators, labor organizers and other experts are exploring the potential of portable benefits, or benefits that are linked to individuals rather than particular employers, as a way to expand worker financial security and drive broader economic prosperity."

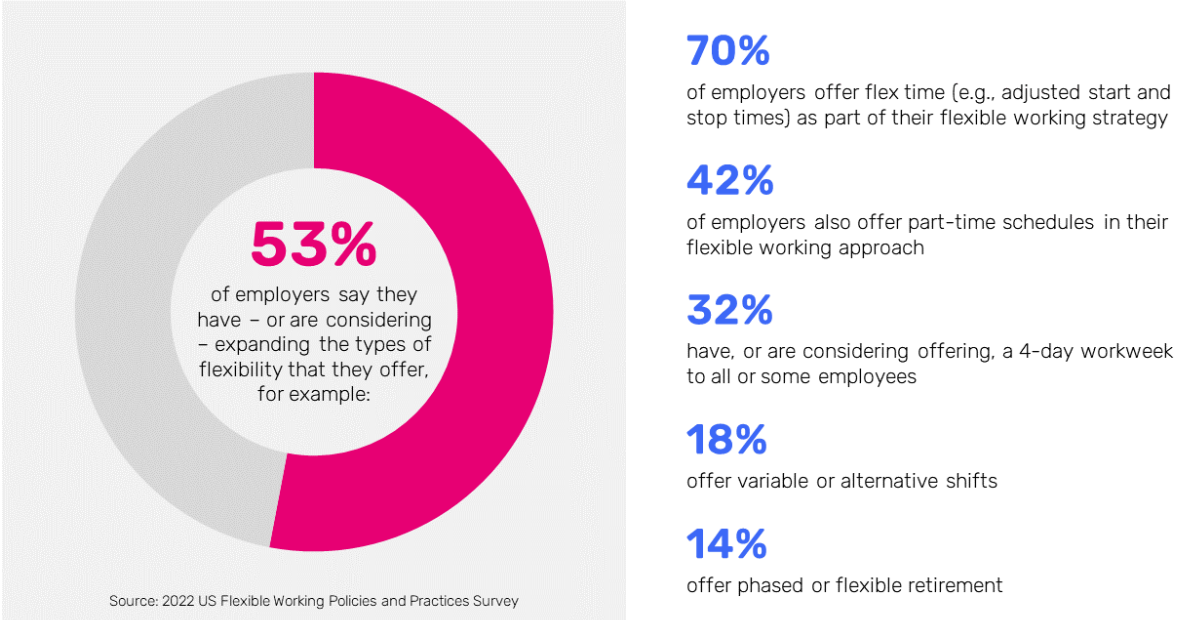## Hybrid & Flex Work Permanence

Location Flexibility. According to Gallup, prior to the pandemic, very few remote-capable employees worked exclusively from home (8%) and one-third had a hybrid work arrangement. As the pandemic took hold, as many as 70% of them worked exclusively from home. Fast forward to 2022, there is still a strong permanence to hybrid work (42%) and entirely home-based work (39%).

There is a disconnect between employers, who want folks in the office, and workers who primarily want to stay remote. Two thirds of employees want to come into the office three days or less per week. And if forced to come back, 54% said they would quit.

Schedule Flexibility. There are other forms of flexibility beyond where you work, including when and how you work. With the rise of tech tools, knowledge workers can be very productive asynchronously. Some workplaces enable non-linear days so workers can fit in work around their lives, rather than in a fixed schedule. (I especially love schedule flexibility as a mother. I traded my 4:00 pm slot today for this midnight block because it's the quietest time in my house.)

Policy Flexibility. SHRM offers flexible work policy examples that organizations can adopt that include additional models such as compressed workweeks and job sharing. Mercer reports that 53% of employers have already implemented or are considering expanding their flexibility offerings.

53%
of employers say they have – or are considering – expanding the types of flexibility that they offer, for example:

Source: 2022 US Flexible Working Policies and Practices Survey

70%
of employers offer flex time (e.g., adjusted start and stop times) as part of their flexible working strategy

42%
of employers also offer part-time schedules in their flexible working approach

32%
have, or are considering offering, a 4-day workweek to all or some employees

18%
offer variable or alternative shifts

14%
offer phased or flexible retirement

LIONS & TIGERS

In Conclusion

"The fires of suffering become the light of consciousness" – Eckhart Tolle, author and spiritual leader

Let us co-design a more human and valued work experience to collectively advance impact, access, and belonging.

It is possible to change; in fact, it is inevitable. We can rebuild structures that exclude people, we can balance profit and purpose, and we can maintain our energy so we don't burn out.

This is a crisis-tunity. Let us not waste it.

Where to from here?

Reach out to our team to discuss ways we can work together.

Subscribe to the Lions & Tigers newsletter on the website.

Follow Brea on LinkedIn.

Check out our blog for additional best practices, thought leadership and more.

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