

[How The Way We Work Will Change](#)

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By Melissa J. Anderson (New York City)

According to Alison Maitland, co-Author of [Future Work: How Businesses Can Adapt and Thrive in the New World of Work](#), it's time for companies to adapt to employees' needs – rather than the other way around. By doing so, she believes, companies can unlock untapped potential and productivity – particularly when it comes to women – and that's good for business.

She explained, “We need corporate cultures to adapt to the two new realities of workforces and careers. First, that women are nearly half the workforce in most advanced economies. And yet many organizations are still built and designed by and for men of another era. That is no longer suitable for today's workforce. “

“There is a connection between the way work is done and women's lack of progress to the top.” Location should be removed from the equation when evaluating work, she continued. “Really, it's results that should count rather than hours spent in the office.”

Future Work was released in the UK in October and in the US on the 8th of November, and discusses the urgency with which corporations need to address a changing workforce as the global marketplace becomes more complex. The book is co-written with Peter Thomson, a former HR director and a long-time expert on new ways of working.

She explained, “We both thought the way we work is crazy, and that there are much better ways to be doing it, and change is on the way.”

Maitland and Thomson interviewed over 60 executives and experts around the world and surveyed managers in their research for the book. “The majority of these managers expect there to be a revolution in working practices in the next decade. The book has a driving vision to explain how work can be done better and how people can be more productive, in a way that is good for people, good for companies, and good for the environment,” she said.

The Future of the Global Workforce

The second new reality that Maitland called critical for corporations to embrace is the rise of the emerging markets. These regions are growing in importance and companies are now drawing talent from them. “One of the questions we ask is how new ways of working will play out in new cultures, and it’s an important one,” she said.

“In the US and UK it is increasingly acceptable to work from home. But in some other cultures – even within Europe – it is not so acceptable to work from home.” And in some emerging markets, there are other factors at play, like a lack of infrastructure, or responsibility for extended family, which may limit employees’ ability to work from home, she noted. “We have to realize that, in terms of new ways of working, one size does not fit all.”

Why Culture Matters

“We’ve known for fifty years that people are best motivated and productive if you give them autonomy and the tools to do their job, and they can just get on with things,” she said with a laugh. “Yet, there was huge resistance to that and there still is.”

“Now we have the technology, but what is standing in the way is management’s fear of losing control. They’re thinking, ‘If we can’t see them, how do we know they’re working?’”

Corporate culture is an incredibly powerful force in how work gets done in each company, Maitland said. “Culture is critical in terms of the successful transformation of work.”

She continued, “What we call ‘future work’ provides much more autonomy and [personal] control over your work.”

In fact, she said, a workplace culture of presentee-ism is often based on management mistrust of employees, when in fact, most employees are perfectly capable of managing their own time and work flow. “We see that people are being treated as children rather than adults in many cases,” she said.

Additionally, Maitland said, in many cases companies are working to implement technologies that enhance workplace flexibility, but, without the appropriate training and mindshift for managers, more innovative and efficient ways of working will go unused, or be used incorrectly. “It’s not enough to introduce new technology to the workplace,” she said. “And it’s not enough to redesign workplaces. Those are just their physical manifestations. It’s critical for leaders and managers to examine their attitudes toward flexibility and they may need to change attitudes and practices.”

Flex as a Business Strategy

Finally, Maitland suggested ways to change the culture of work so that flex becomes more accepted. First of all, she said, the business case for flexibility must be communicated. “If organizations are going to do it effectively, they need to come at it as a business strategy, rather than an HR strategy.”

The message should come from the top, she advised, and should bring together senior management across corporate functions. After the infrastructure is in place, companies must rethink the way they are managing people. She explained, “Have good, honest conversations with mid-managers so they can overcome their fears about losing control. In the book, we

show how the companies that are doing this well have had these conversations, and have people at the top managing and modeling flexible work. Our book is really addressing leadership 2.0, the kind of skills you need to be a leader when organizations are flatter, and the ability to inspire and motivate a dispersed team.”

She added, “And the skills we find are important for this new world of work are skills in which women tend to be ranked higher than men – such as team- and relationship-building, emotional intelligence, tenacity, and awareness of the wider picture and the social impact of business decisions.”