

CREATING THE FUTURE OF WORK

History is replete with examples that the turn of a century have traditionally been an innovative and productive decade. The past few years are by no means the first time human beings are pausing to reflect on the state of their world and contemplate ways of improving it.

Australians are no exception, and over the past three years an increasing network of Australians has evolved an apparently unique organisation with the potential to provide a model for any other organisations which are also asking themselves how best to structure themselves to flourish into the next century.

The organisation is called "The Future of Work Foundation" and its origins, vision and way of operating are explored in this two part article.

The first part will focus on the Foundation's origins and vision for the future of work. The second part will explore the activities of the Foundation, and in particular its provocative organisation structure and mode of operation.

The Future of Work Foundation is the story of a movement which has organically grown from a small group with a powerful and compelling vision for work in the year 2020 to a vibrant organisation strongly anchored in the present and committed to action which will further evolve and implement the vision.

Part One:

Crushing Despair or a Vision of Hope? Australians at Work in 2020

What do the Business Council of Australia, the Men International Trust and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation have in common? All are organisations, who contributed in 1992 to a year long research project entitled "Australians at Work in 2020 (AAW)".

The project was convened by peak body for Human Resource Practitioners in Australia - the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) - and invited a wide range of organisations and individuals to develop their particular forecast for the future of work. Through a multi-stage iterative process (a somewhat Delphi-like process), these individual prognoses were refined and shaped before being compiled in a 300 page volume.

To some people the future is "out there" just waiting for us to arrive. To others, since the future has not yet happened, it is influenceable and capable of being changed.

These distinctions apply equally to futurists. Some are extrapolators, diviners of trends and predictors of probable futures. Others are dreamers, seekers of the ideal and creators of preferred futures.

The Australians at Work in 2020 project began as an attempt to codify and compare the forecasted or expected futures predicted by participating organisations.

Had it remained true to its original design it would have almost certainly culminated in the publication of what would actually have been a rather pedestrian book. Instead, it spawned an organisation which gives every indication of being able to evolve a significant and lasting change in the way Australians conceptualise, do, and are rewarded by, work.

The AAW project concluded with a three-day workshop which, for the first time, brought participants physically together.

For nearly a day the workshop group struggled first to understand and then to reconcile what were quite disparate predictions about the future for work, before finally recognising the inherent futility of this process and ultimately abandoning it.

Unencumbered by expectations rooted unavoidably in today's value systems, the workshop participants ultimately found deep agreement by focusing their attention on the parameters and characteristics which might comprise an ideal world of work.

The process, and the agony of those three days has been recorded elsewhere (copies can be obtained from the Future of Work Foundation at the address at the end of this article). The purpose

of this article is to elaborate on the vision of an ideal world which emerged, and which now sustains the myriad activities of the Future of Work Foundation.

The vision itself comprises four hundred and fourteen words, and can easily fit onto one printed page. In this article, the vision itself is reproduced in **large bold type** wherever it appears in the narrative.

The vision statement begins by exploring the meaning of the word work and anticipates many significant changes to the way work is understood, valued, done and rewarded as society evolves over the next twenty five years.

Work will mean something very different in 2020.

In fact, we may have so marginalised the word "work" that the word itself may not exist in 2020.

The first two lines of the vision statement reflect a deep seated dissatisfaction with work as it is currently experienced by most people. Not only are a significant proportion of our population denied access to work (the unemployed and the underemployed) but, for too many Australians, work is unsatisfying and often demeaning. Similarly, many do meaningful and valuable work which is simply not recognised or valued. The FOWF preferred future is an inclusive one, engaging all Australians.

Work is simply a creation of mankind. In fact it is a relatively recent creation. Animals have no concept of work. They simply do what is necessary to live. This includes a whole range of activities which humans might care to define as work, and some we would not; but animals would not understand such a distinction. For animals, survival is what counts, and work is what they do to survive.

This is also what work meant to the earliest humans. Not far evolved from animals, humans used their superior physical and mental evolution to make more efficient the things their animal forebears had done to survive, but basically for the first seven hundred thousand years of human existence on earth, work was indistinguishable from survival.

The development of cities, and the consequent specialisation which cities required of their residents began the modern trend of separating work from survival. In a city, survival became the responsibility of only a portion of the population for a portion of their time and those released from "survival duties" could embark on the wide range of tasks which now distinguish humans from animals.

Aristocracies and religions continued the trend, both becoming a higher class dependent almost entirely on others for their survival, but devoting an increasing amount of their time and effort to education, the arts, politics and other pursuits. This classification of human society continued for the next eight thousand years until the Industrial Revolution completed the process.

Since the Industrial Revolution the human species has had an increasingly uneasy association with "work". This is perhaps no better seen than in our dictionaries.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary devotes a column and a half to 27 definitions of work.

The sixth of these 27 definitions is:

"employment, especially the opportunity of earning money by labour."

The first definition of work in the Concise Oxford is:

"Expenditure of energy, striving, application of effort or exertion to a purpose."

The dichotomy between the two definitions has been elegantly expressed by a reference group set up by the Australian Capital Territory Government to report on Australia's Capital City Canberra in the year 2020. On page 39 of their recently published report the reference group note that in the year 2020:

"The Canberra community recognises that there is a difference between work (labour which gives meaning to one's life) and employment (labour which earns income).

Many who work in employment which is not critical to their sense of identity define themselves more by their work and less by their employment. For many people work and employment are one and the same activity. Others have made a full journey to a modern equivalent of subsistence life where people are part worker, part artisan and part community participator. The way people work and love is more diverse than it ever has been and these differences are respected as acts of personal choice."

Work will mean something to which every adult can and will aspire, for the whole of their adult life.

In fact, we will probably see children begin to "work" at a very early age.

Retirement as we know it now will no longer exist.

A society divided into "haves" (who are economically independent) and "have nots" (who are economically dependent on government largesse) is simply unacceptable. Our goal is a future in

which all Australian' s wants and needs are met through their own and others goal directed activities.

Work is currently conceived as an activity which commences no earlier than age 15 and ends (if one is fortunate) at about age 65. This is an unnecessarily narrow conception of work and it reflects the general economic premise that work is inherently unsatisfying and hence is to be avoided if at all possible.

The Future of Work Foundation does not accept that doing the things which need to be done in our society must inevitably be unsatisfying, neither can these things only be done between the ages of 15 and 65. There is an enormous satisfaction, not to mention pleasure, to be gained from doing useful and needed work. Such work is entirely unrestricted, the demand can never be satisfied.

Reconfiguring schools as places where people do the work of learning will be an important first step towards instilling future generations with a new work ethic. It, and other changes, will also provide useful and needed work for which people entering their third age will be ideally suited.

Configuring work as a desirable activity in its own right will probably follow a number of societal changes, principally among which is the relationship between people and money.

The very fabric of Australian society will be characterised by the work that people do and the rewards which they receive for that work.

Money as a unit of exchange will be much less influential in 2020.

Whatever units of exchange do exist, they will reward the totality of work not just the current "GDP" type of work

Since the Industrial Revolution, the Western world has inexorably built "work" into our societal structures. Those who "have work" define themselves by the work they do (' I am a plumber') and those who are denied work suffer (among many other things) a crisis of identity and worth. In Australia many so-called ' unemployed' Rotary members describe themselves on their membership badges as "formerly".

A prime reason both for our dependence on work, and for our alienation when out of work, has been our reliance on money as the sole (or at very least prime) measure of worth and reward. What began as a liberating invention (creating the possibility of third party exchanges) has developed into a divisive and self-serving concept (' the rich get richer as the poor get poorer'). Fortune Magazine recently estimated that 75% of the wealth created in the 1980' s in the USA went to 2% of the population.

It is now standard practice in all walks of life as a way of valuing something to convert it into dollar terms, even if the validity of such conversion is highly suspect. The economic "bottom line" no longer refers simply to a corporate profit and loss statement but is being increasingly touted as the measure of our success as a species.

This dependency on money will only be overcome with the rise of viable parallel value systems, a trend which is paramount in the writings of ecologists such as Paul Hawken ("The Ecology of Commerce", Harper Collins 1993). These changes appear to be progressing slowly through measures such as the "index of sustainable economic welfare" (ISEW) [first published in "For the Common Good" by Cobb, Cobb and Daly] or "economic value added" (EVA) [promoted by Stern Stewart in New York].

Barter or counter trade is another example of an increasingly prevalent parallel value system through which things are being created in all parts of the world. Barter is no longer simple concept, having many forms and configurations. At one level, for example, the increased trend towards "family friendliness" at work can be seen as a form of barter through which cash remuneration increases are traded for other commodities (such as more time away from work).

Central to the achievement of our vision is the continued development of more inclusive and holistic reward and value systems.

Implicit in these value shifts is an increased role for communities (meaning people with interests in common, as well as those who are geographically close together). There is no reason why intra-community transactions need to be mediated by a universal currency. Informal trading arrangements (baby sitting clubs, car pooling and the like) are being increasingly professionalised and as well more Australians are becoming involved in more formal community trading arrangements (such as LETS schemes, discount buying groups etc) every year.

We confidently envision a two-tier value exchange system, at the top of which will be a universal currency mediating inter-community and international transactions. And at the bottom of which will be a whole diversity of 'transaction specific' value exchange arrangements through which intra community transactions will be mediated.

It is this second tier which will facilitate the recognising and rewarding of work which is not currently included in that economic work scorecard called Gross National Product.

These changes will evolve slowly, however, and

A significant number of Australians will be working in jobs very similar to those they are in today

More work will need to be done to identify growth industries and to identify industries which will have less impact in 2020.

but those who do not will not be marginalised.

Many things which are now not considered to be "work" will very much be work (and rewarded work) in 2020.

This vision does not portend revolution, though many revolutionary changes will occur between now and 2020. We arrived where we are currently largely through the processes of evolution and we will evolve into our better future. Perhaps more now than ever before, human beings are active participants in the processes of evolution. Our actions, and inactions, irretrievably shape the future for our descendants. Throwing the baby out with the bathwater, or ignoring the gains of the present in favour of the apparent simplicity of the past, have never been successful change strategies.

It is clear that if this vision is to be achieved by 2020 then

Societal structures closely linked to work will have undergone radical change.

Education will become all encompassing, seamless and lifelong.

Politics will become an activity which engages many more Australians, though the methods of engagement will be very different.

The legal structure will be relevant to the future not repeating the past, and will become a harbinger of change.

There will be a considerable increase in community based industries which are internationally competitive.

Global corporations will control mass markets, though these will become of lesser importance.

Entire articles could be written on each of these societal structures, and the Foundation continues to auspice activities designed to explore the implications of these changes in more detail. FOWF is by

no means alone in these tasks. As the pages of "The Futurist" and other magazines attest, many people are both questioning the efficacy of almost all our Western societal structures and proposing a broad range of alternatives.

There is, however, one fundamental change which underpins the entire vision, and that is a change in peoples' understanding of how work is created, and how people choose the work they will do.

For at least two hundred years urban populations have been conditioned to believing that 'real' work is created by corporations and businesses, and then doled (pun intended) out to lucky people. Even the wholesale dismissals which have accompanied downsizing and re-engineering in recent years haven't changed this fundamental assumption in the minds of most people. Until very recently, most business writers and economists seemed to believe that economic growth meant that jobs lost in one company of industry would be created in others.

In late 1994 and early 1995 four independently written books began a trend to seriously question this assumption.¹

The Foundation, too, believes that the assumption if it was ever correct is no longer applicable, and the last thirty-four words in our vision statement are

**Work will cease to be something someone else gives you
and will come to mean those things you choose with others to do because
they add value to your community and to your country**

It is truly said that vision without action is dreaming.

The vision which FOWF holds for work in the year 2020 is nothing more than words on paper if it doesn't translate into actions in 1995 and beyond.

¹ "JobShift - How to prosper in a workplace without jobs", by William Bridges - published in Australia by Allen and Unwin

"The End of Work - The Decline of the Global Labour Force and the Dawn of the Post- Market Era", by Jeremy Rivkin - published by G.P. Putnam's Sons

"Job Shock - four new principles transforming our work and business", by Harry S. Dent Jnr - published by St. Martins Press

"The ReInvention of Work - A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time", by Matthew Fox - published by HarperCollins

To this end the mission of the Future of Work Foundation is:

"to engage all Australians
in creating a better future for work"

and over the past two years the organisation has, not only committed itself to evolving the vision, but is also committed to modelling ways of behaving which are congruent with the vision.

The ways in which the Foundation is structured and operating

Part Two:

The Future of Work Foundation An Australian Effort to Create a Twenty First Century Organisation

The first part of this article described the development in Australia of a vision for work in the year 2020. This article explores the essence of an organisation which has evolved as custodian of the vision: The Future of Work Foundation (FOWF).

The Foundation has as its mission: "to engage all Australians in creating a better future for work", and hence is actively involved in a variety of activities some of which are described in this article.

Of perhaps greater interest to readers is the way in which the structure and mode of operation of the Foundation has evolved as FOWF strives to model in 1995 its vision for the world of work in 2020.

To recap the vision briefly; the Foundation seeks to evolve a more holistic approach to the role of work in people' s lives. Implicit in this vision is both a broadening of the sort of "work" which is valued and rewarded by society, and the emergence of non-money based value exchange systems. Achieving the vision will challenge every individual to shape their lives through the development and achievement of personal goals and will also require significant changes in many organisational and societal structures and systems over the next twenty five years.

The Foundation is a network of individuals and organisations who are committing themselves to working to attain the FOWF vision within their sphere of influence. As one FOWF Director puts it, "The Foundation is a mirror reflecting the extent to which we are personally living the vision."

Or, has also been said, the Foundation is: "a seventeen million (the number of people in Australia) piece jigsaw puzzle attempting to put itself together to form a pleasing picture".

It is not possible to join the Future of Work Foundation, all Australians are already a member. It is possible, however, to actively commit yourself to the FOWF vision, and the Foundation exists to support and encourage those who are prepared to make this commitment to whatever degree.

Many of the Foundation' s activities resemble those of other organisations, as the following four examples demonstrate.

Two hour Futures-Forums, for example, are held on the last Wednesday of each month and everyone is welcome to either attend the Forum or to subscribe to audiotapes of the Forum series. Information packaged with these audio tapes is a major way of informing interested people of FOWF activities.

The Foundation is also sponsoring the formation of a network of "Collaboration Centres" which at their simplest level are serviced offices for like minded organisations and individuals. The design and operating processes of these centres, however, makes them a far richer home than any serviced office could ever be and allows for considerable interaction and growth between otherwise isolated groups.

At the community level, the Foundation has begun a project entitled "Let' s Create an Unemployment Free Zone" the aim of which is to eradicate the concept and practice of unemployment within an urban community (and in the process inspire other communities to adopt the same goal).

One final activity emphasises the range of FOWF' s activities. The Foundation is positioning itself as "The Consultant' s Consultants." Working through existing management consultancies provides FOWF with considerable leverage in supporting organisations to face the challenges of the future. The Foundation accredits resources used by consultants in their various organisational interventions, and also provides professional development activities for the consultants themselves.

Organisationally the Future of Work Foundation is a not for profit public company. The articles of association provide for up to twenty Directors to act as the Governing Board. Currently there are eleven Directors all but one of whom primarily occupy paid positions within other organisations.

The Foundation conducts almost all its activities through subordinate organisations, which are structured according to the specific needs of the activity.

FOWF Forums, for example, are organised by a subsidiary private company which is a partnership between FOWF, public broadcasters and a major Australian Corporate partner.

New sub-structures are continually emerging, and dying, as projects are conceived and are either completed or lapse for some reason. Even at this early stage of the Foundation' s life no attempt is

made to compile a complete description of all the activities currently being undertaken by or through FOWF.

One individual FOWF' er, for example, has recently produced an animated graphical version of the FOWF vision and uses it as the means of marketing his software creation skills.

The Foundation has no concept of passive involvement. Every Australian is welcome to participate to the (hopefully increasing) extent they feel able. Contributions are made actively and directly, and payment is only made for services directly used (there is no "membership fee").

The Foundation does not seek sponsorship, rather we create relationships. Ways are found to ensure that value exchange is direct and only mediated by money when absolutely unavoidable. FOWF Forums, for example, are conducted on the premises of the Corporate Partner (and all their employees are invited to attend at no personal cost).

These arrangements are often not easy to implement. Organisations like FOWF are viewed, and often view themselves, as charities and hence typically seek funding from their sponsor and then use the money provided to purchase services (eg venues) from a third party. As was briefly explored in the first part of this article, this societal dependence on money as an intermediate unit of exchange in almost every transaction is one of the causes of many unnecessary things, including unemployment.

No person receives a wage from the Foundation unless they have generated at least the equivalent value into the Foundation. The Chairman, for example, chooses to have all his "earnings" directed through the Foundation and has the Board' s permission to withdraw up to 100% of the amount credited (less expenses incurred) without explanation. In practice the Chairman' s earning capacity currently exceeds his needs, resulting in a surplus to the Foundation. Other Directors choose to channel part of their earnings through the Foundation under a similar arrangement. (There are no taxation benefits of these arrangements, they are entered into in the spirit of living the FOWF vision.)

The Directors have developed an agreed set of mutual expectations on which their relationships will be based. These expectations are:

- . to act as consultants to each other
- . to live and enhance the vision
- . to inform each other about relevant things
- . to support each other in managing the risk
- . to maintain regular, open and honest communication - including financial information
- . to agree on targets and outcomes as required - and having committed; do
- . to behave with integrity in our joint relationships

This is the extent of the "Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual".

At the current state of evolution, at least one Director is personally involved in all major activities, and hence this set of expectations is implied between all those involved with a particular project. This is expected to continue into the foreseeable future (probably initially by expanding up to the maximum number of Directors), however, some attention is being paid now to the way in which the organisation will operate when it is too large for personal Director involvement in every project.

A similar issue has already risen with respect to authority to make public statements on behalf of the Foundation. Obviously the Foundation has views about issues and societal trends and would seek to have its voice heard in various public arenas and forums.

Any Australian is entitled, unrestrictedly, to speak "as a member of the Future of Work Foundation". Subject to the set of expectations referred to above, any Director may speak "on behalf of the Future of Work Foundation". Formal written position papers are presented to Directors before being issued.

The Future of Work Foundation is striving to:

- . be inclusively relevant and accessible to all Australians
- . model an operating style which allows people to approach their lives holistically
- . recognise, value and reward the full range of work done in and on behalf of the Foundation
- . demonstrate ways in which sustainable value exchanges can take place other than through the medium of money
- . grow organically and sustainably
- . provide a model for other twenty first century organisations

and in the process, evoke the achievement of our vision for the future of work.

There is much about FOWF which is counter-intuitive.

Conventionally, organisations which make a difference have large or influential membership bases from which to influence political direction.

Similarly, the experience of most "grass roots" organisations is that a significant majority of people want, indeed expect, to be lead. In fact many people appear actually afraid of being told that they have the power within themselves, preferring to follow someone else' s dream rather than creating their personal vision.

FOWF has no concept of financial membership, and provides little leadership of the kind which will satisfy those who prefer to gain their identity through being a disciple of some-one else.

FOWF does not have a conventional organisation structure. Elliott Jaques² would have difficulty identifying the 'accountability hierarchy' mainly because the governing body is also the employee. In fact the FOWF organisation is deliberately fuzzy to ensure that the survival of FOWF never becomes more important than the achievement of the vision.

And yet FOWF has to operate in the real world of 1995. A world where Governments are influenced in creating various policies by lobby groups and public pressure. A world where businesses, public bureaucracies, community groups and learning institutions all shape (either consciously or unconsciously) the way people think and feel about work.

Achieving the required balance between vision and action; living in the world of 1995 while creating the world of 2020 will be an exciting challenge for all those associated with the Future of Work Foundation.

There are many different places to begin to create a better world. FOWF concentrates on the nature and role of work as a significant force in Australian society.

There seems little reason to believe that other Western democracies are significantly different in the way their societies understand and approach work. Perhaps what began as a pure research project down under in Australia may stimulate others elsewhere to identify and create their ideal world of work.

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² Elliott Jaques, Requisite Organisation, Cason Hall & Co, 1989

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Collaboration Centres Creating new workplaces as well as new businesses

A Collaboration Centre is a physical, spiritual and virtual home for organisations committed to making a difference in the world.

At one level nothing more than a serviced office, a Collaboration Centre can be both a model for the workplace of the future and a new business incubator.

There are three levels of engagement with a Collaboration Centre.

Partners physically occupy space and are part of the management of the centre. Partners share administrative infrastructure, information technology and ways of operating. Their aim is to operate their particular organisation seamlessly within the Collaboration Centre.

Colleagues use the centre itinerantly as a physical, fax or electronic address (Partners in a Centre in one city may well be a Colleague of a Centre in another city). They are spiritually aligned with the values of the centre and incur interaction fees for their use of centre facilities.

Visitors pay a fee to use agreed resources of the Centre on a rental basis (for example they may hire group computer facilities within the conference rooms).

Collaboration Centres grew out of the observation that there was a large number of very powerful organisations in Australia each of which had its own history and constituency, both of which tended to require the organisation to operate alone, or within what was at best a haphazard network. The creation of Collaboration Centres is an attempt to strengthen these networks and enhance the professionalism and potential influence of these organisations.

The Centres are evolving new ways of working, and hence providing new workplaces for their employees (both paid and unpaid employees since many Centre Partners are largely volunteer organisations).

They are also creating new businesses as synergies are explored and new ideas generated. Similarly they are challenging those who are suppliers to Centre Partners to change the way their products and services are supplied to meet the needs of a new and innovative organisation.

Although in their infancy, Collaboration Centres are one important way in which the Future of Work Foundation is seeking to live its mission of "engaging all Australians in creating a better future for work."