

The future of work – virtual collaboration and solving the world's biggest problems



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Given today's connected world where global expertise can be accessed online, important environmental problems can now be solved collaboratively by specially created multidisciplinary teams.

The world is changing constantly. The only permanent thing is change. What was valid yesterday, may not be valid today. What is valid today, will very probably not be valid tomorrow. The way people work will be no exception to the above statement. If we look at the past, the way people worked and collaborated together has been permanently changing. We are seeing more innovative modes of work. Just as the IT revolution has changed the global landscape completely, the collaboration process will also be completely changed. This is due to the way in which all things are becoming connected, virtual and intelligent.

Virtual collaboration is like a cherry on a cake – the last element to face the global impact of IT. It gives us better ways to exchange ideas and thoughts, no matter where we are located and when we are interacting with each other. The world became connected thanks to the introduction of the internet and mobile networks. Of course, most of the global population still does not have access to the internet or mobile communication. In fact, two-thirds of the world is still waiting to be connected, though the pace of this change is continually increasing. Importantly, initiatives like www.internet.org (supported by Facebook, Nokia and Samsung) will only accelerate the pace of change.

The next stage will be the virtualization of the way we deal with everyday tasks. This will enable a truly virtual collaboration. It will mean that corporate structures, as we know them today, will cease to exist.

People will have the chance to work more as freelancers, offering their knowledge and skills on the virtual labor market. It will not matter anymore where you are located, or when you are available, whether you come to the office or if you take the next month off and travel to distant parts of the world. The only thing that will matter is what you know and of what you are capable. In this way, you will join collaboration and knowledge platforms and decide for yourself on a personalized way of interacting with the rest of the world. Today, there are plenty of examples in various industries of people collaborating virtually. One of the largest freelance communities can be found at www.freelancer.com, where you can either hire professionals from all over the world or provide your time and get hired. Some communities are going even further. 10EQS (www.10eqs.com) is a knowledge platform connecting clients with global top talent in a structured, online collaboration environment. Here we are seeing the establishment of the first virtual teams consisting of independent experts from all around the world.

In the last stage, the power of the machine will look at all the data in the network and, using smart algorithms, will start not only mining the content, but will also start understanding the processes behind them. This will be the moment when people will no longer need to deal with administration. From that moment, we will only generate content. And the more creative our thinking is, the more added value we can generate. This will hopefully allow us to retain our competitive advantage over artificial intelligence, which will serve us as a partner. Like Siri,

it will be our personal assistant ready to help us with the tasks we do not have the personal energy to deal with. One great example of bridging a process of design thinking to the online world is OpenIDEO (www.openideo.com). OpenIDEO is an open innovation platform where the global community solves big challenges for social good. Design thinking, as a process of solving complex challenges by teams of multidisciplinary experts, is a game changer. Once this process is virtualized and personalized, it will enable us to answer the big problems of today's world by being globally connected.

To give some real life examples, this type of co-creation process has been used in a great variety of projects. Municipalities can very easily establish flexible teams of experts from various regions and so gain benefits of an on-demand type of advisory service. They can start conceptualizing solutions for better mobility, the innovative use of public spaces, sustainable urbanization, or develop concepts for sustainable energy systems. Real estate developers can tap into global networks, know-how and opportunities. They can gain a competitive advantage by mapping global trends in sustainable architecture and design in an effective way. Recreational entities can co-create new types of services with a positive impact on the surrounding environment, while attracting new visitors. Investors can validate the business models of various start-ups and receive feedback early on from the key markets. Last but not least, governance at all levels can start drafting sustainable strategies for innovation and the creation of new jobs. Of course,

the possibilities to work in this way are endless.

A number of important market changes are creating the common ground for next generation platforms for solving clients' cleantech problems. First of all, clients today require a much greater degree of specialization from consulting firms; traditional service models based on full-time employed consultants are severely challenged to meet this need for deep specialization. Secondly, clients also want to take a more active role in defining and developing solutions to their critical issues, while utilizing outside expertise in a more flexible and dynamic way. Finally, there is a growing community of experts from around the world who want to work on their own terms, and to collaborate with others to solve interesting and important problems.

The impact of this change will be profound in all industries, and it will be the traditional consulting model that will be most affected. What we also have to keep in mind is that this change will come faster than most people realize. In my opinion, for anyone reading these lines in 10 to 15 years, it will be more of a reality than an observable trend. At the end of the day, the most important factor will be that this creative power focuses on solving the world's biggest challenges such as poverty, environmental destruction and medical advancements. Only then will we be able to say that this change was meaningful and helped us create a better place for us and for our children.