

FUTURE OF WORK AGENDA

A Free Monthly Newsletter
June 2007
www.thefutureofwork.net/

THIS MONTH'S HEADLINES

Click on any Headline to go to the full story.

1. FROM JIM AND CHARLIE

This is our personal note welcoming you to the June 2007 issue of *Future of Work Agenda* and setting our theme for the month. This month we're looking at several "what could be" scenarios – what if communities actively designed themselves to be attractive to talented knowledge workers? What if we took "being green" seriously?

2. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF WORK

We're pleased to announce that WIRED Michigan has approved our recommendations for proceeding to build detailed plans for several remote work centers. We've got several public appearances scheduled over the next several months. Our new book, *Corporate Agility*, will be out in August – and we're always seeking new members.

3. FEATURE ARTICLE: WHAT ATTRACTS KNOWLEDGE WORKERS TO A COMMUNITY?

The challenge facing every community and region today is how to adapt to the new global economy that depends on knowledge, creativity, and innovation. It is becoming increasingly clear that the key to a thriving innovation-based economy is talent – knowledge workers and professionals. The emerging economic development paradigm focuses on making a region attractive to knowledge workers, in the well-founded belief that an area that attracts talented people will generate enough jobs to keep them there.

4. BONUS ARTICLE: A COMMENTARY ON ALTERNATE OFFICING OPTIONS IN THE UK

Brian Sherwood Jones, author of this article, is the founder and CEO of ProcessforUsability, a UK-based consultancy firm focused on providing assurance that systems and services meet user needs. We would welcome similar submissions offering perspectives on office costs and alternative work arrangements in other countries.

5. BEST OF THE BLOG

This section provides you with brief summaries of several recent notes we've already posted on the *Future of Work* weblog. In each case we also include a live link to the original post on the blog. And we encourage you to become a regular reader of the blog, where we are posting notes, case studies, and links to other important websites on a regular basis.

6. IN OUR HUMBLE OPINION: GREEN IS OUR FAVORITE COLOR

We end each issue of *Future of Work Agenda* with a personal perspective – our chance to comment on issues and developments in the world of work that we find important and interesting. This is our "editorial" page, where we enjoy offering our opinions and predictions about what's happening (or should be happening) in the world of work and beyond.

THE FULL STORIES

1) FROM JIM AND CHARLIE

Well, here we are approaching summer (at least here in North America). We feel a bit like a broken record saying this, but what ever happened to those “lazy, hazy days of summer”? Around here it feels like we’ll be speeding up, not slowing down, over the next several months.

As we note in our [Announcements](#), below, we’re very pleased that our initial work on the WIRED West Michigan program has been well-received. The WIRED Policy Council just voted to extend our contract. The Council has asked us to develop detailed implementation plans for developing three or more Remote Work Centers (we prefer to call them Business Community Centers™, but that’s our registered name for our version of the more generic concept) in the seven-county region. We’ll also be designing a regional marketing plan aimed at educating local business leaders and public officials about the compelling business case for these shared work facilities.

Speaking of which, we encourage you to read our rant for June, “[Our Favorite Color is Green](#)” for some strong commentary (we don’t know any other kind) on the importance of thinking creatively about global climate change and energy independence. Our message is really a very simple one: it’s all well and good to develop alternative sources of energy and build high-mileage vehicles, but where’s the focus on reducing the number of miles we collectively drive commuting to work every day?

Anyone who knows us knows where that rant is going: work at home, or work out of a neighborhood “third place” or remote work center, at least part of the time. Or, as we’re fond of saying, it’s time to go to work without *going* to work. We know that’s not the whole answer, but we can’t fathom why there isn’t a national conversation about the idiocy of millions of workers driving trillions of miles and burning up billions of barrels of oil every year.

And then we turn to what is fast becoming our favorite topic of all: how to make local communities attractive to talented folks. In fact, in one sense that’s what our small piece of the WIRED West Michigan project is really all about: building understanding of how that region can attract and retain knowledge workers. There is a very exciting story building up in West Michigan as it supplements its well-established (but struggling) manufacturing base with a whole new set of 21st century industries based on research, design, and engineering skills.

Our recent research helped us (and our clients) to understand in much more detail just what attributes of communities make them the kind of place that knowledge workers will flock to and settle down in. That’s the essence of this month’s lead article, “[What Makes a Community Attractive to Knowledge Workers?](#)” We hope you’ll find it both interesting and useful.

Finally, we’re also pleased to publish a brief thought piece submitted to us by **Brian Sherwood Jones**, founder of the UK consultancy Process for Usability. Brian’s analysis of the costs of various commercial and home office facilities in the U.K. poses some tough questions about the future of work in that country (“[A Commentary on Alternate Officing Options in the UK](#)”).

And as always, of course, we're also pleased to bring you the [Best of the Blog](#) section summarizing our most recent posts on the [Future of Work blog](#). We continue to believe that you'll find ideas and information here that you just can't get anywhere else.

So, on to the rest of the newsletter. Enjoy! And please [let us know](#) what you think.

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2) ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF WORK

WIRED West Michigan extends WDC Contract

We're very pleased to report that our WIRED West Michigan project has received Policy Council approval to move beyond our Phase I general market research into a targeted Phase II effort that will produce specific plans for remote work centers to be located within the seven-county WIRED region. We've already begun working with local advisory groups who will "vet" our business planning toolkit and regional marketing plan over the next six months.

WDC and *Future of Work* Activities

Jim will join **Jill Duncan** of Herman Miller at a workshop being sponsored by Herman Miller during [NeoCon](#), the commercial furniture extravaganza held every year at the Chicago Merchandise Mart. Jim and Jill will be presenting on Tuesday, June 12.

We are also very pleased to announce that Jim and Charlie will be featured speakers at the [IFMA World Workplace Conference](#) in New Orleans, October 24-26.

***Corporate Agility* to be published by the American Management Association in August**

We've made several references in past issues of *Future of Work Agenda* to the book we've been working on for the last several years – with enormous assistance from **Cory Williamson**.

We're now pleased to announce that the book will be published by AMACOM, the publishing arm of the American Management Association, in late August. In fact, there are early pre-publication notes about the book at both Amazon.com ([here](#)) and BarnesandNoble.com ([here](#)). You can even place a pre-order that will be shipped as soon as the book becomes available.

We'll be telling our readers lots more about ***Corporate Agility*** in the July and September issues of this newsletter.

***Future of Work* Continues to Seek New Members**

Future of Work offers several levels of membership that depend on your status and needs: *Individual and Small Business*, *Corporate*, and *Implementation Partners*. We also offer special discounts to nonprofit, educational, and public sector organizations.

These membership programs are described in more detail on the [Future of Work website](#), or feel free to [contact us](#) directly for more information about fees and benefits.

All *Future of Work* members are now listed on the *Future of Work* website, in the [About Us/Members](#) section. We encourage all our readers to consider joining the community.

Please [visit our website](#) and apply for membership today.

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3) FEATURE ARTICLE: WHAT ATTRACTS KNOWLEDGE WORKERS TO A COMMUNITY?

by Charlie Grantham and Jim Ware

This article is excerpted from our WIRED West Michigan white paper “What Attracts Knowledge Workers?” The full white paper is also available online, at:

http://www.thefutureofwork.net/assets/What_Attracts_Knowledge_Workers.pdf

The challenge facing every community and region today is how to adapt to the new global economy that depends on knowledge, creativity, and innovation. It is becoming increasingly clear that the key to a thriving innovation-based economy is talent – knowledge workers and professionals. The emerging economic development paradigm focuses on making a region attractive to knowledge workers, in the well-founded belief that an area that attracts talented people will generate enough jobs to keep them there – and will develop a strong regional economy based on their wants and needs (See “[Market Segmentation and Development for Remote Work Centers](#)” by James Ware and Charles Grantham, WIRED Working Paper, January, 2007, for a broader discussion of this new economic development paradigm).

Knowledge workers are the engine of the information- and innovation-based economy; they are the “creative class” in Richard Florida’s language ([The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life](#), Basic Books, 2003; [Cities and the Creative Class](#), Routledge, 2004 – links are to Amazon.com).

But the larger question remains: what attracts these people to specific geographical areas? What causes them to move from their hometown, from a college town, or from their most recent residence to another area to live? What kinds of services, programs, and institutions make an area attractive to them?

Our strong belief is that first and foremost knowledge workers value *self-control and autonomy*. And they view their careers and their personal life as something they want to plan and take care of on their own. Having the opportunity to choose among alternatives is thus a key component of what knowledge workers are looking for. But self-control and choice by themselves are not enough; knowledge workers also want to be part of strong communities that meet their other personal interests and needs.

If, as we suspect, these wants and needs become the central features of an area that drives economic development, then cities and neighborhoods must consider carefully what attributes are most attractive in their planning and development programs. Without those attractors, the

talent won't come; and, as the economy becomes ever more dependent on innovation and ever more location-independent, regions that are less attractive will wither, and, in many cases, die.

The short answer to the question of attraction is **community**. Although the physical attributes (weather, recreational opportunities, cleanliness, livability) of a region are important, the equation is far more complicated than that. It is, frankly, about the *psychology* of the region. We are convinced that you can have all the roads, schools, airports, business services, Internet access, and hospitals you want, but if you don't have a meaningful sense of community you won't see much in-migration.

It's not that roads, schools, airports, business services, Internet access, and hospitals are unimportant or trivial. Indeed, without those basics no region will be able to thrive in today's global economy. Our contention is that these resources are just the price of entry. The more important question is what it takes for a region to be head-and-shoulders above average in attracting and retaining talent.

We believe a good way to approach this question is to take a step backward and examine first what kinds of abilities and competencies will be required of the workforce of the future. Or, put another way, what will knowledge workers have to be good at to thrive in the emerging global economy?

Our hypothesis is that they will be attracted to communities that offer them an **experience** of what they have to be competent at. One of the best approaches we have found to that idea comes from Daniel Pink in his 2005 book *A Whole New Mind (A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2005)*.

Pink proposes six new competencies for the future of work:

- Design
- Story
- Symphony
- Empathy
- Play
- Meaning

Design is not just function; it is the aesthetic quality of a thing—be it a chair, a house, or a town. For a community design is a combination of architecture, appealing public and natural spaces, layout, and geography. Design also involves non-physical elements: how well the community incorporates diversity, provides mixed-use housing, includes multiple industrial sectors, enables recreational opportunity, and supports a variety of social institutions to create a vibrant, “cool” place to live.

Story is not just argument; it is the compelling narrative. It's the engaging and emotional part of the conversation. Does the community have a strong understanding of its own history and build that history into current events and institutions?

Symphony is not just focus; but variation, interweaving of things, putting it all together across boundaries and synthesizing things.

Empathy is not just logic; it is about caring for others, understanding their various motivations, and identifying with them as part of a larger whole.

Play is not just seriousness; it is humor, lightheartedness, and games.

Meaning is not just consumerism and possession of material things; it is about purpose, transformation, and spiritual fulfillment. It's about the community or region's sense of identity, and its connections to other regions and specialized communities of practice around the state and around the world.

If these are the core competencies, the things that knowledge workers engage with, then how do they translate into community characteristics? Table One captures our initial linkages.

Table One

Competency	Community Characteristic
Design	Social and ethnic variety; "coolness"
Story	Performing Arts; Historic Preservation
Symphony	Civic involvement; diversity of interests
Empathy	Social action programs
Play	Recreational variety; whimsical architecture and natural spaces
Meaning	Number of faith-based organizations; connectivity to the global economy and society

Design is about **variety**. Creativity and innovation (the end products of design) usually come from the interaction of people from varied backgrounds, viewpoints, and philosophies. The amount of ethnic, religious, and social diversity are good indicators of how much potential variety exists in a community. Knowledge workers are attracted to regions that have these kinds of variety. Conversely, they are generally not attracted to highly homogenous communities because they don't find the amount of social stimulation they are looking for.

Design is also by nature an "edgy" profession. Is the community on the leading edge in its physical and social architecture? Does it "push the envelope" in experimenting with new structures, new outdoor spaces, new businesses? Is it a "cool" place to be?

The **Performing Arts** are about telling stories and expressing emotions – some old, some new. The extent to which communities have locally staged productions and events tells prospective residents about the story-telling capacity and intellectual energy of the community. Is there an opera house, symphonies, venues for live music? Those are critical elements of communities that are attractive to the creative class (whether or not a given individual is personally a performing artist is not the question; it is the possibility of participating and the opportunity to attend performances that matters).

But Story is not just about the performing arts. It's also about a community's **sense of history** and connections with its past and its roots. A community that offers its residents well-preserved (but updated) buildings and a strong sense of neighborhoods that include people of all ages is a community filled with stories. And stories contribute deeply to that sense of place that

knowledge workers crave. In a world that has become virtually a global village, a strong sense of local place is more important than ever.

Symphony, or the ability for members of the community to interact, translates into **civic involvement**. Political, professional, and civic associations (i.e., Kiwanis, Masons, Elks, etc.) show how involved residents are in local activities. These kinds of associations are evidence that a community has the potential for high involvement – and that there is citizen interest in a wide variety of community activities.

Social action programs like help for the homeless, Habitat for Humanity, gay and lesbian support groups, and proactive environmental programs are additional examples of a community's empathy for its members, and of its openness, inclusiveness, and tolerance of diversity.

Recreational variety is a key ingredient for a well-rounded life for knowledge workers, no matter what their age. Outdoor venues like skiing, boating, biking, and hunting (and their indoor counterparts) are as important as, and often much more important than, spectator sports. Again, the more variety the better to accommodate a wide range of interests. Organized sports leagues are another great example. How the community reaches out and develops different opportunities for its residents of all ages is a key indicator of recreational variety – and of energy and zest for life as well.

Conducting a Community “Health Check”

But how can you tell if your community has what it needs? We don't know of a fully-formed, statistically supported answer yet, but we are actively investigating the development of a widely agreed-upon set of community-based “health” metrics.

For now, we turn to the work of John Gardner, former head of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and then a professor at Stanford University. Professor Gardner was fascinated with leadership: what is it and how do you grow it? Later in life he turned to the study of communities and in particular how to promote and develop a sense of community. He felt that the contemporary breakdown of community was a root cause of many social ills and a significant contributor to a general decrease in the quality of life in America.

As a result of his interest and concern Gardner developed a framework for measuring the ingredients of community. While there is not an exact one-to-one match between Pink's six competencies for the new economy and Gardner's framework for community, there is a rough correspondence that we find compelling. Gardner's categories are:

- Wholeness incorporating diversity
- Reasonable sense of shared values
- Caring, trust, and teamwork
- Effective internal communication
- Participation
- Affirmation
- Links beyond the community
- Development of young people
- A forward view

What, then, should communities do? If they want to attract highly talented people who are motivated in their lives by design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning they need to develop programs, organizations, and capabilities that support exactly those kinds of experiences.

As usual, your comments and reactions are more than welcome. And as always, please send your thoughts to us at comments@thefutureofwork.net.

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4) BONUS ARTICLE: A COMMENTARY ON ALTERNATE OFFICING OPTIONS IN THE UK

By Brian Sherwood Jones

Brian Sherwood Jones is the founder and CEO of [ProcessforUsability](http://ProcessforUsability.com), a UK-based consultancy firm focused on providing assurance that systems and services meet user needs. He can be reached at brian@processforusability.co.uk. We would welcome similar submissions offering perspectives on office costs and alternative work arrangements in other countries.

UK costs and constraints on future work

I am not an economist, architect or builder, so this is not my area of expertise, but it is an attempt to “follow the money” and understand the working conditions for future British knowledge workers.

Office space is expensive

I live in one of the cheapest parts of Britain. The rent on an office of about 1000 square feet in my area would be about £10k p.a. (multiply by two for dollars), with hefty local taxes on top of that.

Office space in Britain is the most expensive in the world. Even in a struggling, medium-sized city, like Birmingham, costs are more than 40 percent higher than in Manhattan although construction costs half as much.

Office space in London, according to commercial data (KingSturge, 2003 to 2005) is not just more expensive than anywhere else in the world; it is some three times as expensive as the next most expensive city in Europe, Paris, and more than three times as expensive as in Manhattan.

Even more telling, perhaps, are the costs of office space in British provincial cities. Birmingham was the next most expensive European city after Paris, and Glasgow, Edinburgh and Manchester were all more expensive than Manhattan; office space costs almost twice as much in any of those smaller and not very prosperous British cities as it does in San Francisco – a city which not only is highly prosperous and has some of the tightest regulatory constraints on housing in the US but also has topographical constraints on land supply. Office space in Birmingham cost 124 percent more than in fast growing, twice as big, and land-strapped Singapore.”

“Office Space Supply Restrictions in Britain: The Political Economy of Market Revenge,” by Paul Cheshire and Christian Hilber, January 2007)

The "[Square feet oh, how square](#)" article from *Business Week* (July 3, 2006) ought to apply to the UK in spades. It is my impression that the penny seems to be dropping at last, and that companies and corporate organisations are now welcoming flexible working, telecommuting etc., but that this is very recent (the last few months really). The [shedworking website](#) has links to the various surveys. Personally, I would expect things to move fast now.

Homes are small (and expensive)

The shortage of housing combined with low interest rates has led to high prices – the market has not started to move down (yet?), unlike in the US.

The UK has the smallest space standards in Europe (developed as minimum standards in 1961 and adopted as maximum). Modern homes are seen as too small ("[Space Race](#)," *Building* magazine, Issue 11, 2007). Houses are say 750 – 850 square feet. The introduction of additional bathrooms into much the same volume has shrunk the size of bedrooms ("The changing face of housing in Britain" by Beverley West, UNMIST, RICS Research Foundation ISBN 0-85406-968-2, 1999: Download from www.rics.org). Potential working space is small; typically the third bedroom; 80 square feet would be about par.

Recognition of home working is patchy at best

Some people (notably Josephine Smit of *Building* magazine) have been pointing out for the last decade that home working should be recognised, but Beverley West did not find support for this in 1999, and the 2005 CABA survey ("What home buyers want: Attitudes and decision making among consumers," CABA Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment, 2005. Download from www.caba.org.uk) did not even ask about it. Personally, this seems an astonishing omission.

Garden Offices and sheds seem to be the answer for many. The [shedworking blog](#) has some impressive figures on the scale of uptake. For less than a year's rent, I could buy a garden office and add value to my house) The site <http://www.smartgardenoffices.co.uk/start-up-businesses/funding.htm> has figures.

The "third place" may be the pub

The coffee house culture is long established in Britain (for example, Lloyd's coffee house in London started a number of famous enterprises named after it). However, pubs are getting wi-fi and need the business; there are some enterprising landlords on all scales who may well provide the major "third place."

Not much sign of mobile offices (yet)

The extreme top end of the mobile office caught some press interest ("[Firm builds internet motor home](#)"), but there seems to be little activity here. For a small multiple of the cost of a garden office, a vehicle conversion to an office would seem to offer considerable flexibility (and leave the shed free for more important things, like time-wasting). To some extent, I may be unduly influenced by a neighbour; I do not covet his ox, but his Stonefield 4x4. . .

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5) BEST OF THE BLOG

Here's a small sampling of excerpts/lead-ins from our recent weblog posts. Please get in the habit of reading the [Future of Work weblog](#) regularly – bookmark it, or if you have an RSS news reader, subscribe to it. And please contribute as well. We're more than happy to reprint your stories, or to consider featuring you as a Guest Writer.

We believe we're creating a unique knowledge base of what's going on out there today, and what's going to be going on tomorrow. If you want to learn about the future of work, [our blog](#) is the place to go (along with this very newsletter, of course). Just click on each headline below to visit the full original blog post.

Web 2.0 Means Two-Way (April 30)

I had a minor (*very* minor, but nevertheless meaningful) epiphany recently regarding the impact the Internet is having on business.

I was listening to a podcast from *Business Week* featuring Steve Wildstrom, *Business Week's* very well-informed technology guru. The podcast ("[Harnessing Social Networks](#)" - click on the "Listen to this Episode" link), which was based on Steve's April 23 column "[Harnessing Social Networking](#)" (the core ideas in the two sources are virtually identical), focused on the wide variety of new ways of creating and leveraging networks - networks among people but of course enabled and put on steroids by the web. . . .

The Worldwide Labor Crunch (May 1)

Catching up with some reading this week, I came across an important *Business Week* article about the increasing difficulty that many businesses across the globe are having finding qualified workers ("[Where are all the Workers?](#)").

The most astounding statistic is that, according to a recent survey conducted by [Manpower](#), fully **41%** of 37,000 employers in 27 countries are reporting having difficulty finding the people they need to hire. The full survey is available on Manpower's website, at [this link](#). . . .

Why Does It Take a Disaster to Promote Telecommuting? (May 6)

The repair of the freeways leading to the Bay Bridge from the East Bay is proceeding even more rapidly than expected. Local officials expect that the section of the I-580 overpass that collapsed on April 29 will be repaired and open again by early July [Update: the overpass actually re-opened on May 24]. And fortunately Bay Area commuters have adapted well. Ridership on BART has soared, and car traffic has continued to stay well below pre-collapse levels.

One contributor to that traffic decrease appears to be a significant increase telecommuting - staying off the highways altogether. . . .

Another Proponent of Distributed Work (May 20)

A friend recently called my attention to an outstanding article on the value and virtue of distributed work by retired Harvard Business School Professor **Shoshana Zuboff**.

Soshana and her husband **Jim Maxmin**, both very smart, articulate people, host a blog called "[The Support Economy](#)" that I heartily recommend if you are at all interested in thinking about the future of work and business. Anyway, Shoshana suggests, as Charlie and I have for years, that one very important pathway to a more sustainable, environmentally friendly economy is distributed work. . . .

A New Alliance with Work Connexions (May 21)

We're pleased to report that we have recently formed an informal alliance with a relatively new UK-based organization (or, as they put it, *organisation*). It's called [Work Connexions](#) and was established by **Leo Cussons**.

Leo contacted me a couple of weeks ago and asked if he could "syndicate" selections from this *Future of Work* blog. After an intriguing get-acquainted conversation (conducted, no surprise, over [Skype](#)), Charlie and I readily agreed. . . .

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6) IN OUR HUMBLE OPINION: OUR FAVORITE COLOR IS GREEN

Commentary by Charlie Grantham and Jim Ware

This month we're focused once again on energy and the elements of a sustainable society. The boys are back and raving to rant. A few months back (okay, it was April 2005, eons ago) we wrote about what life would be like when gasoline prices hit five bucks a gallon ("[In Our Humble Opinion: What Will a World of \\$5 Gas Be Like?](#)") and people sort of said, "Yeah, so what?"

Well, here we go again, with a gallon of dead dinosaur juice now hitting close to four bucks and still going up (that's in the US of A – we know it's already a lot higher just about everywhere else in the world). Same-old, same-old. Don't folks get it? Or has everyone taken another double dose of stupid?

Buford's been ponderin' what's at the bottom of all this ignorin' reality stuff. And good 'ol Maynard figured out that an average cow (like Bessie, his favorite) produces around 500 liters of methane gas a day (just in case you don't believe it, just check out [this source](#)). Talk about bovine flatulence.

Hey, in the spirit of helpin' out, Maynard goes down to Home Depot and gets some rubber tubing, a roll of duck tape and rigs up a methane-powered pick-'em-up truck (getting the picture?). Well, it sort of worked – until he fired up a stogie while re-fuelin'. (Maynard should be outta the hospital by the time of our next issue. We know he's not the brightest bulb on the porch, but at least he was doin' his part for energy independence).

And so we dispatched Cooter the data dog to see what he could dig up (pardon the pun).

Look, fuel efficient cars are great; good God, the Governor of Callifornia even converted a couple of his Hummers to run on biofuels. But as Indiana Jones said, "They're digging in the wrong place." And as our futurist hero Alvin Toffler pointed out over thirty years ago in *Future Shock*, moving millions of good folk into center cities every morning and back home again every evening is just plain wrong!

So let's start way back in history to unnerstan' how it got this way, and then move forward to Now. Then we'll end with a few Humble Opinions (this month we're warning you ahead of time).

We can't say it any better than Shoshana Zuboff (remember her *The Age of the Smart Machine?*) did recently in the ["The Support Economy"](#) blog that she and her husband Jim Maxmin run:

"But inside the support economy is a far more sustainable and profound response to climate crisis. It entails the shift from concentrated to distributed patterns of life, work, consumption. Start with our daily obeisance to the gods of command and control: the commute. The commute exists because in the late eighteenth century canny British factory owners figured out that they could get more work out of people and use fixed assets more efficiently if everyone worked in the same place at the same time. Today, the concentrated pattern of work costs far more than it saves for firms, individuals, and the planet: It feeds needless bureaucracy; it destroys value by insulating employees from consumers; it requires mass-carbon-spewing transport."

See ["The Real Road to Green: Don't Reduce, Distribute!"](#) for the full text of Shoshana's very provocative comments.

When are people going to start to ask the right question ("Just why is it you **go** (somewhere) to work?")? As Buford would allow, we've the the whole dang thing bass ackwards. Sure, some folks still have to travel to their place of employment – like, say, brain surgeons, barbers, and plumbers. But accountants, tech geeks, and even humble writers and researchers like yours truly? Not! Don't think so.

So what are our little pea-brained politicians offering us now? Well, how 'bout ethanol made out of corn? Let's follow this little thread of genius thinkin'. Let's think about how much corn it takes to make ethanol that can then be added to real ol'-fashioned gasoline to power our mobile beasts. (Footnote: one of us in our college days used to buy the stuff under the label of "Everclear" and mix it with grape juice to make some rot-gut "purple Jesus" that fueled the frat parties, but that's another story for when the young-uns are in bed). Anyway, back at the ranch, let's see what Cooter found.

Here's his erudite – but important – lesson on energy production:

"Oil has historically had a much higher EROEI (the amount of energy you get out of something as a function of how much energy it takes to produce it), especially on land in areas with pressure support, but also under the sea, which only offshore drilling rigs can get to. Apart from this, the amount of ethanol needed to run the United States, for example, is greater than its own farmland could produce, even if fields used for food were converted into cornfields." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethanol>).

With current technology we get about 34% more energy out of corn ethanol than it takes to make it. In *Our Humble Opinion* (there it is!), you need to get something close to double the energy out versus what went in if you want to get anywhere close to sustainability. Oh, and did anyone tell you that ethanol will produce more air pollution than gasoline?

Yeah, yeah, we can hear it out there. “Well, what about Brazil and their reliance on ethanol from sugar cane? You have a point, but we still don’t think you’re asking the right question. But the “genius thinking” back in the ol’ DC swamp supports going with this lame-brained approach. Hey, maybe the loose end of Maynard’s rubber hose contraption got stuck in some politician’s ear. Or they’ve been snortin’ somethin’ that’s shriveling up their brains.

And here’s a curious note for you gastronomes. Ever wonder why the price of beef and poultry has been increasing lately? Seems all those midwestern farmers are pushing their corn into federally-subsidized ethanol production and the dumb ‘ol cows haven’t got as much to eat as they used to. Fill up your car, empty your tummy. Boy, there’s some deep thinkin’ going on somewhere! Give us a break, Horace. We’re waiting for someone going to say, “Stop just a minute while we think this thing all the way through.” But we ain’t holding our breath either.

Did you know we could get close to energy independence in the United States right now if we just stopped driving to work? Yep, if everyone just worked from home or locally two days a week that would create an almost 40% decrease in petroleum use overnight (some driving isn’t to offices – we do have to get to the grocery store, the Doctor, and grandma’s).

Now that would probably just really upset the Saudi’s and drive the whole Middle East into a purple haze (Pardon us for the pun: purple haze, purple Jesus. Oh well, if we have to explain it, it isn’t funny).

So far we have a twisted spaghetti bowl of a policy mess. Start with labor policies built on an industrial model, then connected with an energy policy built on an addiction to oil, a transportation policy built on gas guzzlers, and an environmental policy built on exploitation of the environment. It just goes on and on. This is enough to get a person seriously depressed. Break out the Everclear – please.

But we can’t stop without making a couple of comments about how this thing links to the environment, and then finally we’ll come back with a radical suggestion. We’re sure you wouldn’t expect anything less.

Let’s start with the utterly ridiculous: your typical business trip by airplane to attend a “must do” meeting. Assume it’s 1,000 miles one way. That’s 2,000 miles round-trip. That plane trip puts about 620 pounds. of carbon in the air – per person! (See *Time Magazine*, February 12, 2007, “Greenhouse Airlines,” page 57.)

Hello America, what’s this all about? Now back to Zuboff’s point. You have heard us rant on and on about Business Community Centers™ (BCC’s for short – see [“Business Community Centers as Third Places,”](#) September, 2005). You know we’re promoting so-called “Third Places” near where you live that you can use to work in occasionally instead of buzzing around all over the place every day. Well, we’ve done some back of the envelope calculations, thanks again to Cooter.

Suppose one Business Community Center™ has 350 members who use the community-based location two days a week (there's the ol' 40% figure again). That translates into about 5600 hours of saved time, \$70,000 in reduced transportation cost, and **700 tons** of CO2 not produced and spewed into the air for that one BCC. Not too shabby an impact. Now start multiplying those numbers by thousands if not millions. By the way, we estimate that there are about 20 million people in the United States who could work that way **today**. Them's some pretty big numbers, Horace (and thanks to some good friends at Sun Microsystems for helping Cooter teach us just how big those numbers are).

So why aren't we (all of us, together) workin' this way big time? How come everything we hear is about high-mileage vehicles so we can continue drivin' as much as we do now? Why isn't there at least some small voice asking us, all the time, "Is this trip really necessary?"

In Our Humble Opinion (there we are again), a lot of fat cats would lose their shirts if we did that. Heaven help us if we actually think about what we do and where we do it. What was the last quarterly profit number for Exxon? **\$9.92 Billion** dollars!! That's right, sweetheart, \$9.92 Billion, with a big-butt "B." And that doesn't count automobile industry profits, state departments of transportation budgets, Iowa corn farmers' income, and God knows what else.

Now, do you think that maybe, just maybe, there could be something nefarious going on here? Naw, not here! What do you think this country is, some sort of Russia? Like maybe, just maybe, most politicians are sort of, somehow, really promoting the interests of big biz, big oil, big whatever over the sustainability of the planet? No, that couldn't be, that's not the American way – or is it?

Ponder on that dear hearts and we'll be back next month with some more "outrageous" (but important) ideas that we feel passionately about. Cards and flowers for poor ol' Buford would be appreciated.

Please direct your comments to comments@thefutureofwork.net. We'd love to publish your reactions and suggestions. And thanks for listening.

RETURN TO HEADLINES

This issue of *Future of Work Agenda* was produced by Jim Ware and Charlie Grantham of the Work Design Collaborative, LLC.

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