



What's Next: Life-work Technology



Introduction

Everything is different now. The events of 2020 and 2021 impacted every possible area of our businesses, our cultures, our communities. A global pandemic. Widespread lockdowns. Social upheaval. A renewed emphasis on mental health and wellbeing. A massive, overnight shift to remote work — then the tough questions of when, how, and even why to return to the office. These unprecedented circumstances have accelerated a fundamental shift in the way we think about our lives both at work and at home.

Organizations have universally been forced to consider their vulnerabilities and realize their potential to adapt in the face of new threats and unexpected opportunities. These crises impacted each industry in unique and uneven ways, with businesses variously finding themselves in growth, in retraction, disrupted, or pivoting to new business models. In 2020, the grocery sector grew 10% globally as families relied more on dining at home,¹ while the hotel industry experienced its worst year on record.²

For any employer, its mode of business will dramatically impact hiring, scheduling, retention, training, benefits, succession, and more. But no matter the specifics of any individual organization, these unexpected states shine a spotlight on the importance of people — the human element required to flourish in moments of opportunity or weather the storm in times of downturn. People, more than ever, determine success when tackling strategic goals such as driving growth, increasing revenues, and improving profitability.

Meanwhile, employees have closely watched how their employers have reacted to these unprecedented events, and have looked inward to consider their personal values and loyalties, often asking themselves if it might be time for a change (a phenomenon popularly dubbed “The Great Resignation”³ by the media). The organizations that carefully considered the wants and needs of their people, communicated openly and honestly, and consistently did the right thing rather than the easy thing are the ones realizing much greater loyalty in the aftermath. Those that treated their people with indifference, or as simple commodities, are now experiencing a struggle to attract talent despite the chance to move back into a hiring phase.

Employees know they deserve to feel rewarded, valued, and empowered, and are emphasizing more than ever the psychological contract of mutual trust and understanding that must exist with their employers. Each side must seek to honestly consider and accommodate the needs of the other if either is to meet its goals. Faced with this “New Future of Work,” organizations must adapt or risk failure, regardless of their current level of success.

As employers seek to evolve, core areas of — business, like HR, payroll, and operations — will look to the tools and technologies best equipped to help them do it. But before we examine the solutions that empower organizations to face these challenges, let’s take a look at the profound and accelerating trends that have led to this point.

**Employees know they deserve to feel
rewarded, valued, and empowered.**

From work-life balance to Life-work Journey

Do we “live to work” or “work to live”? While a lucky few might get up in the morning absolutely ecstatic about every aspect of their jobs and passionately excited to get back to work, most employees would likely say they “work to live” — earning a wage to meet their needs and secure a comfortable lifestyle. This basic idea, that work doesn’t supersede all other aspects of life but rather enables them, eventually led to the notion of “work-life balance.” This concept became the goal of many workplace initiatives, tech solutions, and even therapeutic exercises for employees. These attempts all took something for granted: that with enough attention and effort, every employee could effectively balance the two halves in a more-or-less equal arrangement, like weights on a scale. This assumption, that there was an equation to be ultimately solved so people could get in balance and stay that way, has resulted in countless misfires in corporate policies and wasted resources over the decades.

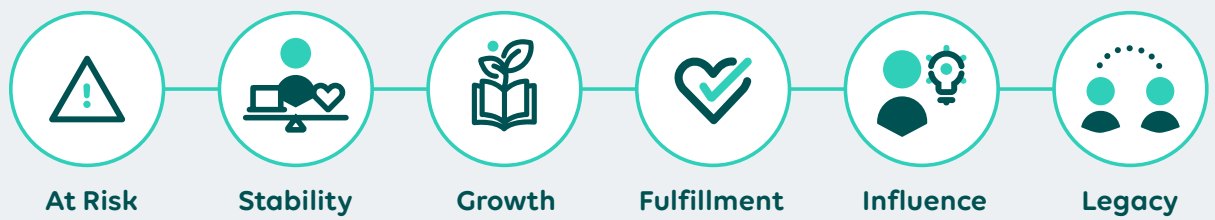
This does not mean that work-life balance is a bad idea in theory or that no one should attempt to seek balance in their daily activities. Instead, the phrase is out of touch with modern reality and the real resources and accommodations employees require to protect their wellbeing while remaining productive. Consider how the term was constructed, with work in the first position, implying that work comes first and we must find our own ways to minimize its impact on our personal lives (and of course, prevent those lives from ever encroaching on our jobs).

In reality, achieving the idealized state implied by the term is largely impossible, and the best possible arrangement for most workers is much more complex. The actual situation for any given employee at any given point in time can vary wildly, and the needs that employers meet for their people can never be one-size-fits-all. Rather than implementing a blanket initiative to provide work-life balance, employers must be flexible and adaptable enough to understand and support employees based on the specific conditions of their individual lives. But businesses won’t be making this effort out of the goodness of their hearts — it represents a true competitive advantage. Better engagement. Boosted productivity. Higher rates of retention. Most importantly, those organizations that fail to prioritize the needs of their people in this manner will struggle to keep their top performers now and attract the talent they need in the future. Nearly 50% of employees might leave their jobs if their employers do not provide flexible work options post-pandemic.⁴

At UKG, we have developed a framework for understanding the reality faced by employees and organizations throughout the modern, global workforce. We call this the “Life-work Journey.” It represents six distinct phases of the employee lifecycle, and five phases of business operations, each bringing with it a unique set of challenges, desires, and needs for employers to address. The support or resources one needs to be successful in life and work at any given stage will be dramatically different.

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The Life-work Journey for the individual



At Risk: An employee who is At Risk sees their job as the primary force enabling them to meet basic needs and avoid danger. To someone in this stage, work might simply mean access to food, shelter, and clothing, and their primary motivator is likely the fear of job loss or losing financial security.

Stability: Those in this stage no longer see work as a means to basic survival and security, but rather a source of Stability in their lives and the pathway to a stable, comfortable lifestyle. These employees are driven by a desire to build capital and express themselves more freely while planning for future life events.

Growth: Employees in the Growth stage have begun to see their jobs as part of a career and are willing to take risks in order to progress. These employees are interested in acquiring knowledge and responsibility, and may be cultivating an interest in leadership. Strong motivators are increased financial reward and recognition.

Fulfillment: This stage signifies that an employee has achieved a degree of personal success and views their work as a source of Fulfillment in life. This satisfaction with regard to their career ambitions means they are now motivated primarily by earning the respect of colleagues and managers.

Influence: Following closely from Fulfillment, someone in the Influence stage is adept at sharing knowledge, and self-assured enough to lead others by example. Their ability to successfully Influence others and evoke change becomes a motivator; these employees seek a “seat at the table”.

Legacy: The final stage of the Life-work Journey sees an employee desiring to contribute to the organization at large as well as the world around them. They have begun to consider what their impact will be after retirement and think about potential successors; their main motivation is leaving things better than they were.

The Life-work Journey for the organization



Growth: Businesses in the Growth stage can be new to the market, growing as a result of a merger or acquisition, expanding to new territories, or simply increasing naturally in size and scope. These organizations are likely hiring a wide variety of new employees and seeking to entice top talent.

Retraction: A Retraction phase means that an organization is not seeking Growth and may be actively scaling back. The catalyst for this stage may be planned, such as limiting budgets for a year in preparation for future endeavours, or unplanned as a result of external market forces.

New Business Models: Organizations seek New Business Models in order to expand their client base, adapt proactively to evolving markets, or respond to unexpected threats. Many organizations that attempted to “pivot” in light of recent global events were in this stage.

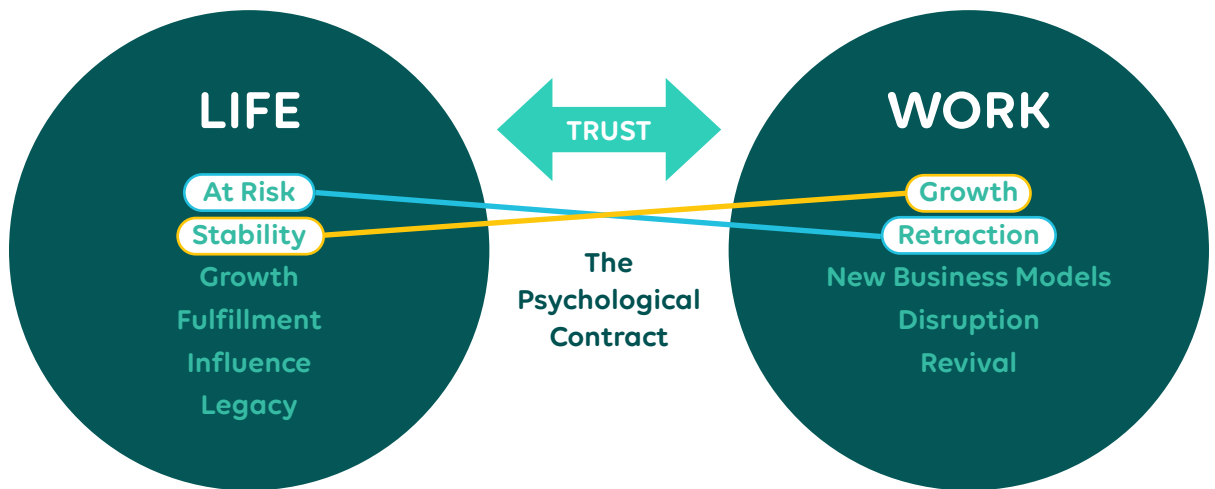
Disruption: Experiencing Disruption simply means the expectations and plans of a business have been interrupted unexpectedly. Unlike the other stages, Disruption is never planned — common sources include rising competitors, changes to company leadership, and market shifts that render old approaches obsolete.

Revival: After an economic downturn, a period of planned Retraction, the success of a New Business Model, or recovering from Disruption, organizations may enter a Revival. This recovery-oriented stage is distinct from traditional Growth, but may set the stage for future success.

A couple of crucial notes about this framework:

- **The Life-work Journey is not a linear progression from left to right.** Most people will travel back and forth between stages at various points over the course of a career, whether planned or unplanned. For example, an unexpected emergency might see someone thrust from a later stage back to At Risk, suddenly forced to fixate on basic financial security. Likewise, advancing to a later stage is not always positive. An employee might rocket into a management role and find themselves in the Influence phase too early, lacking the experience to effectively empathize with their team and yearning to return to a sense of Stability. Finally, people may share characteristics of multiple stages at once towards what is going on in their organization or the world at large.
- **The stages experienced by organizations as a whole will also have a profound impact on the conditions experienced by individuals. For example:**
 - Employees of a business that is going through Retraction may find their Stability in question and trend back toward At Risk
 - An organization pivoting to New Business Models may see employees reevaluating what Fulfillment means to them
 - Organizations experiencing a Revival are likely to have many employees considering Growth alongside the organization’s new-found success

Life-Work Journey



Because of this inevitable connection between the two sides, a full understanding of the Life-work Journey requires employers to embrace the psychological contract of mutual trust. Organizations must know their employees will provide honest, unfiltered feedback, while individuals need to believe their employers will do the right thing.

The task for employers, then, is to first understand their overall position in the market, then determine which stage a given employee inhabits, honestly engage with their needs, and nurture them along the journey without pushing them to grow before they are ready. If you think that sounds like a tall order, you'd be right. But even beyond the complexity, many business leaders wonder if this sort of investment in their people is worthwhile. Putting aside the future competitive advantage described above, employers may worry about immediate concerns such as their ability to control their budgets while meeting customer demand. So how can organizations guide their people along the Life-work Journey in an effective and profitable way?

This is where the latest technologies, tailored specifically to help employers address the complexities of the journey, can help.

The task for employers is to nurture employees in each stage of the journey without pushing them to grow too soon.

The intersection of people and work systems

The biggest obstacle to effectively guiding employees along the Life-work Journey is simply outdated software and related technologies for HR, payroll, time tracking, recruiting, reporting, and other common-yet-critical workplace processes. The problems can stem from siloed systems that don't talk to one another or efficiently share information, from too many manual, transactional functions, from operating only reactively rather than proactively, from treating people as a resource rather than as individuals, or any combination of the above. Even many products branded as "experience platforms" are still approaching organizations with the lone goal of improving productivity, rather than serving the actual needs of the workforce.

Leading businesses are looking to tools and technologies that are designed with people at the center, truly serving them and improving their lives rather than simply managing transactions and processes. This is the first step towards accommodating the Life-work Journey. Consider unified solutions that help your organization develop resilience, fluidity, and adaptability in the wake of new workforce expectations around the globe.

At UKG, we believe the best of these solutions represent an entirely new category. We call it Life-work Technology™. This approach differs from other forms of HR, payroll, and workforce management systems by combining people systems with work systems, harnessing the most powerful aspects of each. Let's examine the role of each of these vital components.

The notion of "work-life balance" is outdated.
It's not life vs. work.
It's all life.



People systems

People systems inspire your workforce and ensure that your organization continuously understands and supports your people. These are the systems that underscore the importance of life in “life-work.”

Effective people systems can help your business:

- **Connect people to purpose** — just as they do at home, employees need to know the purpose and value of their contributions to derive meaning and satisfaction
- **Amplify human contribution** — employees at every level can feel that their individual efforts make a difference and impact the strategic goals of the organization
- **Understand human signals** — get a true understanding of employee needs and wants no matter where they are on the Life-work Journey
- **Ethically promote belonging and wellbeing** — your solutions can play an active role in making sure employees feel that they can bring their whole selves to work, while supporting their physical and mental health at every step

If these factors do not seem like things that technology has traditionally helped with at your organization, then you have tapped into exactly the problem we’re introducing Life-work Tech to solve.

Work systems

Work systems help your business thrive. They must be designed purposefully and include intelligence to reduce friction at work and scale human impact.

Effective work systems can:

- **Increase effectiveness and productivity** — take advantage of artificial intelligence (AI) for better reporting and decision support, while streamlining processes and removing manual ones wherever possible
- **Augment capability and security** — give your people the right tools for the job no matter where they are on the Life-work Journey, and enable your entire workforce to do more with less
- **Automate bias interruptions** — draw upon rich workforce data to cut off instances of unconscious bias before they can negatively impact operations and reputations
- **Teamwork optimization** — remove obstacles to collaboration while ensuring recognition can be easily given when deserved

These systems are crucial, but they are also the beginning and end of many platforms for HR, payroll, and workforce management. Combining them with thoughtfully designed, people-sensitive capabilities is what sets Life-work Tech apart.

Fully embracing the Life-work Journey for your workforce is one of the best investments you can make right now to future-proof your organization. This is a significant endeavor that requires clear intention and the will to make it happen, along with the right technologies to support employee needs as you progress along the path. Notably, one cannot be done without the other. All the good intent in the world will be hamstrung by outdated systems that see employees as numbers first, while your progress can easily be hindered if your organization simply puts the tech in place without the will to use it proactively.

Example scenarios: Life-work Tech in practice

To illustrate the stark differences that businesses can experience based on whether or not they've embraced this model, let's take a look at two organizations in common scenarios. In both cases, imagine yourself in the shoes of a retail store manager responsible for a team of direct reports. Organization A has not yet taken steps to embrace the Life-work Journey, with reactive, process-driven behaviors and a transactional people management platform. Organization B is taking advantage of Life-work Technology and is much more adaptive as a result, with proactive, outcome-driven behaviors and the ability to support employee needs and optimize processes. We'll examine the general challenges of each organization, and walk through a potentially stressful week in the life of the manager to compare their respective mastery of the Life-work Journey.

Organization A

Behaviors: reactive, process-driven
Systems: transactional-process platform

Challenges

- Customer demand is fluctuating and difficult to predict
- Budgeted labor hours are often cut by central operations and regional managers
- Revenue targets are increasing
- The organization has high levels of staff turnover and absenteeism
- The organization is receiving poor reviews on employer feedback websites from current and previous employees
- As a manager, too much of your time seems to be spent on administrative tasks, with too little time spent with colleagues and customers

Typical Week

- You submit your expected sales for the week based on previous experiences and last week's numbers
- After spending several hours putting together the schedule for the week, you share a spreadsheet with your team via text and pin a paper copy to the noticeboard
 - The schedule is based on employee contracts and labor budget, but does not take other data or trends into account
 - The first shift begins just two days after the schedule is finalized
- On day one of the new schedule, an employee calls in sick, leaving a gap
 - You spring into action, pick up the phone and start texting and calling people to fill the open shift
 - At the same time, you make a mental note to add the sick time to the employee's timecard later in the week
 - The employee you finally manage to coax into covering the shift is unhappy, working at a subpar time for their typical schedule
- In the middle of the week, one of your employees gets your attention and mentions that there is an issue they believe may affect their career development
 - You fully intend to hear them out, but there is a customer service problem that requires immediate attention
 - Unsure of the organizational policies regarding the issue, you instruct the employee to open a case with corporate HR
 - With no immediate response or recourse to formally submit the employee's request into their employee record, the issue is forgotten, and the employee becomes disengaged
- The end of the week comes, and amid the chaos of readjusting the schedule, you forget to append the sick time to the employee's timecard.
 - The error goes unnoticed until after payroll is processed, requiring a manual correction

Organization B

Behaviors: Adaptive, proactive, outcome-driven
Systems: Life-work Technology

Challenges

- Fluctuating customer demand is seen in advance in your demand forecast data
- Budgeted labor hours are occasionally still reduced, but central operations can see the correlation between budget and increased revenue
- Revenue targets are increasing, but they exist alongside new approaches and initiatives
- Staff turnover and absenteeism rates are below industry norm, but the organization still aims to improve its ability to attract new, high-quality talent

Typical Week

- Employees receive a reminder on their mobile app to update their shift availability and work preferences, along with notification of training courses available to enable qualification for other shifts
- You receive notification that the customer demand forecast has been run and is ready for review; based on previous experience, you know the automatically generated, AI-powered forecast will be accurate
- The system has also automatically generated fair and equitable work schedules for colleagues that consider employee preferences, customer demand forecast, and labor budget hours available
 - Manager workload is drastically reduced compared to Organization A, allowing more time to connect with staff and customers
- Employees working their preferred shifts have reduced absence rates, but if an employee has to call in sick, your technology has your back:
 - The absence is automatically added to the system and alternative qualified employees are automatically notified via their mobile app of the now open shift
 - The replacement employee can claim the shift directly and managers are notified of the work being covered
- An employee who desires to raise a career development issue can simply ask the system in natural language for information on what resources and opportunities may exist, and add this as a note on their personal record to discuss with you
 - Even if you don't have the time to address it immediately, it remains in the system permanently and can be discussed at your next touch-base meeting — it won't go forgotten
- Employees are regularly reminded and encouraged to raise issues, share ideas, and attest to their wellbeing through one-on-one check-ins and by completing always-on anonymous aggregate pulse surveys
 - These results are continuously available to stakeholders to encourage proactive steps that can make life better on and off the job

Over the course of just one week, you can see the dramatic differences and positive impacts experienced by an organization that embraces Life-work Technology. And this is just the beginning. This model offers the best possible chance for business leaders in every industry across the world to truly future-proof their organizations, by becoming more resilient, adaptive, and life-aware than ever before.

Employers can proactively identify areas of capacity need, and address potential problems before they ever arise. Rather than casting a wide net out into the gig economy, employers might create a branded internal gig marketplace for talented employees to leverage their skills and further their careers with projects outside their typical roles. In the current economic climate, even nurturing relationships with furloughed employees can be an important part of the talent pipeline.

No matter how workplace norms continue to evolve or what unexpected disruptions await, Life-work Tech has your back for the long haul.

Life-work Technology at UKG

Just as UKG was the first vendor to offer HR management in the cloud, we are leading the charge with Life-work Technology. We believe passionately that the future of work — despite incredible new technologies for automation like AI — will be a more human one, and those organizations that see this trend early and adapt quickly are those most poised for success. Life-work Technology spans our entire product suite, helping employers guide their people along the Life-work Journey, re-emphasizing organizational health and productivity, and strengthening workforce resilience and fluidity.

UKG intentionally seeks to shape the future of work because of the unique value and insight we bring to the market: a deeply human understanding of operations, people, and the systems that support them and inspire their best work. We believe that when people feel valued, they're empowered to tap into their unique talents. This is not only for their own good, but the good of entire organizations and communities as well. This belief informs the design of every one of our solutions.

Recognizing that life and work are intertwined, Life-work Technology delivers on UKG's promise by connecting people and technology in the ways that truly help employers guide and support every individual employee along their personal Life-work Journey. Our approach helps people excel by uncovering what inspires them to do their best work, bringing a deep understanding of people and their work histories, aspirations, and goals together with holistic data about their work patterns, efficiencies, and behaviors. We believe that information leads to impactful action, and your people and your organization will feel the results. No matter what part of their lives your employees find themselves in, taking advantage of UKG solutions to address their needs can be a substantial step towards trust.

Our goal is to continue innovating and delivering best-in-class HR, payroll, and workforce management in an unmatched suite of cloud solutions, backed by people who truly care about yours. Life-work Tech can be experienced across a wide variety of business operations, from ensuring your people are paid correctly, on time, every time, to automation of even complex HR service processes. Transform annual performance reviews into a people-centric source of continuous feedback. With advanced sentiment analysis, you can even go far beyond traditional engagement surveys and empower employees to describe how they feel in their own words — and get clear, actionable results. Discover powerful, strategic solutions that solve the unique challenges of your specific industry.



Conclusion

The implications of Life-work Technology are simple. In the wake of The Great Resignation, organizations that are people-focused, life-aware, adaptable, and resilient will lead the race to become employers of choice. Ignoring the realities of the Life-work Journey will only lead to an exodus of employees seeking the chance to be heard and supported. By embracing the right solutions now, businesses around the globe can be confident in their ability to attract and retain the talent they need, no matter how uncertain the future.

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