The reality of the ongoing global pandemic has reminded Europe of its reliance on high-capacity and low latency networks as a means to maintain a sense of normalcy in our lives.

With everyone spending a great deal of time working from home, with an increased dependence on connectivity, the nature of the workplace is changing.

This event report is published alongside Liberty Global’s new study entitled ‘The Future of Work’ and examines Europe’s next steps in terms of the key trends on the horizon when it comes to work, workforce and workplace, with an increased dependence on next-generational telecommunications networks.
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The Future of Work is Here: Are leaders packing up all they know to lead with new skills in an unprecedented way forward?
EU Commission vies to protect future for platform workers

By Samuel Stolton | EURACTIV.com

The European Commission will attempt to protect the future of platform workers in the EU by setting minimum standards and potentially enforcing pension entitlements and insurance obligations.

Future legislation on improving the working conditions of platform workers is set to be put forward by the EU executive later this year. Meanwhile, a public consultation has been launched on the plans as a means to identify the means by which platform workers can be afforded more labour rights in the upcoming rules.

Speaking at an online event on Wednesday (4 March), the Commission’s Joost Korte, director general for employment, social affairs and inclusion, said that the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the need to protect platform workers as part of new EU rules.

“In times of COVID it is important that we do not create more precarious jobs,” Korte told participants at the event. From the Commission’s perspective, it is essential that platform workers are granted “proper insurance and access to a pension entitlement [and] all the normal things that we expect from the labour market in the European Union,” he said.

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The EU executive is also reflecting on “algorithm management” within platform economy work. “When you are asked to do a job by a computer, what does this mean for the relationship between the employer and the employee?” he asked, noting that this question was something that the Commission would seek to address in the upcoming legislation.

**TRANSITION TO AGILE ORGANISATIONS**

The remarks came as part of an event marking the launch of telecommunications company Liberty Global’s Future of Work Report, produced by Deloitte, which highlighted how the pandemic has revolutionised the nature of work and employment.

The study highlights how the mass transition to remote working calls for a new environment of trust between employer and employee, the importance of digital upskilling, and more collaborative work environments as distributed working methods become the norm.

The importance of digital upskilling has been on the minds of bureaucrats in Brussels for some time. Last year, the Commission published their revised European Skills Agenda, which highlighted the need for ensuring that 70% of the EU adult population has basic digital skills.

For its part, Liberty Global believes the transition to “agile organisation structures” that many companies have had to go through during the pandemic, can lead to many benefits for the future of employment.

“Empowered employees, multidisciplinary teams, and speed: these are all key ingredients for this agile model,” said Amy Blair, chief people officer at Liberty Global, adding that the transition to this new culture had to happen “in a matter of weeks” owning to the coronavirus restrictions.

Moreover, this new culture of working will lead to new needs in terms of the workforce of the future, Blair says.

“When you talk about a world where you have a blend of virtual and personal interactions, it’s a completely different skillset. And empowerment and trust, are foundational here,” she said.

“Leaders will have to allow their teams to work more autonomously and in different locations. And managers are going to have to rely on human skills such as empathy, listening, awareness, foresight, adaptability, resilience, and patience.”

For Adam Spearing, chief technology officer at Salesforce, autonomy is an important ingredient for the future of work, but that needs to be accompanied by an increased reliance on communications at all levels within an organisation.

“Ambiguity, once that starts to creep in, you’ll find it very difficult to keep that motivation and efficiency in working from home,” he said. “The task of the modern leader is to have empathy and understanding for individuals’ situation, but being really clear on what you actually are expecting of that group.”

Wednesday’s event took place ahead of a presentation by the Commission of its action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, due to be published on Thursday (5 March).

As part of new benchmarks to be included in the plans, the Commission will put forward a target of having 78% of the EU population in employment by 2030, according to President von der Leyen, who participated in a virtual conference on employment promoted by the European People’s Party.
With the launch of the new Deloitte report ‘The Future of Work is Here’, John Porter, CEO of Telenet, gives his views on how he and the company are looking at the future of work, especially under the impact of the pandemic.

**Under the pandemic, the way labour is organised and conducted has changed considerably. Where have you noticed the most significant impacts?**

I think one thing that the COVID pandemic period has really laid out there is what you have just described. The fact of the matter is that this situation has accelerated our need to have exceptional infrastructure and to be able to develop applications that can serve the population much better than we have in the past. So, clearly, the classical sort of workforce, if you will, where there is technology, there is business, there is strategy, and then there is everybody working in silos — in other words, the organizational hierarchy under which all the good ideas come from the corner office and then are pushed down into the factory — those days are truly gone. We need to have IP coming out from a lot of different places, new places. Most importantly, we need the technology people to move closer to business and society and we need business and society to move closer to technology. This is causing a number of things. One is to be much more intimate with our customers, to have a much better understanding of their use of data, in a lot of smarter ways. We also need to have people who know how to do that. Another thing we need to do is less offshoring. Companies can’t just throw data governance and data strategies over the transom to India (or even nearshoring in Eastern Europe) — we need to have the capital capabilities right here. So, we really do

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more intense. I wouldn’t say that our needs are changing, as our values are changing. Our purpose becoming the business challenge. And so, our technology but also understand customers think, who understand who are shaped, who can know how to graduate school — we need people studying software engineering in we can and should be developing talent in many different places. We bring technology people and business people together around specific business challenges. This means that there is no more handing off the marketing department’s goals down to the factory. Everybody, from day one, is hands on – we believe we can do better for our customers here. And I think secondarily, it is also about running our businesses with more purpose and more focus on people. Whether it is our customers and the digital gap that they are experiencing, or our non-customers, it is our social contract. And, in the same way as Europe has a very high level of social contract between government and society, I think we also need to have that same kind of social contract between business and society. I believe we have an obligation, because we are experts in digital infrastructure and the way people use it, we need to be part of the solution when it comes to bridging the digital gap. But also, it serves us as well as a business, because we can and should be developing talent in many different places. We need people who are not necessarily studying software engineering in graduate school — we need people who are shaped, who can know how customers think, who understand the limits and the opportunity of technology but also understand the business challenge. And so, our needs are changing, as our values are changing. Our purpose becoming more intense. I wouldn’t say that our purpose is changing necessarily, but I think we have a pretty big role to play as we scale up our business, as we think about the future of our business. People are using our product, from the time they wake up till the time they go to sleep — almost no other business has that kind of engagement level. If we are going to be everywhere where our clients are, and our customers are, then we need to be with strong purpose and with strong products that are delivering on a number of fronts. This cannot just be a transactional relationship. It cannot simply be about giving our customers 100 megabits of bandwidth for 40 euros – it has to be a much deeper, a much more intimate relationship with our customers, and society at large.

**How has Telenet itself adjusted to the new reality?**

As a company, we have completely reorganized around a much more agile operating model, where tribes and squads act much more independently. We bring technology people and business people together around specific business challenges. This means that there is no more handing off the marketing department’s goals down to the factory. Everybody, from day one, is hands on – we believe we can do better for our customers here. And I think secondarily, it is also about running our businesses with more purpose and more focus on people. Whether it is our customers and the digital gap that they are experiencing, or our non-customers, it is our social contract. And, in the same way as Europe has a very high level of social contract between government and society, I think we also need to have that same kind of social contract between business and society. I believe we have an obligation, because we are experts in digital infrastructure and the way people use it, we need to be part of the solution when it comes to bridging the digital gap. But also, it serves us as well as a business, because we can and should be developing talent in many different places. We need people who are not necessarily studying software engineering in graduate school — we need people who are shaped, who can know how customers think, who understand the limits and the opportunity of technology but also understand the business challenge. And so, our needs are changing, as our values are changing. Our purpose becoming more intense. I wouldn’t say that our purpose is changing necessarily, but I think we have a pretty big role to play as we scale up our business, as we think about the future of our business. People are using our product, from the time they wake up till the time they go to sleep — almost no other business has that kind of engagement level. If we are going to be everywhere where our clients are, and our customers are, then we need to be with strong purpose and with strong products that are delivering on a number of fronts. This cannot just be a transactional relationship. It cannot simply be about giving our customers 100 megabits of bandwidth for 40 euros – it has to be a much deeper, a much more intimate relationship with our customers, and society at large.

**How has the traditional concept of the ‘office’ changed and how much more of a dependence does this place on high-quality network connectivity?**

The office does not represent to place to go, where you plunk yourself in front of a screen and do a bunch of work. We will have to work backwards from there – it is clearly a collaborative space where people can mingle, exchange ideas and brainstorm. It is a place where, as a CEO, I look to nurture that culture, I look to reinforce that purpose, help people understand how the strategy works — that’s very hard to do on a one-to-one or even one-to-many basis. I was just talking to somebody today about it, and even just the ability to kind of dump your bucket with your colleagues, that is important — nobody will set up a Zoom call for that, to simply complain for five minutes. It is those kinds of things that can happen and need to happen. We are organized around collaborative work; the agile operating model is organized around that. It is about standing up, sharing a story – it is about everybody contributing. It can be done virtually, it is being done, but it is a bit soul-destroying after a while, so it is really about creating a space. We have already changed our space, nobody has dedicated workspaces anymore, there aren’t any places where you can just go in, sit down and plunk yourself in front of a screen. And we have also opened up, from a mobility standpoint — having a central location is not that constructive anymore. We will take advantage of shared workspaces in regional areas of Belgium, so people don’t have to have 90-minute commutes one way, which many people do. I think it has really just accelerated everybody’s thinking and I think most importantly for people like myself who have been in business for 40 years, who are a little more levered to the old world. It has really reinforced the values of trust and our shared sense of purpose. I believe that trust and generosity were the real benefactors of the COVID period. Because I do not feel like I need to put a whole lot of rules in place to get my people to want to do the best possible job they can do. I know, and I have seen it, that no matter what they are going to do every day, whether they are doing it in our office or doing at home or they are doing it at Starbucks, I am not really that fussed about it. The colleagues will hold each other accountable, that is for sure. I probably would have got there eventually but it that process has now been accelerated. I do not believe that people, if you hire well of course, will take advantage of a more trusting and fluid way of working.
The Future of Work is Here: Are leaders packing up all they know to lead with new skills in an unprecedented way forward?

By Manuel Kohnstamm | Liberty Global

Over the years, we’ve seen exciting, new and innovative trends in leadership modernize the way companies run and grow their people. We’ve seen linear corporate ladders shift to adaptive corporate lattice models. We’ve seen CEOs trade corner offices for hot desks. And “EQ” has long replaced “IQ” as the core skill we look for in our managers.

Today we stand on the precipice of our new future ways of working. New norms, priorities, values and practices. Yet unlike the paced evolution enjoyed in the past, corporate leaders are rapidly leaning on unprecedented agility and honing skills across unproven theses like never before.

The once corporate ladder is now akin to climbing a mountain, calling for improvisation, motivation and the up-and reskilling of employees. The new corner office is any room that has the best WiFi connection, good lighting for Zoom calls, and mutes the noise of dogs and household activity. And EQ is making way for “CQ”, or

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Cultural Intelligence, following a year of purpose-driven awakenings and a world holding itself accountable to be and do better.

You could say “The Future of Work is Here” already, and that inspired Liberty Global to commission a new report by Deloitte, set to launch on March 3rd. This report examines how the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns fast-tracked a number of work trends that not only have demanded seemingly immediate responses by leaders and organizations but ultimately, may be here to stay.

Within the first weeks of remote working, companies were loosening bureaucracy, flattening hierarchies, and enabling faster decision-making to preserve productivity and keep major agendas intact. Distributed working has continued to transform our interactions, increase flexibility and independent work, and shift the traditional emphasis from inputs to outcomes.

But even amidst the promise of vaccines, leaders are studying the impacts carefully as indications show that distributed working habits have embedded in our routines and expectations. In one example, Deloitte reports that 77% of people surveyed in the financial sector expect to regularly work remotely after the pandemic.

As CEOs announce their future working and return-to-office plans, we can expect most will include a remote component – if solely to retain and attract talent, now validated in their focus on commuting time, flexibility and work-life balance. This in turn has prompted significant reflection on how to manage a highly distributed workforce, ensuring genuine connections based on increased transparency and greater trust.

The report also points to an essential need to create a shared sense of purpose among employees. For senior executives, with established relationships and priorities, it’s easier to work and execute remotely. But for juniors and new joiners, they don’t just miss the social interaction that’s harder to develop on-screen, they miss the shared cultural cues and rituals that make belonging palpable.

For these reasons, the role of the office will likely reshape to support the needed moments of collaboration, connection, co-creation and social engagement that cannot be replicated remotely. More than ever before we realize the value of informal social contacts as an essential element of professional growth.

A distributed workforce will enable leaders to build broader and more diverse talent pools. Both companies and individuals see new opportunities to match jobs that previously would be unattainable. At the same time, they are called again to consider how these workforces sustain engagement and effectiveness, working through cultural and language differences, and reskilling employees to foster both internal mobility and value for the business.

In fact, leaders are likely to index highly on adaptability as a key attribute when attracting new talent. In Deloitte’s Human Capital 2021 trend report, 72% of executives cited reskilling as important to overcome future disruptions. Together with digital skills, the willingness to learn and interchange roles may well become the future formula for workforces to prepare for transformation and disruption.

Today’s leaders have faced the most profound crisis of our generation – one that will no doubt serve to redefine and humanize the new priorities of leadership and organizations.

I, for one, am excited for a future of work that emphasizes trust, culture, well-being, diversity and inclusion – that brings being a part of “something bigger, something meaningful” to our people – no matter where we happen to sit.
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From London to...
the Amsterdam
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Contact us
Teresa DOMINGUEZ
EU Affairs Senior Manager
teresa.dominguez@euractiv.com
tel. +32 (0) 47 601 78 26

For information on EURACTIV Event Reports...

Contact us
Teresa DOMINGUEZ
EU Affairs Senior Manager
teresa.dominguez@euractiv.com
tel. +32 (0) 47 601 78 26