



Fifth generation work

A new dimension

The fifth generation of work has arrived, and it's not leaving any time soon, say Frances and Max Harré. They outline the characteristics of 5G careers and explore the implications for how we work today.

An exciting world is opening for those willing to step into it and take their working lives to a new level of adventure, purpose, challenge and meaning—we call it the fifth generation of work and careers. It's the latest era in the long history of work—the 5G era for short. The preceding four generations of work span from the subsistence-based living that has dominated most of human history (and still exists today—even in highly developed economies), through to the digital-industrial era of the 21st Century knowledge worker.

But you won't find a 5G classification in any recruiter's database of positions or on job search sites. 5G work is very particular

and personal to you. It is a matter of negotiation between your current situation and your real future aspirations. The detail of what this takes is considerable and is the subject of our new book *Work Passion Power: strategies for a working life you will love* (www.workpassionpower.co.nz). But here we can at least outline some core ideas, indicate why the 5G era is so important and offer you a quick self-audit of your current situation.

WHAT DOES A 5G CAREER LOOK LIKE?

It is work characterised by a range of much sought-after qualities, none of which alone is either new or unique to this era, but the hugely increased possibility of these qualities coming together comprehensively in our working lives is indeed newsworthy. Amongst the outcomes from consciously moving towards 5G work is massively improved wellbeing. This is the heart of the 5G story.

It is convenient to look at characteristics of 5G work under five broad headings. (One could even call them the '5 Goods of work'—the best that work can be.) While our focus here is on employees, the principles apply whether your perspective is as an employee, a manager, business owner or start-up.

The message is simple and applies to you: the fifth generation of work has arrived, it is not leaving any time soon, it's deeply challenging, and it is changing how we work, work places and business models—for the good. Of course, there are many ways of slicing the cake of what makes for engaging work and great careers, but these five characteristics of fifth generation careers capture some of the core elements and they have direct practical implications for how we work today.

PURSUING A FIFTH-GENERATION CAREER

Work/life harmony. Terms like 'integration' and 'harmony' better describe the interaction between your work-related activities and your family/personal/community responsibilities. The industrial-age struggle for work/life balance is gone and instead there is a sense of cooperation, mutuality of support and collaboration between all the different domains of activity across your life: family, work, community, society.

Snippet: Melanie carefully reviewed the relationship between her career choices and her family aspirations. Over a period of a year she moved from a 2.5-hour daily commute to a corporate law position in London that had her largely absent from the lives of her three children, to a mix of roles in New Zealand (community law, writing and facilitation). She said, "I had jumped from university direct to corporate finance, but these issues I'm engaged with now really make me tick."

Takeaway: Using a 'whole of life' framework for career decision making and acting on bigger picture priorities from that context.

Emergent leadership. This refers to the set of skills involved in looking outside the narrow sphere of self or team interest to pursue larger objectives—your employer's as well as your own. It demonstrates the skill of choosing to be responsible for making things move in the right direction. You are interested in the bigger picture and in progressing it because it matters to you as a contribution to the greater good, not because you are specifically paid to do this. It is this that distinguishes emergent leadership: it is the kind that shows up without explicit authority or instruction—it's the evidence of raw curiosity, initiative, commitment, caring and courage. It can be developed whatever your age or stage.

Snippet: A team leader in a manufacturing industry takes on (at his own expense) developing his skills around communication, generating customer delight and effective delegation. As a result, he converts an underperforming contractor into a star performer, reenergises his own career and accepts a promotion.

Takeaway: Taking initiatives motivated by interests and concerns sourced more broadly than from the job description.

Self-management. Your work life displays high integrity in the myriad details of making your work more effective. We are talking about the kind of integrity a well-designed and constructed building has, not just the moral sense of integrity. The emphasis is on your trustworthiness in relation to doing and being what you say you will do and who you want to be.

Snippet: A stressed out senior manager about to resign from an insurance company because of the stress and a negative, blaming culture, examines how he could think differently about the dynamics and performance in his team: he takes on an exercise involving active appreciation, finds his working environment immediately improves, and leads his team to a top performance.

Takeaway: Willingness to explore a personal attitudinal change.

Purpose and meaning. As a 5G worker, you work for a reason beyond the salary. You have a high-level purpose, and salary is servant not master. In doing this work you know you are making a contribution that matters to you and others. As a consequence, retirement thinking takes a back seat: why would you stop when this work matters so much and you enjoy doing it? You look for products, services, employers, businesses and organisations that enable and amplify this.

Snippet: A woman with a solid track record in her corporate role in a large company said "I love working with creative teams and exceeding sales targets, but at the end of the day flavoured



SELF-AUDIT: HOW WELL DOES YOUR CURRENT SITUATION ALIGN WITH QUALITIES OF FIFTH GENERATION WORK AND CAREERS?

Indicators of 5G careers	Negative extreme	Locate yourself	Positive extreme
Purpose, contribution	Work is okay but the product/service does not inspire me at all	1 2 3 4 5	Work is making a contribution that inspires, it really matters to me and others
Stress and strife	Work is driving me nuts and destroying my health and vitality	1 2 3 4 5	Work strengthens, fulfils and vitalises me and others
Retirement thinking	Can't wait, don't know if I can stand this another XX years	1 2 3 4 5	Can't imagine stopping. This work is improving life for all and I really enjoy doing it
Money and finances	I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for the salary	1 2 3 4 5	The salary is okay, but I'd do this for free anyway
Control of work and using my best skills	I'm constantly pushed from pillar to post, barely know what day of the week it is	1 2 3 4 5	My focus and rate of work is pretty much up to me. I'm busy but I'm in control: I know what I'm doing
Depth of engagement	Bored silly most of the time. Can't wait for the day to end. Thank God for Facebook!	1 2 3 4 5	I'm deeply engaged at work, I love it, I'm learning lots and developing myself
Being noticed, respected and acknowledged	If I wasn't here no one would care. They'd just wheel in another pair of hands	1 2 3 4 5	I matter here and what I do makes a difference that's noticed and appreciated. I feel like I belong
Billable hours	Billable hours torment me, drive my whole working existence	1 2 3 4 5	Sure, I track and cost my time, but it's a servant not my master, and I am responsible
Competition	This business (industry/sector) is viciously competitive: dog eat dog	1 2 3 4 5	It's good to do well, but winning is the not the driver of anything significant here—collaboration rules
Work/life balance	I wish! Life is work. Family? Haven't the time or energy for one	1 2 3 4 5	Work enhances the rest of my life and is enriched by other things I'm interested in and committed to. And vice versa

SCORE YOURSELF

- 45-50** Looks like you have made it. Congratulations. Where to next?
- 35-44** You have achieved many qualities of a 5G career, but more is definitely possible.
- 25-34** While you are experiencing some of the benefits of 5G work, there is plenty more to explore.
- 15-24** You would be wise to do something to improve your situation right away.
- 10-14** Your current situation may well be putting your wellbeing at risk—urgent action needed.

water is just flavoured water. Really, what's the point of it all?"

Takeaway: It matters what your work is actually producing in the world, as well as how you do it.

Collaborative culture. You understand how all work is collaborative at its core (and yes, this is an open challenge to the industrial-era notion of the autonomous, independent agent). For example, you seek team-based approaches in workplace cultures that are open to Agile methods pursuing continuous improvement (as opposed to just trying to work longer, faster and harder).

Snippet: Before agreeing to fill a vacancy in a team managing a large roading company, a recruiter insists on first interviewing other managers and members of the existing team. Of course, good hiring managers have always tried to get the best 'team fit' with a new hire. But we mention this snippet here as evidence of this concern becoming systematically wired into the whole hiring process.

Takeaway: The importance of team and business culture becoming a standard part of culture-sensitive, system-wide approaches to employment.

If we had to pick just one idea to crystallise what 5G careers and work are about, it would be that the traditional drivers of work and business life (incomes and profits) move from being drivers to being precessional effects—results off to the side of your driving intention (think of how a honey bee, with only the thought of nectar, pollinates the whole orchard). This changes everything.

Personal financial wellbeing, sales results, and other standard indicators of progress—personal and business—also become precessional effects, results arising from pursuing the 'goods' of the 5G work: your real 5G KPIs.

WHY THE 5G ERA IS IMPORTANT

Given the level of alarm about how damaging work can be to wellbeing, anything that can help turn this around is noteworthy. 5G work not only has the capacity to radically improve wellbeing, but also we now understand better what kinds of skills are helpful in moving towards it. We can develop them in ourselves, express them in our businesses and teach them to our people. The skills we are referring to here are the high-level, strategic soft skills needed to move towards 5G work, careers and business models. They are in fact those skills that uniquely define our humanity and, interestingly, they are central to the evolution of work beyond what is being gobbled up by AI (artificial intelligence, cognitive computing, smart tools etc).

Another area of topical interest today, which is closely associated with wellbeing, and which is addressed in the 5G era

of work, is the concern about disengagement at work. The latest Gallup Poll figures (covering New Zealand) are rather shocking: "Just 14 percent are engaged in their job, showing up every day with enthusiasm and the motivation to be highly productive." (*State of the Global Workplace 2017.*) The 5G era promises high engagement, and even beyond engagement, it promises high levels of personal fulfilment, satisfaction and meaning from work.

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

How does your current working situation stack up against what's possible? Take a look at the self-audit on page 30. It's a brief reality check we have extracted from listening to thousands of hours of people talking about what they would really want their work to be like, what they want to get from it, and what they want it to mean for them. Run through it for yourself.

Only you know if your responses to the audit in the table add up to "Time for a serious rethink!" or "Okay, not perfect, but pretty good really". This is not a scientifically standardised test—getting to the heart of these issues is simpler than that, more subtle and what they mean is unique to you.

There are many different skills involved in 5G work, and they include the standard soft skills (people skills, self-management, critical thinking). Fortunately, most of us have a number of them already—so it's not as if you are contemplating a course in quantum physics having failed entry-level mathematics. But in terms of serious progress towards 5G era work, the standout skills are a step further: the high-level, strategic soft skills of being able to form, communicate and honour your own sense of aspiration.

As a start, a useful position to take is to refuse to be so preoccupied with the day-to-day tactics of getting through the to-do list that you have no time to think seriously about the shape of your future work—in its full context.

What it takes in detail is a large topic, but there are at least two clear next steps that can get you started. Firstly, start an ongoing conversation with a friend on this issue. It is very hard to maintain this kind of enquiry alone inside your own head. We call this forming a micro-team—teams can amplify results hugely—and a team of two is still a team. Secondly, use the self-audit on page 30 as an agenda, as a set of talking points. Work through it, set priorities and lay out your next steps. All the best! 

