



# Workforce 2020: When Worlds Collide

By Derek Sidebottom  
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Hyper-speed competitive organizations are about to collide with the gig economy, fusing into an exciting and new agile hybrid. Tomorrow's workforce will be an accelerating series of connections among priorities, people, teams and organizational networks. Firms that leverage and align these fluid talent networks to achieve results will prosper through enviable cost and agility advantages.

This is the near future of Workforce 2020. It's here whether we're ready or not. Old employment contracts are dead. The skills on your squad (team), comprised of contingent, part-time and full-time employees, drive profitability and growth. Even now, upwards of 30% of the US and European workforces respectively report that they engage in some form of independent work.

Technology platforms are just beginning to create large-scale, efficient marketplaces that facilitate direct connections between companies who need skills, and workers able and available to provide that service. Project-based work, shifting organizational priorities in response to competitive pressures, and skilled labor shortages further reinforce 'change' as the only true constant.

**With the fluid team being the true organizational atomic unit of performance, the manager (coach) is the focal point to align and accelerate greatness**

Managing this shifting fluid workforce will challenge leaders like never before. Managers and talent must become high-performing squads, rapidly transitioning between group 'storming, forming and norming' change cycles while ensuring that explicit and tacit knowledge transitions to new - and often temporary - contributors to drive speed and efficiency.

With the fluid team being the true organizational atomic unit of performance, the manager (coach) is the focal point to align and accelerate greatness. Managers need autonomy, empowerment and integrated platforms to support situational awareness and lead their teams most effectively in aligning talent to business outcomes.

Five critical shifts are at play in driving disruption in Workforce 2020: always-on planning and performance; data and insights management; engagement emphasis on achievement; manager as performance driver; and accessibility.

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## **Shift 1: Planning & Performance Is Always On**

The annual planning and performance cycle is dying and no one is mourning. Spending four months planning at the beginning of the year, and then assessing individual performance at the end of the year, was about as effective as checking a map every 12 months and wondering why the team bus ended up on a dead end road with no gas. The future is agile planning, alignment, coaching and feedback.

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In hindsight, the always-on direction setting and feedback shift probably started with agile engineering methodologies as the evolution beyond waterfall development. Always-on/agile from both a planning and measurement perspective is now slowly making its way through the rest of corporate life. Always-on feedback loops, course corrections, status updates, transparent access to the changing plan of record and a new agile mindset are collectively the first shift already underway for Workforce 2020.

## **Shift 2: Data & Insights Management: Turn Down the Noise and Up the Impact**

An avoidable by-product of the always-on revolution is always-on noise. Changing directives from executives, budgeting cycles, annual engagement surveys, quarterly pulse surveys, workforce analytics reports from well-intentioned HR teams, infrequent 360 feedback reports, hallway conversations, ad hoc status reports, customer feedback, emails, relentless Slack updates, texts, individual reviews and 1:1's generate a lot of feedback, dashboards, reporting - and noise. It's challenging as a manager to convert noise into meaningful signals and then develop an effective response plan.

True value in the next decade will come from systems that not only make it easier to register that a performance red light is blinking, but also from smart coaching platforms that analyze patterns and inform users why the red light is blinking and what to do about it. Management of this deluge of information through smart systems, elegant design that masks complex automation, and leveraging artificial intelligence capabilities to assist with pattern recognition are together the next major shift as we move towards Workforce 2020.

## **Shift 3: Engagement Emphasis on Achievement**

Organizations in the last decade launched employee engagement surveys to reduce turnover, retain top performers and flag management/leadership issues. Important stuff. But these efforts had varying degrees of firm impact, as annual engagement surveys suffer the same issues as an annual performance survey - burdensome, transactional and point-in-time - and are siloed from the connected aspects of employee experience.

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Workforce 2020 requires that we remain interested and focused on building achievement cultures. Engagement at all levels in the organization is a powerful strategic advantage, combining the individual's maximum role satisfaction - through clear goals, purpose, feedback, flexibility and learning - with maximum job contribution for the organization. Peer, self and manager 360 feedback provide meaningful perspectives and insight on the connection of engagement and performance to support the goal of optimal job happiness and contribution.

By integrating always-on engagement and performance data with micro-pulse trends and insights, companies (and managers) have a holistic view of what's driving competitiveness in employee performance and squad goal achievement, and the company's success outlook therein.

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### **Shift 4: The Manager as the Performance Driver**

In Workforce 2020's fluid environment, team performance and acceleration tools we build must be relentlessly designed around managers who influence day-to-day decisions and performance, not HR or the executive team. Infrastructure investments will only achieve maximum impact through delivering insights to the furthest endpoints. To drive maximum productivity, managers need near real-time situational awareness to the following:

- What is the status of the live plan of record at strategic AND tactical levels?
- How does one get access to real-time updates from other parts of the organization that are relevant to decisions that need to be made locally?
- How fast are goals being achieved vs. delayed, and how do you manage the cascading impact of perpetual change?
- Who is responsible, accountable, consulted and informed (RACI)? How do you ensure that these stakeholders have complete situational awareness at all times to make optimal decisions?
- Who is doing what is needed well, and how are they achieving their goals? Are contributors having a positive multiplier effect on their squads or diminishing overall achievement and performance through unproductive behaviors?
- Does everyone know what's going on and what is coming next so that they can adjust course accordingly?
- Does the team believe in the organization overall? How does the individual connect to the manager and organization in a meaningful way?



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Integration, simplification and getting these insights directly into the hands of the manager is a key shift for the future of team performance in 2020. Emerging next generation solutions such as Squadley's Workforce Success Platform move beyond archaic annual goal cascades and instead deploy agile multi-layer goal networks with RACI to connect macro goals to squad and individual roles. The effect is zero ambiguity and real-time situational awareness to optimize achievement and performance.

## Shift 5: Accessibility

All along the frontlines of organizations, progressive managers are seeking better ways to navigate perpetual change now. The urgency of Workforce 2020 needs will force the removal of barriers to entry and adoption with tools that are intuitive and fast to find and deploy. Trading off massive top-down deployments of large/centralized enterprise solutions for accessible tools that easily connect and facilitate rapid adoption through internal net promotion is easy math.

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At Squadley, we believe that Workforce 2020 will also benefit from consumerization-of-the-enterprise trends. Long-term contracts, complicated configurations and integrations, central administration dependencies, poor user experience and expensive fragmented tool sets will fall away over the next decade. Integrated SaaS with improved design, emphasis on customer experience, ease of use, and instant-on value with explicit utility will become the new normal over the next decade. The path to adoption and accessibility of talent solutions should be frictionless and delightful at all levels.

To help organizations make durable decisions about solutions for the team or the enterprise, we recommend thinking through the following questions:

1. **Is Planning and Performance Always On?** Does the solution facilitate real-time collaboration and alignment with the plan of record and team performance in insightful and meaningful ways? Yesterday's PowerPoint plans and large review forms, along with their infrequent/disconnected cadences, are no longer relevant
2. **Does It Support Data and Insights Management?** Does the solution address the noise vs. signal problem, and move towards integrated end point team performance intelligence, collaboration and virtual-expert trended insight?
3. **Are You Making the Shift to Engagement Emphasis on Achievement?** Does the feedback the tool generates genuinely build thriving, successful, achievement cultures through an integrated performance platform that serves daily utility value?

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**4. Is the Manager the Performance Driver?** Is the manager in the driver's seat for choice, implementation and execution? How much central administration is actually needed to sustain the delivery of insights and value to the leaders of teams?

**5. Is it Accessible?** No onerous investments, configurations and term contracts; instead, focused on customer experience of daily utility, user delight and internal net promotion to deliver value

These criteria move well beyond the typical 'requirements' list we traditionally think of when shopping for any human capital solution. Workforce 2020 challenges ensure that neither a traditional core data HRIS, performance management software nor engagement survey tool will do. Something new and different and far more powerful is needed. Now.

## About the Author

Derek Sidebottom is the Chief People Officer of LendingHome and President of Squadley. A seasoned consultant and technology HR executive, Derek's passion is supporting massive scaling and growth through the alignment and engagement of talent and creating cultures of achievement and accountability. In his spare time, Derek can be found enjoying the Bay Area with his family and evangelizing the necessary shifts to meet the needs of Workforce 2020.

## About Squadley

Built for modern teams and the distributed agile enterprise, Squadley is an intuitive yet powerful planning and performance platform that meets the challenges of managing today's distributed workforce. Always-on performance planning and management from Squadley drives alignment on goals by directly connecting business strategy to the work employees do every day, fostering achievement cultures and uniting teams with clear targets at the individual, team and organizational level. Rapid sensing, always-on feedback and critical analytics on the performance of people and teams provide real-time insights into both employee engagement and progression towards company targets. In-platform collaboration, communication and virtual coaching enables employees to focus on what matters most. Visit [squadley.com](http://squadley.com) for a demo today.

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