

By Amanda Visser

The new workplace: Digitally connected, but isolating

The rise of the freelance workforce has led to a heightened state of digital connectivity. But it can also lead to a human disconnect.

In a year's time more than 40% of the US workforce is expected to be freelancers – up from 6% three decades ago – a recent study by US business and financial software company Intuit shows.

These freelancers are also called the contingent, open talent or on-demand workforce. They are digitally connected, with everything they need to do what they are best at, at arm's length – their phones, big screens, power banks and supercomputers.

But the shadow of being digitally connected is loneliness.

Ray de Villiers, consultant and specialist in the future of work, says people who have been part of the on-demand economy have been “navigating” this loneliness for many years. The struggle is going to become real for many more, very soon. Intuit's research indicates that the on-demand labour market will grow by 18.5% per year over the next five years.

In philosophy this notion of loneliness and isolation from the formal workforce is called a facticity, says **Caroline Ravenall, executive coach, organisational consultant and philosopher.**

“A facticity is something we cannot change, but we quite often fight against it.” She says when people's work environment changes and they are forced into a state of greater disconnection from people, they tend to resist this change.

It breeds a mood of resentment and blame, says Ravenall, who is part of the Unique Speakers Bureau and has spent ten years of her career in the Virgin Group of maverick entrepreneur Richard Branson.

People then try to fill that void. They rush out to find new networks to connect to, and new “places to be”. This sense of loneliness is not going to change. In fact, it will be getting worse.

The rise of the on-demand economy is also forcing policymakers, companies and concerned citizens to ask important questions about the future of work.



The rackets we run

Ravenall says in order to navigate this new world of work and its shadow (loneliness) we have to become aware of the “rackets we run” and how we “show up in this world”.

The rackets we run are learnt behaviours. It is what we tell ourselves about ourselves (that inner roommate who always has something to say), and the mood that we operate from. It is like the deep undercurrents of a river – you cannot see it, but it directs the flow.

“When we are working alone the racket comes to the surface, because we do not have the distractions of other people around us.”

Alex Chriss, vice-president and general manager of self-employed solutions at Intuit, said in an interview with *Forbes* magazine that the rise of the on-demand economy is also forcing policymakers, companies, and concerned citizens to ask important questions about the future of work “and how best to create stability for this new breed of entrepreneur”.

State of inner order

Ravenall says it is important for workers to stay connected with themselves first. They need to create a state of inner order – or what she calls ontological security – which comes from having a pliable mindset.

She quotes from the Dalai Lama and Howard Culter's book, *The Art of Happiness*: “In today's world, the attempt to develop a flexible mode of thinking isn't simply a self-indulgent exercise for idle intellectuals – it can be a matter of survival. **By adopting a flexible, malleable approach to life, we can maintain our composure even in the most restless and turbulent conditions.**”

Ravenall says to create that state of inner order, people must accept the situation they find themselves in. Accept that your moods and emotions are valid, but look at them with lightness, she says. She says that due to massive shifts in the way we experience work and life we are forced to ask the bigger



Caroline Ravenall, executive coach, organisational consultant and philosopher, lists the skills needed for our new world:

1. Emotional agility and resourcefulness to self-observe and self-correct;
2. Cultivating an explorer mindset;
3. Accountability and responsibility;
4. Having the capacity to tune into our intuition to get answers is becoming critical;
5. High tolerance for risk;
6. Resilience and capacity to bounce back – to let go of the need for certainty and to work with uncertainty all the time.

Photo: Supplied

questions, and to find new purpose in what we are doing.

We have to be aware of the stories we tell ourselves about where we are and what is going on. We need a solid support system, but it is equally important to interact with people who will be able to share a different perspective with you.

“We need someone who can respectfully perturb us – push us out of our comfort zone. We must be sure what it is that we want to achieve from our social interactions.”

As humans we want to feel valid, to feel heard and that we are making a contribution. “The problems we have are not psychological. We are not broken and need fixing. The problems are existential. It is about: how valuable am I in this world?” We are forced into a “crisis of meaning” and isolation is the catalyst for that. “This changing world is an evolution of consciousness, but we are doing it kicking and screaming.”

We also need to recognise that we are operating with 200 000-year old software. It has been designed for a simpler life where we had been part of a tribe. When we are confronted with mercurial change it is natural to experience anxiety and depression. It is just the way we have been wired; we can rewire that, but it takes some time to do, says Ravenall.

Our inner order must be built on creativity, courage, perspective and not on what our status or title is. ■

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How's your general knowledge? Try our quiz! It'll be available via fin24.com/finweek from 4 March.

1. Who won the Oscar for best actress in a leading role on 24 February?
2. What is the name of the cat which belonged to the late fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld?
3. American politician Bernie Sanders has announced that he will again be running for US president in 2020. How old is he?
4. SAA has agreed to pay Comair for its anticompetitive conduct. How much is the settlement amount?
 - R1.1bn
 - R1.5bn
 - R2bn
5. Where did the DA launch its manifesto on 23 February?
6. Name the CEO of MC Mining.
7. On 22 February, Zimbabwe started to trade its new currency. What is it called?
8. True or false? Sri Lanka is the first cricket team from Asia to win a test series in South Africa.
9. On 21 February a robbery and bloody shootout occurred at a school in Johannesburg. Which school was it?
10. Wolfgat, which featured in the 21 February edition of *finweek*, was announced as restaurant of the year at the Inaugural World Restaurant Awards held in Paris in February. Where is this restaurant located?

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

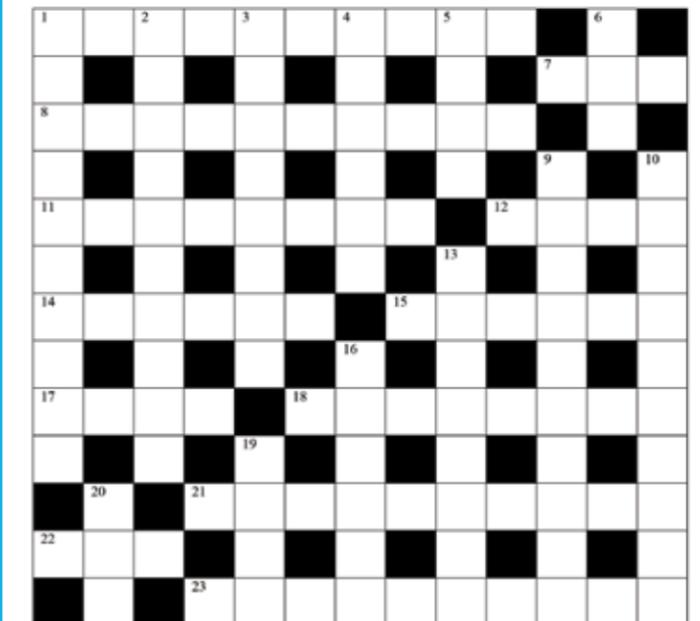
NO 727JD

ACROSS

- 1 For a change leading critic is not involved in noisy argument (10)
- 7 Offered regular rate (3)
- 8 Superintendent to be in charge of Iranian money (10)
- 11 Little weight given to half-baked awards (8)
- 12 Take rail transport home (4)
- 14 River in bad times floods (6)
- 15 System that's part of brain controlling all I'm bickering about (6)
- 17 Confesses to having in one's possession (4)
- 18 US summerhouse on rolling meadow connected with trees (8)
- 21 Closely contested match (5,5)
- 22 Make good jam (3)
- 23 Royal Family has fish on Thursday (4,6)

DOWN

- 1 Equip old boy for ultimate contest (10)
- 2 As good as beat the starting figure (10)
- 3 Soldiers take men to first army battalions (8)
- 4 Seaman to achieve ambition (6)
- 5 It can't be passed in silence (4)
- 6 Fish over on the sheltered side (3)
- 9 Hinder cleaner getting round Royal monument (6,4)
- 10 Builder's pile covered by black cladding (10)
- 13 Girls' class a shambles (8)
- 16 See 20
- 19 God left well enough alone (4)
- 20 & 16 Granny, you mostly, and I represent opposites in principle (3,2,4)



Solution to Crossword NO 726JD

ACROSS: 1 Garden gnome; 9 Oil; 10 Late uncle; 11 Lathe; 13 A-tip-toe; 14 Relish; 16 Sheila; 18 cabinet; 19 Tiler; 20 Root canal; 21 Owl; 22 Thinker's cap
 DOWN: 2 Awl; 3 Delve; 4 Nathan; 5 Nourish; 6 Mock trial; 7 World record; 8 General rule; 12 Tollbooth; 15 Sun icon; 17 Stance; 19 Tilts; 21 Ova