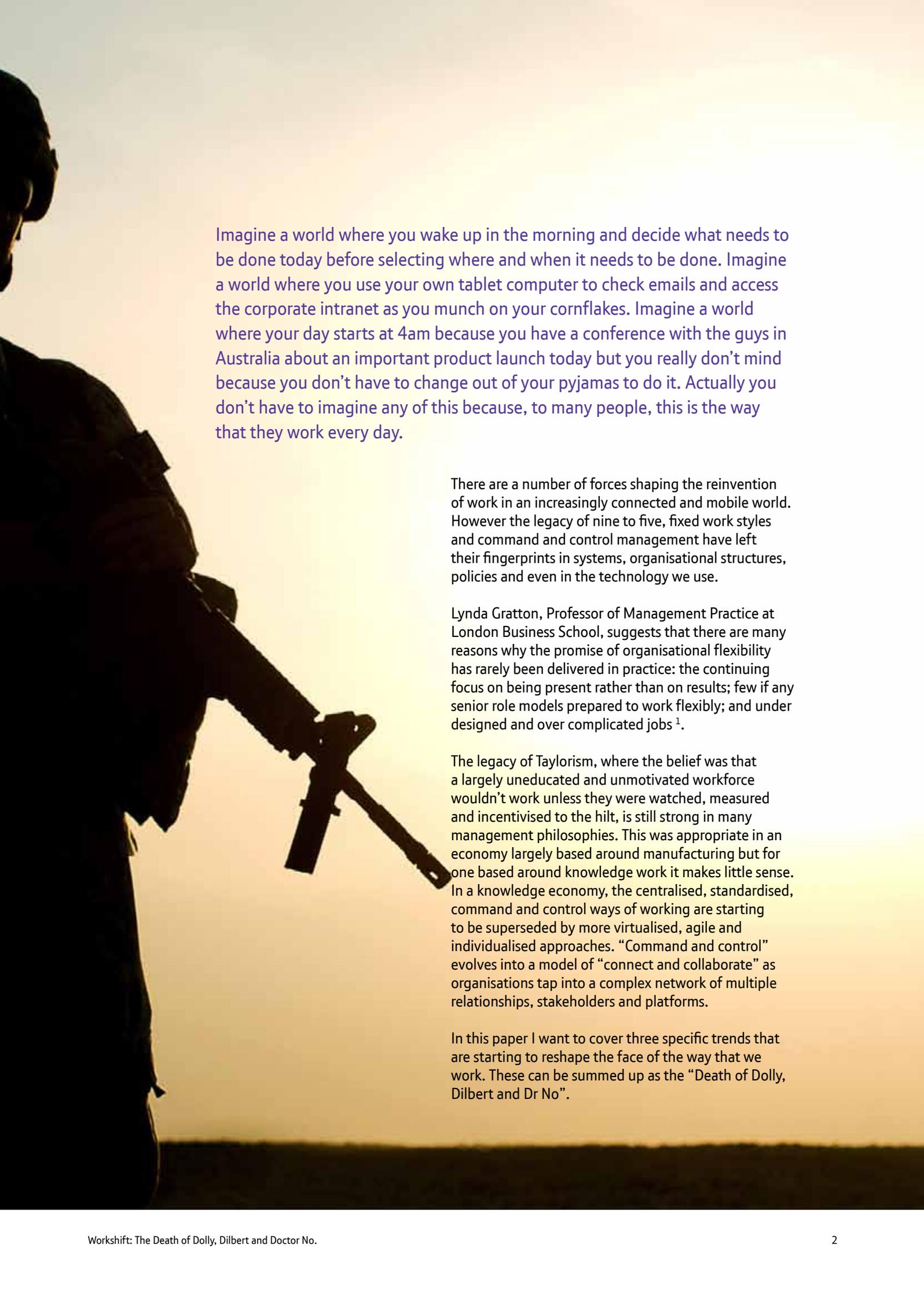# Workshift: The Death of Dolly, Dilbert and Doctor No.

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Imagine a world where you wake up in the morning and decide what needs to be done today before selecting where and when it needs to be done. Imagine a world where you use your own tablet computer to check emails and access the corporate intranet as you munch on your cornflakes. Imagine a world where your day starts at 4am because you have a conference with the guys in Australia about an important product launch today but you really don't mind because you don't have to change out of your pyjamas to do it. Actually you don't have to imagine any of this because, to many people, this is the way that they work every day.

There are a number of forces shaping the reinvention of work in an increasingly connected and mobile world. However the legacy of nine to five, fixed work styles and command and control management have left their fingerprints in systems, organisational structures, policies and even in the technology we use.

Lynda Gratton, Professor of Management Practice at London Business School, suggests that there are many reasons why the promise of organisational flexibility has rarely been delivered in practice: the continuing focus on being present rather than on results; few if any senior role models prepared to work flexibly; and under designed and over complicated jobs [1].

The legacy of Taylorism, where the belief was that a largely uneducated and unmotivated workforce wouldn't work unless they were watched, measured and incentivised to the hilt, is still strong in many management philosophies. This was appropriate in an economy largely based around manufacturing but for one based around knowledge work it makes little sense. In a knowledge economy, the centralised, standardised, command and control ways of working are starting to be superseded by more virtualised, agile and individualised approaches. "Command and control" evolves into a model of "connect and collaborate" as organisations tap into a complex network of multiple relationships, stakeholders and platforms.

In this paper I want to cover three specific trends that are starting to reshape the face of the way that we work. These can be summed up as the "Death of Dolly, Dilbert and Dr No".

## The Death of Dolly.

Dolly Parton once sang about 'working nine to five' – a song that shows its age in an era where a workforce can collaborate across time zones and territories with people whom we may never meet in person. 'Nine to Five' was a convenient way of partitioning work life and home life. It was easy to pack up all your troubles at five o'clock and go and play with the children.

Now we have devices that are always on and always on us, so it is possible to check on things at work at any time of the day. However, a "quick email check" can easily turn into several hours of work. This can mean the demands of the office are not always confined to the neat boundaries of nine to five anymore. 36.4% of UK users in a BT sponsored study by Cambridge University found technology at least sometimes disrupted family life, with 10.5% finding that disruption regular[2].

So why don't some of us want to simply disconnect? Behavioural economists will tell you that technology plays to the natural distractibility of human nature and our compulsion to embrace uncertainty and novelty[2]. Every time the new mail notification flashes up on screen, the response flag on Facebook appears or the red light glows on our Blackberry, we feel the need to take a look, regardless of what else we are doing, because something interesting might be waiting for us. This motivates us to keep checking for incoming messages even when we should really be paying attention to other things (like walking in a straight line or attending a meeting).

In the long run, this can be unhealthy for both our work and home lives. Just because we can make ourselves available for 24 hours a day, does not mean that we should. However, the shift in social and cultural expectations about speed of response and availability can cause new workplace pressures. It appears the lack of actual "face time" in the office has been replaced by a need for "virtual face time" instead. There is an increasing amount of evidence that the productivity benefits of these devices can be displaced by the resulting pressure to keep on top of things. The right to switch off the smart phone, the email and the PC sometimes is vital to productivity, wellbeing and good decision making.

However, this is more than just about individuals setting rules as to when they are 'online'. This is also about establishing guidelines and cultural norms around acceptable use of communication channels within a business[2]. Establishing rules such as "no email after 5.30pm", asking "is this the right channel for this message" and allowing individuals to broadcast their communication preferences are all part of the process of educating the workforce into healthier communication behaviours.

## The Death of Dibert.

The cartoon character of Dilbert is probably the best known example of the office based 'cubicle jockey'. However, is the office the most productive place for us to work? Ask yourself "where am I most productive?" and I doubt that your answer is "the office"! And yet, the majority of us still choose to drag ourselves into those big grey, soulless open plan places with their cubicles and harsh fluorescent lighting every day.  The traditional office and fixed desk model is overwhelmingly the norm for the majority of businesses, according to Lynda Gratton's 'Future of Work Consortium' research[3].

Yet the case for the office is an interesting one. The logic behind the original open plan office was around creating spaces that would encourage increasing amounts of collaboration. The one desk per employee was based on the fact that the open plan office of the 1970s was a tethered one – big technology, lots of paper and a fixed desk phone.

Now we are untethered, less reliant on paper, sit in more traffic jams in our daily commutes and are more likely to email the person that sits opposite us than talk to them! We are also endlessly disturbed during our working day – once every 3 minutes according to the Future of Work Consortium[3]. Many of those distractions are because of the openness of that office space.

Why do we go into the office now? The answer is to see other people, have meetings and socialise about work. And yet, in an open plan office, all of these activities are often greeted by disgruntled shushes and tuts from people who are still clinging on to the notion that offices are good places to concentrate in.

Some companies have taken the office as social space further with innovative office layouts that encourage serendipitous encounters and allow people to move from environment to environment depending on what task they are doing[4]. These designs have had significant positive impact on employee productivity as well as employee satisfaction levels and sickness – people actually want to come into the office and when they do they can be productive as well as improving the utilisation of the space.

Of course, the traditional alternative to the office is working from home. Home working has achieved critical mass in many organisations (around 10% of BT's workforce are registered home workers) and the ever-increasing speed, capacity and reliability of home broadband connections is likely to open up even more possibilities for delivering ever more sophisticated forms of communication to the home environment.

Working from home can reap the benefits, with 20-30% increases in productivity typically reported compared to office-based employees. These benefits are largely delivered through employee retention, reduction in absenteeism (typically 10-20% lower than the average rate due to the fact that the morning commute tends to be limited to putting on a pair of slippers), sickness rates (with some organisations reporting 60% lower than average since many people even work from their sickbed), less time in traffic jams and more flexible hours.

However, permanent home working is not a solution for everyone. Some people don't have a suitable work space at home (or even a home). Some want to have the boundary of a commute that allows them to keep the office and the home separate. Some aren't self disciplined enough to stop themselves being distracted by the sudden compulsion to grout the bathroom or shampoo the dog. Some (particularly younger employees) actually like the buzz of the office.

For those who want an option beyond the home and the office, an emerging trend is for workers to work from a third space – a place that has been nicknamed the 'coffice'. These are typically places like coffee shops, hotel foyers and airports where people have the connectivity to fly into the cloud and also have access to a convenient and pleasant environment as well as coffee and cake.

These coffices can range from the informal (high street coffee chains) to more formal hub spaces where people can get access to power, printers, photocopiers and meeting rooms on a pay-per-use basis. A variation on this is to create hubs (or what BT calls 'touch down' centres) in buildings in key locations. These are secure 'own use' spaces which can either be booked or dropped into and give access to the full facilities that a normal office will provide.

## The Death of Doctor "No".

One of the most interesting challenges for technology in business today is the consumerisation of IT. Typically corporate IT lags consumer IT – in other words we have far cooler gadgets at home than we do at work.  Most companies tend to restrict the selection of laptops and smart phones that can be used on the corporate network – and most tend to veer towards heavy, grey bricks. This is causing more of us bring our own devices (BYOD) to work.

In recent BT research[5], 84% of IT managers thought that adoption of BYOD would give them a competitive advantage, especially with respect to employee productivity (with 27% believing that advantage to be significant). 40% of IT decision makers said they already had a BYOD policy in place. However, 60% of employees said that they are not allowed to use their own devices on a work network, 64% of employees thought that there would be benefits in doing BYOD and 46% wanted to. However, just 25% of employees recognised that using their own device in a work context constituted a risk to company security. Add to that, the fact that 83% of IT managers believe that the main threat to corporate IT security is "giving 24/7 access to corporate systems to an increasingly mobile workforce" and you can see why the "no" reflex tends to engage.

The danger of saying "no" is that people do it anyway – with 4% of employees saying that they weren't allowed to bring their own devices but still did it! They are unlikely to tell the IT department about this – and therein lies the problem with the blanket "no" response. Being aware of what employees are doing and mitigating that risk is far better than the ostrich option of sticking heads in sand and pretending that it isn't happening.

Dr "No" also often exists in the realm of the social network with many organisations banning the use of social sites like Facebook and Twitter at work. The belief is that employees will either end up time wasting on those sites or that they will give away all the company's secrets.  This misses the fact that the biggest threat to both productivity and security is a disengaged employee who may well, in the face of a ban on social networking at work, just log on via their smart phone or home computer and do it. Again, this means that their activities become largely invisible to the IT department.

The other assumption is that social networking is for social activities. However, enterprise social networking can be used as a powerful tool for connecting disparate people up across organisations that have common interests and issues.  It has many advantages over traditional channels like email and the phone in that you don't need to know the person that has the answer to your questions – they connect with you.

So saying "no" means that the behaviours tend to go underground. By not saying "no", both IT and HR can establish policies, put in security measures, roll out integrated platforms and educate people to ensure that the advantages of BYOD and social networking are maximised, whilst minimising the risks of doing so.

## The Future of Work?

The Death of Dolly, Dilbert and Dr No all point towards a much more fluid approach to work in the future. The work-life boundary is being blurred, offices are evolving into hives where worker bees swarm in and out depending on what they want to do, mobility and cloud go hand in hand to enable us to choose to work where and when we want and one size no longer fits all anymore in the tools that we use and the way that we network.

The future of work may look anarchic to some. However, the rate of change being driven fromturbulent economic conditions, rapidly changing customer demands and technological evolution means that agility becomes a means for survival. The trouble is that organisations are generally built to last rather than to change.

We have also moved from a labour based economy to a knowledge economy where the command and control model of de-construction, standardisation and repetition of work doesn't always lead to efficiency gains and where knowledge creation and sharing combined with mass collaboration – connecting and collaborating - can deliver higher gains.

The author E.M Forster once said "only connect" – and the business world is now starting to realise the real value of that connection.

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**Offices worldwide**