



The worker-employer relationship disrupted: If we're not a family, what are we?

Deloitte 2021 Global Human Capital Trends: Special report

Powered by more agency and choice, workers are reexamining everything: from who they want to work for—40% of the global workforce is considering leaving their employer this year¹—to the role they expect employers to play in supporting their purpose and values. Likewise, organizations are contemplating their role in society and the relationship with their workers. So how can organizational leaders navigate this evolving (and disrupted) worker-employer relationship going forward?

Four possible futures for worker-employer relationships

For this special report, we used a combination of scenario planning and research (engaging both executives and workers) to explore the possible futures of the worker-employer relationship, seeking to challenge conventional wisdom, stretch our thinking, and chart a new course. We posit four potential futures that illustrate how the worker-employer relationship could develop and how organizations and workers might respond.



Work as fashion

A *reactive* relationship, where employers are in constant motion as they chase worker sentiments, competitor actions, and marketplace dynamics



War between talent

An *impersonal* relationship, where workers compete for limited jobs due to an oversupply of talent



Work is work

A *professional* relationship, where workers and employers view organizational responsibility and personal and social fulfillment as largely separate domains



Purpose unleashed

A *communal* relationship, where purpose is the dominant force driving the relationship between workers and employers

The worker-employer relationship has no single future, only a multitude of possibilities

Organizations will likely find themselves in some combination of these futures depending on the needs and expectations of their workforce, their industry, their regions, and the communities in which they operate. But examining the question in light of what *could* happen can help us better chart a course toward our chosen destination, the place where we ultimately want the worker-employer relationship to go.

The challenge before us now is to choose, with empathy and a deep understanding of what is possible, where that destination lies, on both the current horizon and the next, and to navigate toward it with a steady hand

1. Microsoft, [2021 Work Trend Index: Annual Report](#), March 22, 2021.

