



The journey to 2030: Choosing the human agenda

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Burt Rea: Welcome back to Capital H, the podcast where we explore the latest trends and developments to make work better for humans and humans better at work.

I'm your host, Burt Rea, a member of Deloitte's Human Capital Consulting practice, and leader of our US Culture Transformation offering.

The decade that began in 2020 is not the one people expected or planned for in 2019. The world has been plunged into an age of instability and profound discontinuity that holds both extraordinary opportunities and unprecedented challenges, all while reshaping the business landscape in ways that are deep, structural, and enduring.

Deloitte recently released *The journey to 2030: Choosing the human agenda*, which details seven shifts reshaping organizations in a disruptive decade.

To discuss the seven shifts altering the human agenda, we're joined today by two guests: my colleague, Yves Van Durme, Deloitte's global organization transformation leader and partner in Deloitte's North & South Europe Consulting practice. And Jeff Schwartz, retired Deloitte Consulting principal and now vice president of insights and impact at Gloat.

Yves and Jeff, over to you.

Yves Van Durme: So, very happy to have a moment to chat with you, my former

colleague, Jeff, in terms of why did you write this, *Journey to 2030*, Jeff? Do you remember why you invited us to start writing this?

Jeff Schwartz: I do, Yves, and it's great to chat with you. It seems that we have one foot in the pre-COVID era and one foot in the post-COVID era. And I think that's a bit of an explanation as to why we're writing this piece now. The world in 2022 and 2023 is a very, very different place than the world that we thought was coming at the end of 2019.

And in discussions that you, I, Steve Hatfield, and many of our colleagues at Deloitte and our clients around the world, and also my clients at Gloat—the startup I'm working with in talent marketplaces—we are in a moment,

and I think Lynda Gratton at London Business School puts it very well. The COVID period was a great moment of unfreezing how we think about the future.

And we're about to refreeze as we move from the COVID era into the post-COVID era. And it's a very important time. It's a liminal moment. It's a moment of transition, for us to think about where do we want to be in the next five or 10 years.

And what we've chosen, as we've organized this paper, is to literally ask the question, where do we want to be in 2030? And right now, we only have seven years to go, Yves, in order to get to that magical year 2030. And I think together, we thought it was a very relevant time to consider this.

Our colleagues at Deloitte and Deloitte Consulting, and our futurist colleagues, have been looking at some megatrends and mega themes that really helped us shape our thinking as well.

Yves: Absolutely. I think that notion of these externalities becoming internalities was one of the triggering points for some of the conversations, like how is the world around us changing what it means for leaders? I think it was very much influential in terms of all the scenarios that we're looking into. And I remember listening to that conversation triggered many of the thoughts, which we then further explored in our paper.

Any of the thoughts you have to these externalities? I think that was a very interesting conversation. Any thoughts you remember—you want to share?

Jeff: There are a few, and there was a really fascinating paper that some of our colleagues—Eamonn Kelly and Jason Girzadas, one of the deputy CEOs of Deloitte, put together earlier this year. The paper has a great title, almost as great as our title! Their paper is Leading through an age of discontinuity, and ours, of course, is The journey to 2030, so we're leading through discontinuity.

But in thinking about the age of discontinuity, they identify five—I'm not sure whether they're mega themes or megatrends, but maybe they're meta

themes and meta trends—but I really found them very informative, very useful starting points for our thinking, and I think for the thinking of people that will both review that paper and the insights that we have in ours.

And the five, if I can summarize them: one is we are living in an era of just unbelievable scientific discovery. It's almost like a Cambrian moment in terms of what we're seeing, in terms of the amount of progress that we're making through science itself.

I read a wonderful article in the last day—actually, the day we're recording this—from Tom Friedman, who is telling us that maybe the world is even flatter than we thought. So, we can argue about that, we can think about that. But the point he makes is, we are hyper-connected; we see everything going on in the world.

Yves: Yeah, and I think this is also sort of triggering: Everything is connected. At the same time, if you look, there are increasing worries—politically, energy—which are also dictating how we reinvent global, because it's clear that we can't do the same thing everywhere in the world.

So, I think it was looking at these different options of what global means in this new world, I think, that made it interesting. I think it also triggered that third one, which is looking at more ecosystem-wide strategies.

I think the organization, which in some ways used to be the middleman, is being put under pressure; on the one hand, the individuals, and on the other hand, the ecosystems and the value chain. I think that was another one which is reconsidering the value chain.

And maybe putting the organization as a middleman is probably overdoing it, but I think it triggered a lot of thoughts about how you get more ecosystem-wide strategies rather than organizational strategies, which is beyond the control of many leaders. So, I think that disruption is a fascinating thought as well.

Jeff: That's right. You're aware, and hopefully, the people listening to this podcast and recording are aware, that at Deloitte, we've been doing some

research over the last three years with Deloitte Consulting and with MIT Sloan Management Review on the evolution of workforce ecosystems, beginning with talent marketplaces and now workforce ecosystems. And I've done a series of reports on that; we actually have a book coming out on that with MIT Press. But I think it's spot on.

This point about ecosystems is one of the key observations that we'll bring into the human agenda discussion. Which is, what's the frame, and what's the reframe? And the frame used to be the company or the enterprise, and now, the frame is becoming the ecosystem. And I think that relates to the fourth meta/megatrend, which is networked power: How power is becoming networked. How we are moving beyond traditional hierarchical models. And the last one, which is one that we pick up in our thinking on The journey to 2030, is the growing importance and the dynamics of stakeholder capitalism.

I think we take as a given that the world has moved from a shareholder capitalist model to a stakeholder capitalist model, but that that model itself is pretty volatile and is still evolving in a very dynamic, sometimes chaotic way.

So, scientific discovery, reinvented globalization, ecosystem-wide strategies, networked power, stakeholder capitalism. And what we did—what you, I, and Steve got to do in talking with many of our colleagues and our customers—was to ask ourselves the question, in this world that is an age of discontinuity, what is the agenda for business and workforces and organizations, which we call “choosing the human agenda.”

We switched from the background and the why, to what were the seven shifts that we were talking about. And we went back and forth on, were they trends? Were they shifts? Were they discontinuities? Were they themes? In some sense, they're all of those things together.

But let's start talking a bit about what are the seven—and maybe even how we can group them and go through several of them in some detail.

Yves: I think the choice notion is important. I think, after having more than two years—for many organizations, many people, many leaders, to cope with, mitigate, respond to—I think the choice and all these underlying currents and shifts, as we've called them, is very important.

The worker expectation agency is something that might be still a bit different in different parts of the world in terms of how extreme it is. But the power that individuals have and how they get organized to be activists, and how they have expectations—how they want to be able to make choices—is something that has been unveiling for the last two, three years already.

I think it's only getting stronger in terms of workers making choices, workers also being civilians, being consumers, and how that's influencing what they expect. How they expect things like their CEOs to take a position—take a stand on political societal elements—which is something that we see more of.

So, there's different expressions of how that's coming to play. And the remote work part is only accelerating—in terms of what does it mean and what rights and what sort of obligations do they have as a worker versus whatever sort of setup I have as an organization—is a very powerful current. Anything to add to that one, Jeff?

Jeff: I think that's right. The way that we're thinking about it now, we're calling it four plus three. We'll focus on the first four, and the first four are really micro shifts: shifts that we're seeing at the individual level, at the team level, and the organizational level.

And the first, as you've highlighted, is just the growing worker expectations and agency—what workers are looking for. And I heard a wonderful podcast with Lynda Gratton and Terence Mauri on his Hack The Future podcast in September. And one of the things Lynda reminds us of is just what an intense and amazing experience the last couple of years have been. And I find it really useful—even though we've lived through it, we've written about it, we've been working on these issues, intensely and intensively for the last couple of years—to reflect on what the opportunity is in front of us. And what

are workers telling us, and what do they expect, and how is that different? And there are a couple of things I'll summarize, too, that I think that most of us observed and we're still trying to learn. One is that in an age of disruption—in this case, a pandemic—when so many people had to work differently and many people had to work remotely, productivity was pretty high—was very high—and we actually got the work done. And in many cases, we got the work done at a very high level of efficiency and effectiveness! And that surprised us. It surprised many of us who thought that the pandemic would be two, three, four months.

I remember back in March and April of 2020, when we were talking to clients about pandemic responses, and the goals were to be back in the office in the summer of 2020. Here we are, in the fall of 2022, still getting our vaccines.

So, we saw worker expectations change. They changed around the demand for flexibility, the demand for growth, and the demand for purpose and meaning. And I think one of the things that will be a critical milestone or marker on the journey to 2030 is continually recalibrating our understanding of what workers are expecting and treating the diversity of the workforce and the diversity of their interests with much more intentionality than we have before.

And so, I'll end with a comment on this first one by saying, we've had a debate in the last year about the Great Resignation. I recently wrote a piece where I said, "It may not be the Great Resignation, but I certainly think it's the Great Reassessment." And what I mean by that is, workers are asking themselves, who do they want to work for? Where do they want to work? What are their opportunities? What's the meaning of the work they're doing? What are the values of the companies and the people that they're working with?

And this Great Reassessment is a really interesting way of thinking about how we might think about the evolution of workers' expectations and their desires for agency and autonomy. It's a big shift from where we were a few years ago, Yves.

Yves: Absolutely. And I think it's reinforced by the second one, which is "longer lives, more opportunity," that we call it, in terms of looking at longer lives means more moments in time in your life, in your career, to make choices.

And this is also highlighting how you actually harness that, and not just worker agency, but also harnessing these longer lives as something which is not only from a commercial perspective; because you have people of a certain age that have disposable means, which are interesting in some industries, but we didn't write about that. We looked into the career perspective, and that was, for me, one of the very interesting facts that we looked into was, actually, who are the successful entrepreneurs?

And it was interesting to see that beyond the hero stories of all these young entrepreneurs—which are these "kids" that do magical things—actually, the biggest group of entrepreneurs are in their forties and their fifties. Which is amazing to see also the success that they have, which is very, very interesting in terms of seeing that perspective. And adding, to your point, Jeff, in terms of choices, this is also one of the choices that people are considering as part of the many other choices they have in life and in work.

Jeff: I couldn't agree more. We'll come back throughout our conversation today to the importance of the word "choices." It's actually in the title—I'm trying to count how many words we have in our title; I think we have eight or nine words in the title. But one of them—the center word—is "choosing," the center word is "choice."

We talked a moment ago, and we're talking now, about longer lives and more opportunities. Employees and workers want more choices, and business leaders at every level, and at every function, and board members obviously, as well, and political leaders—this is a time where we get to make choices. But a big point that we're making in this piece is that how you frame the questions, and the themes, is important, and this notion of longer lives and more opportunities.

Building off the wonderful work that Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott put in their book, of a few years ago, on *The 100-Year Life*. And demographics—even with the dent we’ve put in demographics with COVID—we are living longer lives.

One of the ways that I think about it—and I would encourage people to think about it—is if you have some young 20-year-olds in your workforce (and we all do), a not insignificant percentage of them will be around in the year 2100, when they’re a hundred years old.

And so, part of what we need to be thinking about today is, what does it mean to have careers and build careers for 100-year lives? What does it mean to have and build careers when you may be working for 50 or 60 years?

Now, every time I say that, Yves, people around the world when I say it, groan a little bit. “Oh, who wants to work for 50 or 60 years?” But on the other side, what we’re seeing is one of the fastest-growing parts of the workforce. You talked about the entrepreneurs in their forties, fifties, and sixties. One of the fastest-growing parts of the workforce are people in their fifties, sixties, and seventies.

People, some of whom have to work, because they’re living longer lives; many of whom want to work. And this comes back to this sort of fundamental challenge on the journey to 2030, which is how do we think about long-term careers? What does a 40- or 50-year career look like?

There was a podcast from the Stanford Longevity Project that said, “What does a 25-job career look like? What does it mean to have 25 jobs in your life?” It’s no longer a question of what do you want to do and what do you want to be when you grow up? But what several dozen things do you want to do, during your working life, as you’re integrating it with your personal life and your social and your political concerns?

This is a major reframing, and there are some big issues here, in terms of career planning, in terms of age discrimination, and

in terms of the way that we think about the nature of linear or ladder careers versus portfolio careers.

So, it’s a really good example of the reframing that can go on as we are choosing new ways of thinking about careers that will go from our twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and—yes—seventies. And how do we organize that? And what implications does it have on jobs, on training, on how we organize, on promotions, many of the fundamental building blocks that we look at in terms of organizational strategies.

Yves: Let’s move to the next one, which is also about choice—the human-technology collaboration, which is the choice that we are promoting and actively supporting, which is partially enabling the previous one as well. Like, if I look at some of the BMW examples here in Europe, which was about very early thinking about how can we make work of some workers in the assembly line and the likes lighter? And how that’s also potentially a bias, but at the same time, offering longer careers.

I think there’s many choices to be made in terms of how do we see technology not as a trade-off with humans, but more as a collaboration; that’s a line that we’ve been looking at in our Human Capital Trends research for a couple of years now as well. But I think it’s fascinating to see how it keeps on evolving and how it’s creating a world of opportunities that also affects career choices.

So, that’s also a very fascinating element of seeing how we can use that human-technology collaboration to actually enable even more choices, reduce biases, reduce discrimination, and make things possible.

Jeff: I think that’s spot on. And when we think of this third shift of human-technology collaboration—I really like the way you framed it in this conversation—it is both a trend and a choice.

And one way to look at it—one way that I sort of challenge myself to think about it, Yves, and I would challenge others to think about it—is if we look around the way we’re

working today and the way that I think many of us anticipate we will be working in the next few years—certainly by 2030—all of us can expect to be working next to and with a robot, and a smart machine, and AI.

And then the question becomes—and again, you’ve summarized it succinctly, very well—is it a trade-off? Do we view human-machine collaboration as a substitution strategy? What work can machines do that people don’t need to do? Is human-machine collaboration a way of reducing the human agenda in the workforce?

Or is it a way of augmenting and creating new ways of collaborating? What new things can we do? How can we see farther? How can we amplify the work that we do so that we can do more human work? Work that requires sort of unique human capabilities: the ability to ask questions, the ability to use our emotional intelligence, the ability to communicate both in empathetic and visual, and physical expression, as well as sort of analytical and mathematical expression. I think these pieces are coming to the fore, and I think one of the major trends and choices around human-machine collaboration—human-technology collaboration—is how we make work more interesting, more impactful, more effective, and not just more efficient.

And this is an active process. Again, I’ll reference Lynda Gratton, who reminds us that this is an era of redesigning work. As we talk about it at Deloitte, rearchitecting work, reimagining work.

That’s part of the amazing energy, hopefully, that comes into this trend and this shift, rather, which is how can we reimagine human-machine and human-technology collaboration so that we can do work that is more interesting to us and more impactful to customers and stakeholders? And not simply how do humans do less, because machines do more. This is a major agenda item for the next few years, between now and 2030.

Yves: Absolutely. And I think it builds nicely into the next one, which is we couldn’t resist the metaverse, of course, and what it means,

and how the metaverse is many different things, and artificial reality, virtual reality, augmented reality, and all these things—which I'm sure not all of us understand fully. But this is a reality where there are more opportunities being created, more markets being created, where also the boundaries between the worker agenda and the human agenda—because will be an expression to part of our lives—this is something that we need to move into, in every industry. And this is even more so the case in terms of—to the point you made very early in the conversation, Jeff—where are we? Is this post-COVID, still COVID, hybrid-COVID, whatever is it?

But at the same time, there's many new disruptions which have come to the forefront. It's amazing to see that economically, it's interesting how we are both combining inflations, which in some parts of the world have reached maximum peaks ever seen in many, many decades; and at the same time, need for employment has also been very, very high, which is a very interesting combination that is quite unique, which also begs us to make some choices. And I think the digital-virtual shift that we are describing is also helping to look into how do you organize the governance around that? How do you see the market fragmentation in terms of all these different markets—be it for consumers, for our employers—what is our human agenda when it comes to sustainability and climate?

There's so many different areas to tap into, which makes it a shift that you need to make a move on. You cannot wait not to move in that direction. I think the timing of all the disruption we see is driving us to make a choice—probably make some wrong choices as well, in the meanwhile—but I think not moving is probably the worst choice in this area.

Jeff: Well, I think the shift—this fourth shift that we're talking about, that you're highlighting, around what we're calling "digital-virtual metaverse lives," I think they're all fascinating. This one, in some ways, is particularly fascinating, because as I reflected on my own life, much of the technology that we're seeing today, I remember seeing as a university student in the late 1970s—I've just dated myself.

And it was a world of very simple computer games, as simple as Pong (which if people don't remember that, it was about as simple a game that you can get, where you literally were playing virtual tennis on a very, very simple television screen).

And here we are, 40 years later, and through the pandemic, we were doing an enormous amount of our work—not just our entertainment—we were working on technology. The growth of telemedicine grew tenfold during COVID. We'd never seen anything like that.

We went from having—as Nick Bloom at Stanford points out—we went from having 5% of the workforce working remotely to something like 30%. That seems to be where the numbers are coming as we're moving into the sort of hybrid era. People say, "Well, that's not a big increase." That's a 6x increase! In your life, when something goes up six times, it's a big deal!

And so, what was entertainment, what was on the margins of our work lives and our personal entertainment lives and our social lives, digital-virtual metaverse is right in the middle. And we are just at the beginning, in the early 2020s, of thinking about how do we integrate into work and personal lives. And we're focusing on work, I think. How do we focus on the opportunities around virtual, digital, and metaverse?

And it is not simply a question of how many days in the office, and what do we use Zoom or Microsoft Teams for? It is a much richer question about how do we design and prosper in a world where the virtual and the digital and the physical are coexisting and overlapping with each other? And it's a very complicated brew. I'm not sure exactly how to describe it, Yves, but a very interesting mix to think about. Because it's not a question of just sort of sorting out, "This is the work that we do in the physical world, this is the work we do in the digital and the metaverse world." We will have many opportunities in terms of how we structure jobs, how we structure work, and how we structure organizations that take advantage of this continuum of physical, to digital, to virtual and metaverse.

And the reason we're highlighting it as the fourth—we call it the four plus three, the fourth of the top four—is that these are very active design choices. Worker agency, longer lives, human-technology collaboration, and the digital-virtual metaverse are very much top of agenda—the human agenda items, I think—as we've been thinking about it, for the design and the reimagination and the rearchitecture in the next few years between now and 2030.

So, let's shift to the three.

Yves: And let's zoom in a bit faster, Jeff, because I'd like to spend a bit of time on what's next, and we want to encourage people listening to this to actually read the full paper.

I think you mentioned stakeholder capitalism in the volatile world. This is the one that was referred to, the five, which we took as part of our inspiration, in terms of how we see that accelerated shift playing out with all these different stakeholders that are more vocal, more difficult to ignore, in different parts of the world, even in sort of political systems, which we would expect less to see—sort of different forms of activism, just as an example.

The trust in governments and the trust in the corporate governance, as we indicated, that the cycle of who to trust, where to trust, is something that is increasingly important. I think the responsibility of businesses and organizations have only increased in terms of relative share of what we expect of organizations to take as a responsibility, despite the broader cycle of distrust that's happening in the world, which is partly fueled by media and by events happening. But also, in terms of [how] we've been talking about D&I [diversity and inclusion] for quite a while, I think there's increasing expectation of what it means from how much can we trust? And not seeing that.

And then also, out of the list of the three, the data and privacy—the battle royale—there's an evolution of who has ownership on data. The regulations are still a bit different in different parts of the world, but how do you tap into that increasing potential to, yes, protect the data that needs to be protected, but also gaining more and more insights,

and also gaining elements of new business models, new IP, which is being co-created between organizations and individuals owning their data to an increasing fact. These are three fascinating shifts in their own right.

But I wanted to look at these four plus three. What does it look like in terms of leading in the human agenda? Any thoughts to leading in the human agenda, Jeff?

Jeff: So, the way we talk about the four plus three is the first four that we talked about: worker agency, longer lives, human-machine collaboration, and the digital-virtual metaverse. These are very much—as we've mentioned in our conversation today—about both shifts and trends and choices for the individual, for the business and the team leader, and at the organization level.

And the three that you've summarized: stakeholder capitalism, trust and governance, and data and privacy, are—one way that we might think of it together is—they're both organizational challenges and beyond-the-organization challenges.

They're regulatory questions, they're societal questions, or political questions. And of course, as leaders thinking about the journey to 2030 and the human agenda, we need to think about the micro—what happens in the organization and the firm and the ecosystem—but also think about what happens more broadly in society.

I think there are a few key points here. One is that—and I'll repeat a phrase I used a few minutes ago—I think this is a liminal moment; this is a moment of transition.

I was literally walking past the coffee shop in New York earlier this week, and I overheard someone say—they said it very loudly—"Well, before the pandemic..." and then X, Y, Z. I didn't hear exactly what they said. The pandemic has been a watershed moment for us. And it presents an opportunity to ask the question, as you just did: What's next?

And what's next in 2023, from 2023 to 2025 to 2030, is not an incremental view of what we were thinking about in 2019, and

in the first few weeks of 2020, before we began to see the COVID shift and the COVID disruption.

And what each of these shifts represents is an opportunity to both choose a question, choose a frame for the question—and then make some bold decisions on the future. And this is something I think I'll summarize it this way: Every one of these shifts presents very significant individual and leadership and organizational and societal choices. We get to decide, as individuals and leaders, what are the questions?

The question, as we've pointed out, could be how do we create careers and career models that really can help people and organizations thrive in 100-year lives?

Or it could be, how do we get very selective and competitive, and create competition among generations in order to create a sort of war for talent, where talent is competing against itself and not in order to be its better self? Human-technology collaboration. Is it a substitution question or an augmentation or collaboration question?

We get to choose right now. We get to think about what that frame is. And I think that's what is absolutely fascinating about the journey to 2030, is the decisions we make in the next 12 or 18 or 24 months—certainly between now and the beginning of 2025—will put in motion where we will be in 2030 and what the human agenda and experience is going to be like.

Yves: I love what you're saying, Jeff, because I think it's also choice, but it's a portfolio of choices—it's a portfolio of choices to be taken. And getting us back to one of the earlier things you said—let's make these choices with the increased access to scientific methods that help us to validate the outcomes of these choices. That will be very important.

I think it's also a moment of courage for leaders, because the disruption that you mentioned is something that navigating the cause makes it the best of time for leaders. Some would say the worst of times because I'm hearing almost cynical comments—a

bit like your comment about the coffee experience, about let's wait for a big recession that will set things back to how it was before because it was better.

It is a moment of courage to step up and to actually navigate these shifts and embrace them for the better of your workers, the organization, but also the ecosystem that you are influencing.

Jeff, as always, it has been inspiring. Thank you so much for joining me here, Jeff.

Jeff: Thank you, Yves. Great conversation today.

Burt Rea: The rest of the decade ending in 2030 starts in 2022.

It's time for HR and business leaders to apply learnings from the past two years to the shifts we're seeing in the business landscape and choose the human agenda to generate organizational resiliency and thrive in a disruptive marketplace.

Although appearing counterintuitive, the way to maintain stability is by being dynamic—don't avoid the rapids; navigate them.

Thank you to our guests Yves Van Durme and Jeff Schwartz.

And thank you to our listeners out there for joining us today. Until next time.

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