

## FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

# THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE FUTURE OF WORK: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE PEOPLE PLAY IN SHAPING A CHANGING WORLD

For as long as there has been work, there has been a “future of work,” through humans’ ingenuity and drive to get things done easier, faster, and better. With the industrial revolution, efforts to shape a better future of work were dominated by improvements in machinery that soon led to fears that these machines might take away jobs from workers, enriching the rich and leaving the poor poorer (Allen, 2017). Later, John Maynard Keynes (1930) optimistically predicted technological unemployment (a net loss of jobs due to shifts in the nature of work outpacing the economy’s ability to redeploy talent) would be short-lived, and John F. Kennedy doubled down on the point in 1962 by saying that “If [people] have the talent to invent machines that put [people] out of work, they have the talent to put those [people] back to work” (cited in Baker, 2018).

Today, we find ourselves wondering yet again what the future may hold. The tone of “future-of-work” discussions over the last several decades has become decidedly more mixed—with some predicting enduring and far-reaching hardship for certain kinds of talent and others emphasizing the upsides of technological innovation and our resilient global economy (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; Rifkin, 1995). The need for research on the changing nature of work, roles for humans, and societal implications of shifts in both has perhaps never been greater, as technologies like blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI) present discontinuous possibilities for organizing economic activity. This Academy of Management Discoveries (AMD) Special Research Forum (SRF) contains eight carefully curated articles that address these issues.

Specifically, these articles focus on the *human side* of the future of work. In contrast to the fast pace of technological change impacting work environments, human psychology tends to change slowly (Cosmides & Tooby, 1994), suggesting a need for insight into how humans experience and cope with fundamental change in how they work. On the other hand, the human capacity to interpret novel situations is infinite (Griffin & Ross, 1991), urging scholars to consider how human understanding affects the trajectories of change. Protagoras wrote some 2,500 years ago that “of all things the measure is man,” a phrase often taken to mean that truth and

reality are relative and subjective, as they are mediated by human perception and beliefs (Plato, 2014). This lends an air of infinite possibilities, rather than determinism, to the future of work, and implies the need for research on how the beliefs, expectations, and narratives managers, policymakers, educators, and others construct can affect the future we realize. For example, whether, when, and how technologies such as AI and robotics serve as tools, partners, or replacements for talent depends, importantly, on how humans categorize, interpret, and experiment with them (e.g., Callen, Bechky & Fayard, 2023; Einola & Khoreva, 2023; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; Tsai et al., 2022; Tschang & Almirall, 2021).

This AMD SRF presents a set of papers that advance thinking about the future of work by placing humans at the center of processes that will shape that future. These papers underscore opportunities to enrich research on the future of work by illuminating how humans shape technological advances through their imagination about what the future will hold and developing next generations of technologies in accordance with those expectations, how diverse human characteristics shape the effects of technological advances at work, and how human values can be challenged, maintained, or promoted as technology changes the world of work. Research on the future of work is typically concerned with projecting what work, workers, and workplaces will look like in the future. This SRF suggests anchoring how we consider those aspects of future work by deepening our understanding of processes and mechanisms through which people understand new technologies’ affordances and consequently how they engage them to get work done. Thus, humans, through their interpretations and utilization of new technologies, mediate their effects on spaces and places of work. The papers in this SRF consider how, although constrained in specific ways by extant technological, organizational, and societal systems, human actors aspire to bring about a future of work they imagine as better.

In the sections that follow, we expand on how the SRF highlights opportunities to broaden our conceptualizations of the future of work, puts humans in the spotlight as actors shaping future-of-work processes, suggests how to empirically study the future of work, and—despite the challenging nature of research on

the future of work—positions management scholars to make critical contributions to this topic of great societal importance.

### BROADENING THE FUTURE OF WORK TO THE MORE HUMAN SIDE

One aim of this SRF is to examine aspects of the future of work that are important to humans but appear to be overlooked or underemphasized in the literature. A predominant theme in the future of work literature is how technology is changing work. In societal and scholarly conversations about the future of work, how technological change will affect jobs is also a frequent theme (Allen, 2017; Balliester & Elsheikhi, 2018; Santana & Cobo, 2020; Subramony, Kepes, Yagil, Groth & Solnet, 2023), in a discourse that is often technologically deterministic (Schlogl, Weiss & Prainsack, 2021). Articles on technology and the future of work in fields such as business, economics, and psychology on the topic have increased 16-fold from 2018 to 2022 (Subramony et al., 2023). In a literature review by the International Labor Organization (ILO) that included 255 studies that broadly address the future of work published in academic and practitioner outlets, the most common theme was technology and its impacts (e.g., technological unemployment, how technology shapes new forms of employment and raises the need for social protections) (Balliester & Elsheikhi, 2018).

Considering the future to be fundamentally contoured by technology has a long history in human thinking. For instance, new human capabilities are often portrayed as being born from advances in technology. In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from the Gods on Mt. Olympus, gifting humankind the technical skill of metalwork and propelling them into a brighter future (Dougherty, 2006). In the field of history, the “three-age system” used for almost two centuries categorizes human history into industrial time periods based on the technologies humans possessed, progressing from stone to bronze to iron (Heizer, 1962). In archeology, scholars distinguish between species’ level of advancement on the basis of technological innovations (Klein, 1989, 2000). As Crawford (1949: 100) wrote: “[archeology] shows how a primitive anthropoid climbed up from the apes by not only using and making tools... but also by thinking about them and improving them.” Accordingly, the notion of progress for humankind has a strong link to developments in technology.

The idea of “technology as progress” is also embodied in classic theories of organizations and management. Frederick Taylor, who led the “Efficiency Movement” in the early 1900s, relied on engineering principles to improve work. He proposed that industrial problems could be solved by applying

engineering principles that helped people to work more like machines. Taylor (1911: 24) asserted that work improves through “eliminating unnecessary motions and substituting fast for slow and inefficient motions for the men working in any of our trades,” as well as that “every single act of every workman can be reduced to a science” and standardized to change it for the better (Taylor, 1911: 64)—or, ultimately, *be replaced by a machine*. This tradition in management pushed the idea that work can be optimized by harnessing the power of technology—an idea still prevalent in conversations on the future of work today, as practitioners sometimes equate the future of work with the “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” born from advances in robotics, AI, digitalization, and automation (Armstrong, Parmelee, Santifort, Burley & van Fleet, 2018; Schwab, 2015). Likewise, searching Academy journals for articles that use the term “future of work” yields associated words like “technology,” “virtual,” “technological and scientific advances,” “automation,” “end of jobs,” “remote work,” and “smart machine.” This suggests that human imagination when it comes to the future of work may be somewhat constrained by a fixation on technology and its immediate impacts, and thus we risk holding a narrow, technology-centric perspective on the future of work, as is represented in Table 1.

Just as Taylorism was soon cast into question by the Hawthorne studies, today we may ask whether prioritizing technology as a solution to our human problems will ultimately serve us well. Sure, humans bring a whole host of needs and limitations (emotional, cognitive, intellectual, etc.) to work, whereas machines have predictable requirements for energy and maintenance and promise greater efficiency and consistency in many tasks. But unless machines enable a better future for people, what is their worth? Thus, by redirecting attention to the human side of the future of work, this AMD SRF seeks to broaden our understanding of the future of work, casting people not just as passive recipients of a technology-dominant future but rather as active cocreators of a future that serves them well. We hope to bring scholarly attention to the human side of the future of work: how individuals, organizations, and society feel about, make sense of, and ultimately act within, react to, and bring about our changing world of work. We suggest foregrounding the human side can broaden our perspectives on what the future of work can mean, expanding our imagination beyond a narrow technical view; this broader human-centric perspective on the future of work opens our eyes to a range of different future-of-work topics worthy of further study and is portrayed in Table 1.

The psychological literature on prospective cognition suggests that people rely on their knowledge of

**TABLE 1**  
**Technology-Centric and Human-Centric Understandings of the Future of Work**

Focus	Technology-Centric	Human-Centric
Nature of inquiry	Causality runs from technology and technological advance to changes in work, with implications for organizations and economies. Narrow, focusing on the direct effects of technological advancements on people, as well as processes, in workplaces.	Causality runs from human agency, mediated by cognition and emotion, to the actualization of technological affordances that shape the nature of work. Broad, focusing on a wide range of societal and organizational changes that are both shaped by and shape multiple stakeholders.
Example topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital transformation</li> <li>• Introduction of algorithms into work</li> <li>• AI</li> <li>• Automation, smart machines, robotics</li> <li>• Virtual and augmented reality</li> <li>• Technology-enabled alternative work arrangements (e.g., telecommuting)</li> <li>• Technology-enabled novel business models, industry platforms, and managed ecosystems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gig economy</li> <li>• Work practices</li> <li>• Remote work habits</li> <li>• Changing nature of jobs and careers</li> <li>• Shifting work orientations</li> <li>• Sabbaticals, side hustles, temporary assignments, multiple jobholding</li> <li>• Employment policy and contracts,</li> <li>• Diversity, inclusion and belonging</li> <li>• Emotions, well-being, mental health</li> <li>• Leadership, visions, planning</li> <li>• Organizational culture</li> <li>• Error management</li> <li>• Sociodemographic divides at work</li> <li>• Mass migration and hypermobility</li> <li>• Global tensions and sociopolitical events</li> </ul>

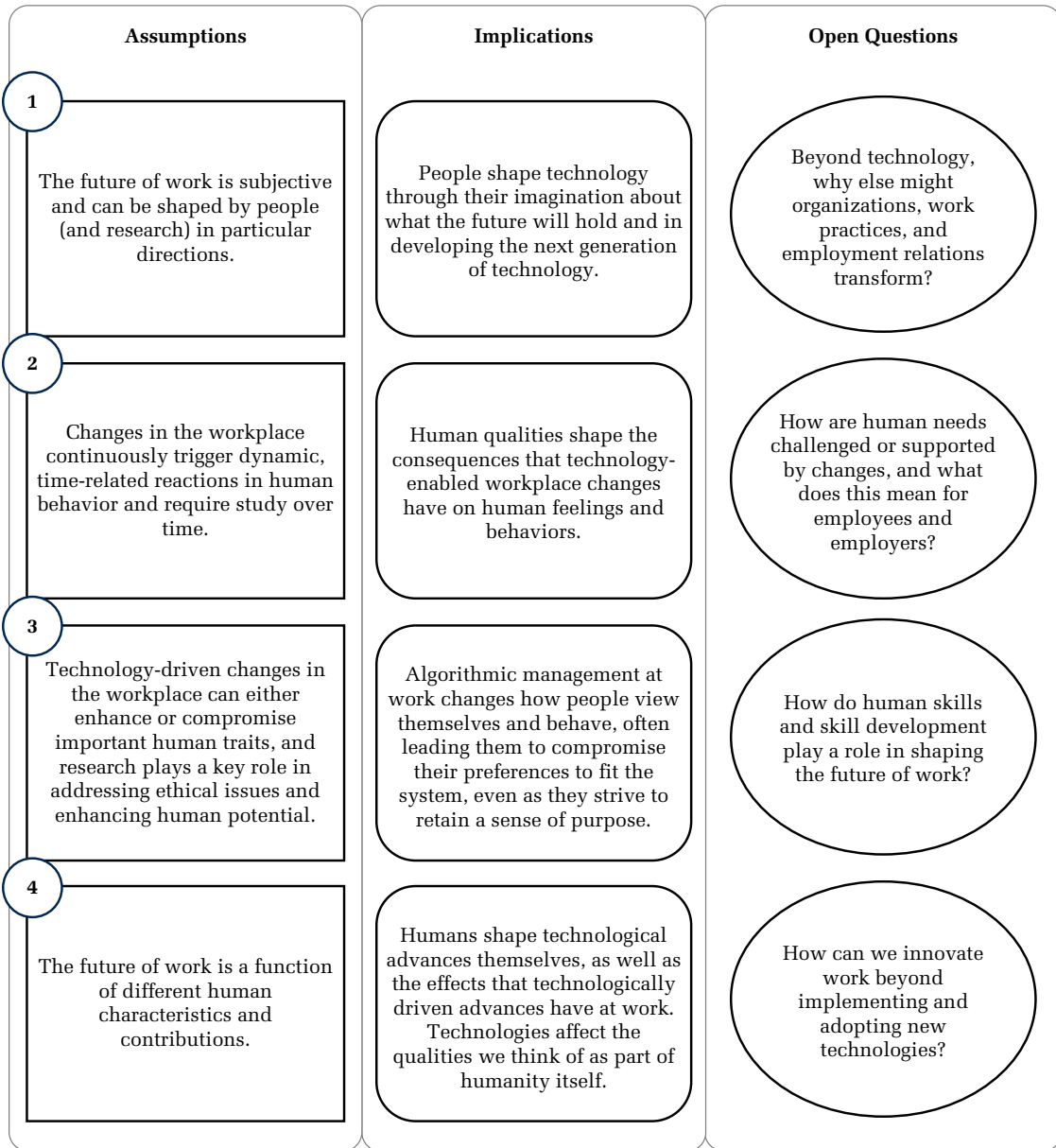
the past and present to form representations of the future (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007). Given the longstanding historical association of human progress with technology, it is perhaps no surprise that technology features prominently in current representations of the future of work. To expand our purview and imagine futures that depart from work defined by past and present technologies, we need a new way to represent how humans engage with technology at work. This AMD SRF challenges us to (re)consider how the future of work is created by human efforts to imagine and create, interpret and utilize, and develop and adapt technologies for work, as well as how human efforts shape the way technological advances ultimately transform the ways we work. These articles examine the humans behind the technology, through the narratives, roles, and emotions they deploy as creators, developers, and users of technology for work.

### **PUTTING A SPOTLIGHT ON HOW HUMANS SHAPE FUTURE-OF-WORK PROCESSES**

Through the eight articles in this AMD SRF, we hope to enrich and amplify ongoing conversations about the future of work and to catalyze new research questions and approaches to theory development on humans as orchestrators and mediators of, not just the recipients and reactors to, technology-driven changes in how we work. The first two articles

(Dries, Luyckx & Rogiers, 2024; Schertler, Glumann & Boehm, 2024) concern themes and trends in the future of work. The next three articles (Goštautaitė, Liubertė, Parker & Bučiūnienė, 2024; Scheibmayr & Reichel, 2024; Schweitzer & De Cremer, 2024) focus on algorithmic management and how people respond to it. The final three articles (Bucher, Schou & Waldkirch, 2024; Ma, Perlow & Eun, 2024; Myers, 2024) zoom in on how people behave in emerging contexts that represent ways of working enabled by technology—specifically, technology development, global teams, and platforms for gig work. Taken together, these articles illustrate how human qualities and efforts in the here and now can shape the coming tide of technology-enabled work. The imperative for management scholars to explicitly turn their attention to the future of work is evident in four areas (see Figure 1 for an overview). First, management scholars must consider how we can conceptualize the future of work. Looking at scholarship on the topic, the future of work appears amorphous, a term that has multiple meanings to different scholars even within fields (Santana & Cobo, 2020). Surprisingly absent from scholarship is an explicit consideration of what the “future of work” itself means as a construct (Balliester & Elsheikhi, 2018; Santana & Cobo, 2020). One contribution of the SRF is to showcase the subjective nature of the future of work—how the future of work means very different things to different actors and why these differences matter.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Assumptions, Implications, and Open Questions on the Human Side of the Future of Work from Articles in This SRF**



Dries et al. (2024) illustrate this explicitly by showing that, based on stakeholder interests and experiences, humans put forth different visions of the future of work that lend technology various roles, from threatening job destruction, to making human work faster and easier, to allowing more time for leisure and meaningful activities beyond work. Other authors in the SRF illustrate this implicitly by focusing on different angles of the future of work, whether technology development, algorithmic management, remote work, platform work, or geographically dispersed teams. Thus, to study the future of work, we first need to

decide *what it can mean and consider how it can be viewed through different lenses.*

Articles in this SRF suggest that lenses that situate human agency in different roles, as individuals and as members of collectives (e.g., task groups, organizations, communities of practice), warrant particular attention. For example, Myers (2024) foregrounds individuals driving technological innovation and reveals the unique perspectives and critical roles technology developers play in shaping the future of work. Perspectives that highlight human agency and how agency is shaped by human qualities (as the

SRF does) can be viewed as complementary to, or contradictory to, lenses that emphasize constraints on agency imposed by various systemic structural forces. We suggest that more productive conversations about the future of work will come from clarity regarding the specific bases of conflict and complementarity between alternative lenses. Such clarity enables scholars to embrace the ambiguity and amorphous nature of the topic and creatively weave together insights from multiple perspectives to create new, more holistic lenses for studying the future of work.

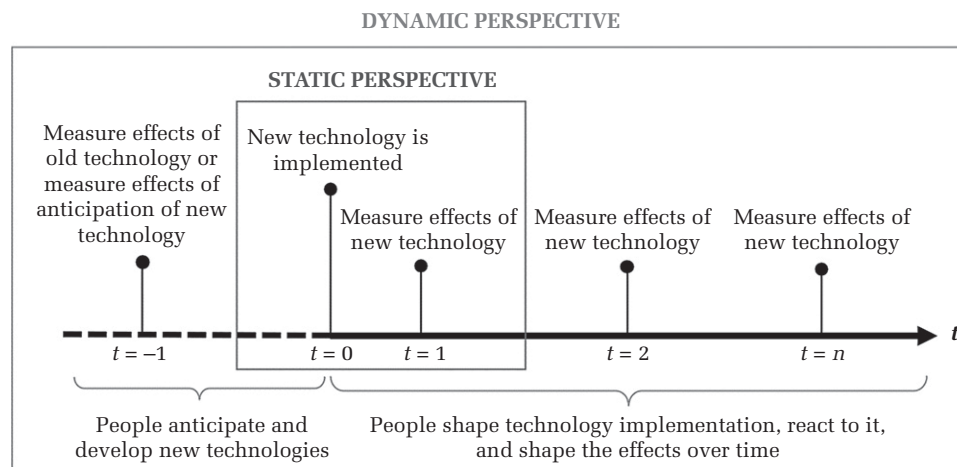
Second, the SRF calls attention to how human reactions to new technologies and other changes at work are dynamic rather than static, continuous rather than episodic. This insight underscores the need to study not only technology as it is implemented and immediately changes work, but also what happens prior to implementation and how changes continually evolve past the initial stages. After all, people both initiate change and react to it in ways that further shape the consequences of change. Myers (2024) illustrates the former in their focus on technology developers. Schertler et al. (2024) illustrate the latter when they show that increases in remote work prompt decreases in belonging, while, at the same time, decreased feelings of belonging lead to an increase in remote work. Similarly, Ma et al. (2024) show that the quality of information sharing in global teams affects team collective energy, which then further affects the quality of information sharing. These articles suggest that researchers need to think carefully and creatively about the temporal lenses they apply to gain insight into their phenomena of interest. In particular, to fully understand the future of work, scholars should consider employing a dynamic lens that incorporates how people anticipate and develop new technologies, as well as how people shape technology

implementation, react to it, and continue to shape its effects over time (see Figure 2).

Third, several articles illustrate how human values and attributes—whether embodied in basic human needs such as belonging and authenticity (Schertler et al., 2024) and meaning (Goštautaitė et al., 2024), human skills such as creativity (Schweitzer & De Cremer) and teamwork (Ma et al., 2024), or human behavior such as voice (Bucher et al., 2024)—can be supported or undermined amid technologically driven changes at work. The articles also identify circumstances in which technology at work leads to negative outcomes, such as people acting contrary to their values (Scheibmayr & Reichl, 2024) and unfairly evaluating others' behaviors (Schweitzer & De Cremer, 2024). This work points to opportunities to anticipate ethical dilemmas stemming from new technologies in the workplace, and suggest means to avoid or mitigate them. In addition, some articles highlight how technological advances influence perceptions of qualities that were once thought of as quintessentially human, such as creativity (Schweitzer & De Cremer, 2024), challenging our notions of whether these human qualities will be maintained in the future of work. Collectively, these articles show how research on the future of work that takes a human perspective can enable society to figure out how to maintain and foster what we care about for humans amid various technology-driven and other changes, and to devise strategies for offsetting potential costs for humans. In doing so, they show how management research can answer a crucial question: How do we maintain a focus on people in a world of work that seems increasingly determined by advances in technology?

Fourth, several articles identify antecedents to human reactions to new technologies and their impacts on how work gets done, highlighting the

**FIGURE 2**  
Example of a Dynamic Approach to the Study of the Future of Work



role that human qualities play in shaping how technology-driven changes ultimately affect work. For example, adding a new perspective to research on a host of technology-enabled alternative work arrangements such as the gig economy (Petriglieri & Ashford, 2019; Spreitzer, Cameron & Garrett, 2017) and remote work (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Shockley, Allen, Dodd & Waiwood, 2021), some articles focus on how stakeholders and their human qualities shape workplaces enabled through technological advances, and thus ultimately the consequences of these technology-enabled workplace changes for human feelings and behaviors. For example, Bucher et al.'s (2024) discoveries in exploring how gig workers engage in voice on digital platforms highlight how it is not just technology that shapes the expression of voice, but human qualities like status and group membership that shape how voice is enacted in digital spheres. Likewise, Ma, Perlow, and Eun (2024) show how human interaction shapes the evolving nature of work, specifically collaborative processes, revealing that in global teams, collective energy plays a critical role in how people share information in this work setting. Human actors and their qualities thus shape the way that workplace changes enabled by technology unfold, and these changes do not affect all individuals uniformly. The range of antecedents explored in the SRF includes differences in how humans imagine the future of work (Dries et al., 2024), gender (Schertler et al., 2024), personality (Dries et al., 2024), professional experience (Dries et al., 2024), interests (Dries et al., 2024; Myers, 2024), status (Bucher et al., 2024), and power (Myers, 2024). Thus, to fully appreciate the human forces shaping the future of work, scholars must embrace human diversity in all its forms.

### STUDYING THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE HERE AND NOW

With this AMD SRF, we hope to prompt management scholars to consider how we can, and should, study the future of work through empirical methods. Indeed, a critical challenge in developing scholarship on the future of work may be methodological. How can scholars study the future of work and its effects on people when the future is off in the distance? How can scientists who focus on working with data examine a future for which data do not yet exist? Given that the future is yet to come and inherently uncertain, it appears difficult to collect meaningful empirical data about it in the present.

These features of the future of work put management scholars at risk of falling into a “crystal ball” approach to the future of work, where we may venture into the business of futurists. This approach has been used in other fields, by, for example, scholars

in economics and computer science who (in highly cited papers) have aimed to predict how automation will change work and the kinds of jobs that will be left for humans (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Josten & Lordan, 2019). However, this approach comes with limitations. We can never be certain what the future holds. Even the most well thought-out, evidence-based predictions about the future of work could wind up being quickly outdated and, indeed, inaccurate. We already see some predictions by experts being challenged. For instance, the notion that creative intelligence presents a “bottleneck” that will prevent jobs from automation (Frey & Osborne, 2017) is being challenged by recent advances in generative AI that showcase AI artists such as DALL-E, and the notion that jobs that involve empathy are unlikely to be automated (Josten & Lordan, 2019) is being challenged by advances in affective robots that can recognize, interpret, and respond to human emotions—showing a sort of “machine emotional intelligence” and taking on a skill that was thought to be the purview of humans alone.

With a “crystal ball” approach, we may become locked into predicting and reacting to a future that “will” come. Yet, people create the future; it only takes form through our actions and inactions. This perspective of people as agentic actors flips the script away from the idea that people must simply accept, and aim to anticipate, a future that unfolds through inertial forces. Embracing this more human-centric perspective requires that, rather than viewing human actors as passive recipients of technological advancements and large-scale societal trends, we develop an understanding of how people act in, contribute to, and shape the emergent future of work.

Indeed, human action and inaction is inherent to how the future unfolds. Highlighting this, models in climate science consider human (in)action as a key variable that influences what version of the future comes to pass (e.g., Beckage et al., 2020). As with climate change, even under various sources and conditions of uncertainty, the future of work is created in part through agentic human action and the various cognitive, emotional, organizational, institutional, and other forces that shape human action. While at first this feature may seem to complicate predictions of the future by adding a new source of uncertainty, if we can understand how people will approach and react to changes in the world of work, we will gain a more accurate glimpse into our future and be better able to anticipate it. Thus, putting humans at the center of our efforts to understand the future of work—what it can be, what is desirable, and what is likely to be—can help us to understand the future better because it will be, at least in part, determined by humans.

With the AMD SRF, we showcase how management scholarship can inform our understanding of how people can take an active role in shaping the future of work and craft it in ways that keep humanity front and center, whether through developing new technology or deciding how to implement it, devising strategies to support human needs and skills as the workplace changes, or anticipating and offsetting human costs that the future may entail. Through such scholarship, we can go beyond trying to predict and engage with futures that are plausible and probable to pose questions that have relevance to what a *more desirable* future of work can look like (Gümüsaya & Reinecke, 2022). Essentially, we suggest moving the question addressed in scholarship from “What *will* the future of work look like?” to questions like “How do human efforts *create* the future of work?” and “How can humanity be preserved in the future amidst changes?” With well over 100 years of modern management research to draw from, some of which specifically focuses on the human side (e.g., in organizational behavior, managerial cognition, and related fields), we are well placed as scholars to provide input into designing and building a better future of work, ultimately creating more productive and fulfilling workplaces, more competitive organizations, and more prosperous nations.

The articles in this SRF provide new insight into how management scholars can question and study the future of work, without aiming to predict it. These authors illustrate how research can use archival, as well as experimental and simulation, methods to do so. Using an archival approach analyzing newspaper articles, Dries et al. (2024) examine societal narratives that present different visions of the future of work. A large body of literature on visions supports the idea that how people imagine the future is consequential for their actions (Kearney, Shemla, Van Knippenberg & Scholz, 2019; Stam, Lord, van Knippenberg & Wisse, 2014) and that visions of the future can galvanize action in organizations, particularly when they convey vivid images (Carton & Lucas, 2018; Carton, Murphy & Clark, 2014). Yet management scholars have not yet asked questions about how people imagine the future of work, including *their* work. Exploring how people envision the future of work, in the present, can offer insight into actions that might bring about a desired future and how to encourage them.

Illustrating the value of experimental and simulation methods, articles in this AMD SRF use them to create alternative visions of future work, and test how they affect people. For example, Schweizer and De Cremer (2024) investigate different future scenarios via experimental vignettes that explore how a limited versus a wide rollout of algorithmic management could exacerbate or mitigate perceptions of

reduced creativity when people are managed by machines. As another example, in a mixed-methods study Scheibmayr and Reichel (2024) use a classroom simulation to explore how undergraduate students react to algorithmic human resource management. These articles highlight how experimental research and simulations can be used to probe different versions of the future of work as it could unfold in organizations, to gain insight even before such changes occur.

As we consider images of the future to be important drivers of human behavior (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005) and assess consequences of certain images before they are realized, we may create or discover a new perspective that can then be enacted, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy as subjective beliefs affect actions and thereby shape the realized future (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Importantly, this suggests we are not fated to one inescapable future of work, but rather that scholars and other societal actors will inevitably affect dialogues around the future of work and consequently the evolution of organizational work practices.

Beyond exploring what the future could look like and its effects on people, the articles in the AMD SRF also highlight what we can learn about people from critically examining contexts that involve newer ways of working as they emerge. For example, qualitative research can be deployed to extrapolate implications for the future of work based on observations made in the present. Goštautaitė et al. (2024) exemplify this approach in their longitudinal qualitative study of how people respond to labor replacement by robots, using insights from the present to shed light on how people may maintain a sense of meaning at work as robot coworkers increasingly become the norm. As another example, Ma et al. (2024) use ethnographic research to examine information sharing in global teams, with implications for how global teams can more effectively work together as this context becomes increasingly common in the future of work.

As AMD encourages, the articles offer insight into nascent and poorly understood phenomena within intriguing contemporary contexts, including algorithmic management and platforms for gig work. In addition to enriching our understanding of the forces that are shaping the future of work, these articles offer nuanced insights gained through deep immersion in their study contexts. For example, Ma et al. (2024) were able to station members of their research team across the world at two locations in the United States and China over the course of seven concurrent months, allowing the researchers to observe the daily lives of team members and, critically, to compare disconnects across these contexts that, without immersion, would have been unapparent. This in-depth observation allowed the researchers to be uniquely privy to what was shared and not shared with remote team



members, sparking deeper insights into information sharing across global teams. Methodologically rigorous, exploratory, context-immersed research has unique potential to uncover insights with compelling theoretical and practical implications. The phenomenon-forward, discovery-oriented nature of AMD also ensures we build theory in cutting-edge contexts that represent new directions in the world of work as they emerge.

### RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE STUDY OF THE FUTURE OF WORK

Conducting research on the future of work may seem risky for management scholars. Uncertainty about what the future holds not only presents methodological challenges but also raises questions about whether one's research will remain relevant as the world of work continues to evolve and change in unexpected ways. Given the rapidly changing nature of work versus the often-lengthy peer review and revision process, there is a risk that future-of-work manuscripts, especially their relevance to practitioners, could become outdated by the time of their publication. Further, the need to connect discoveries to prior research could limit our ability to envision "what could be" that may be particularly relevant for the future of work. Adopting a human-centered perspective might attenuate these dilemmas, as human tendencies and capabilities tend to evolve more slowly than those of emergent technologies. Since a driving force for technological advance is human empowerment, viewing the future of work through a human lens to understand when, how, and why technologies succeed or fail to augment human experiences at work

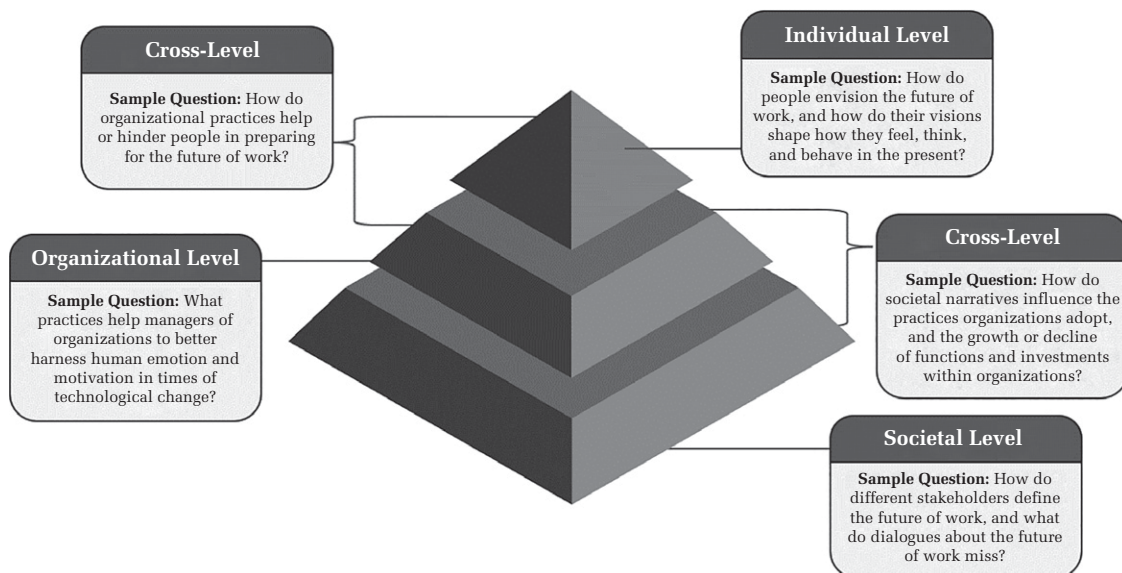
is essential. Such work provides a necessary foundation for considering larger questions regarding how human, technologies, and work can coevolve in ways that lead to enhanced quality of life on multiple dimensions, for all members of our global society.

### THE FUTURE OF THE FUTURE OF WORK IN MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Where should management scholarship on the future of work go from here? What might scholars do differently to enrich our understanding of future work? We suggest that scholars make explicit how their research informs future-of-work phenomena at multiple levels (see Figure 3 for an illustration). At the individual level, we need to better understand how people imagine their work in the future, what they hope for, and why this matters, such as through future-of-work scenarios and how these affect people's expectations of work and demands of employers. At the organizational level, we need to understand extreme scenarios, such as how radical changes in socioeconomic systems could alter the characteristics of essential talent pools and influence how organizations apply technologies to manage, augment, and replace talent. At the societal level, the narratives that organizational, political, and other leaders promote regarding the future of work and their motivations should be examined. Across each of these levels, we need to understand human-driven forces leading to alternative outcomes for future work.

This collection of papers pushes us to look beyond a narrow focus on technology, while acknowledging its centrality to the future of work. Redefining scholarship

**FIGURE 3**  
Example Research Questions at Different Levels of Analysis in the Study of the Future of Work





on the future of work as human-centered would entail connecting with other research conversations, as indicated in Table 1, that address relationships between individuals and their work, and between organizations and their employees. Three examples of such scholarship are as follows: Research on diversity is relevant to the future of work, as a more diverse workforce is a goal that is still to be achieved (Nishii, Khattab, Shemla & Paluch, 2018); research on emotions, particularly at collective levels of analysis, has implications for the well-being of workers in a future of work that is fraught with mental health issues (Menges & Kilduff, 2015); and research on visions and leadership is also about the future of work, as it engages with the question of how leaders can leverage images of the future to motivate workers in the present (Carton et al., 2014).

To expand conversations on the human side of the future of work, we might include topics such as the changing nature of leadership and organizational culture regarding tolerance for errors at work (Carroll, Christianson, Frese, Lei, Naveh & Vogus, 2021), or the work value of emotional intelligence and empathy (Menges, 2012). We might make stronger connections to topics such as the sharing economy (Laamanen, Pfeffer, Rong & Van de Ven, 2018) and diversity, equity, and inclusion (Federer, 2024) to inform how organizations and policymakers can foster more inclusive technologies and economic opportunities, and how managers can address sociodemographic divisions at work (Reinwald, Kanitz, Backmann, Bamberger & Hoegel, 2022; Reinwald & Kunze, 2020). We might include mass migration as a future-of-work priority, given its importance in a hypermobile working world (Groutsis, Vassilopoulou, Ozbilgin, Fujimoto & Barak, 2023). These are important topics in contemporary management scholarship, and some have featured in prior SRFs in AMD. Yet, their connections to our understanding of the future of work are often absent. By bringing together future-of-work research, which tends to be technology-led, with management research on how organizations are dealing with salient societal changes we can craft a more human-centered approach to studying the evolving nature of work, workers, and work practices.

The articles in this AMD SRF apply a human-centered perspective to understand technology-driven changes in the world of work, ranging from algorithmic management to working in remote settings or global teams facilitated by technology. They encourage us to consider how work can promote and incorporate advancements in human capacities, capabilities, and propensities, and accommodate human qualities that are slow to change. We hope others will build on this perspective by considering human-driven forces that are transforming the world of work, in conjunction with technology. Specifically, we encourage research

on the future of work to expand upon the studies presented here by considering:

- What kinds of societal, ecological, economic, and geopolitical forces will reshape work practices, and employment relationships, in addition to technological change? How do people shape these forces? What roles do human emotions and heterogenous life experiences play in driving dominant responses to these forces, with what consequences for the emerging future of work?
- How do human needs like belongingness evolve, and what does this mean for technology use and social contracts between organizations and employees? How are social contracts between employees and organizations changing to accommodate new demands for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and expectations regarding purpose and passion at work (Jachimowicz & Weisman, 2022)?
- How is global competition for talent shaping organizations' approaches to skill development, and with what consequences for the future of work? How do organizations that need both low-tech and high-tech talent balance their different expectations and demands? How do the members of distinctive talent pools think about skill development over their lifespans or expected career trajectories, and how does this affect the way organizations prepare for future work? How are requisite social and emotional skills changing, as compared to cognitive and technical skills?
- How can we innovate work beyond implementing and adopting new technologies? For instance, how can we apply insights in management scholarship about how people think, feel, and relate to others at work to improve coordination, cooperation, and collaboration in the future? How can leadership and organizational processes be changed to better harness human cognition, emotion, and interaction in ways that help people to feel and do their best at work?

### THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A HUMAN-CENTERED FUTURE OF WORK

Management scholars have a critical role to play in shaping the future of work through the evidence their research generates and ideas they propose on the basis of that evidence. Research on the future of work is salient to a diverse array of stakeholders. For instance, intergovernmental entities such as the World Economic Forum (2024), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (n.d.), and the ILO (n.d.) prioritize understanding and shaping the future of work. Governmental departments and science

organizations similarly highlight the topic, with the U.S. National Science Foundation (n.d.) identifying the future of work as a top 10 investment area and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (n.d.) hosting a platform for the future of work and partnering with France, Japan, and the United States to find solutions. Consultancies such as BCG (n.d.), McKinsey & Company (n.d.), PwC (n.d.), and many others offer a suite of services to help companies prepare for the future of work, underscoring its importance for the business world. Thus, the future of work concerns us all, whether imagining the future of our own work lives or those of the generations to come.


Broadening the future of work beyond technology to strongly feature its human side must have practical implications for these stakeholders. At a proximal level, the emphasis on technologies' roles in the literature on future work may influence management education (e.g., the degree to which business schools expand their portfolio of courses focused on technical skills, as compared to socioemotional skills). At a distal level, it may influence the strategic objectives organizational leaders establish, the skills employees concentrate on building to reskill for their futures at work, and how government and nonprofit entities support communities preparing for the future of work. Management scholars may also influence designers, developers, and commissioners of technology to prioritize augmenting human performance.

If the literature on the future of work begins to increase its focus on people—as indeed we hope this AMD SRF will inspire—then this may also shift the topics that are seen as most essential to tackle in preparing the workforce for the future of work, such that we may pursue greater diversity, well-being, and sustainability with the same enthusiasm as we pursue incorporating generative AI and other technologies. In practice, our research in management is what ought to help companies function more effectively and could form a competitive advantage for some; if our reach is broad, then our research would ultimately support people at work across industries and contexts in a way that benefits everyone who participates in the economy. Thus, with our findings, we have the potential to shape the future. This creates the need to communicate our findings in ways that are palatable to broad audiences and aim for rapid dissemination. AMD provides scholars with scaffolding for this endeavor, for example by creating whiteboard abstracts for papers to communicate results in a way that can reach broad audiences and make the often all-too-complex nature of academic research as widely understandable as possible. We hope that by featuring this, that the articles in this AMD SRF will encourage organizations to pursue a more human-centric future of work.

## CONCLUSION

French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once wrote, “as for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it” (Law, 2011). Similarly, American computer scientist Alan Kay (2018) quipped: “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” In this spirit, we hope that this AMD SRF titled “The Human Side of the Future of Work: Understanding the Role People Play in Shaping a Changing World” will prompt reflection on the kinds of futures management research enables humans to create. We hope that the AMD SRF will inspire researchers to pose new questions about how employees, leaders, organizations, and society at large can wisely develop and harness new technologies, support and nurture valuable human attributes at work amid change, and even imagine different versions of the future that will unfold, so that the future of work can be driven in an evidence-based way toward a brighter direction for people.

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