WORK SMART, LIVE WELL

WEEKLY INSPIRATION · BY VANESSA ARADIA

ISSUE 06 · SATURDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2026 · A WORK SMART, LIVE WELL CIC PUBLICATION

The Work We Can Shape

Feedback, voice and the systems that can hear their own work

THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT

A system learns when information can travel back to the people who design it.

THIS WEEK'S BIG IDEA: THE WORK WE CAN SHAPE

That sounds straightforward. Yet many changes at work arrive as finished decisions. A new tool is introduced, a process is accelerated, a measure is added. The people who know where the work becomes difficult are then asked to adapt.

This week, the Institute for the Future of Work published research showing that workplace technology can produce very different experiences. Some workers gain autonomy and opportunities to learn; others encounter greater monitoring, intensity or reduced control. Its argument is that workers need meaningful ways to shape technology throughout its design and use.

READ THE IFOW RESEARCH ON WORKER VOICE

That gives us a question for Work Smart, Live Well:

> *Can the people closest to the work change the system that shapes their day?*

Having a voice means more than being invited to comment. It means being able to identify a problem, see what happens to that information and influence the next decision.

AN IDEA TO DEVELOP: THE FEEDBACK LOOP OF GOOD WORK

Try this as a team exercise, a workshop or a chapter of your own thinking, under the title The Work We Can Shape. Invite a team to trace one recent change through four questions.

STAGE	QUESTION
Before	Who described the problem the change was meant to solve?
During	Who could test it and point out what was missed?
After	Where do people report its effects on workload, learning and judgement?
Next	Who has the authority to alter or stop it?

The final question matters.

> *Feedback that cannot change a decision eventually becomes a request for patience.*

AI makes this especially timely. In an IBM survey released this week, 42% of employees said AI increases their work or leaves work unrecognised, while 80% of HR leaders said AI creates "invisible" tasks, such as checking outputs and correcting mistakes. These are survey findings, rather than proof of what every workplace experiences, but they point to work that a productivity measure could easily miss.

READ THE IBM CHRO STUDY

A useful principle might be:

> *When a tool saves time, ask whose time it saves and what new work it creates.*

A NATURE CONNECTION: RESPOND TO WHAT IS HAPPENING

A September study of farmland birds offers an unusually clear lesson in listening to conditions. Conservation schemes often set fixed dates when farming activity can resume around nesting birds. Researchers examined decades of lapwing and oystercatcher nesting records and found that timing varies by species and latitude. They propose dates informed by those local conditions.

READ THE STUDY IN THE JOURNAL OF APPLIED ECOLOGY

The ecological finding has its own importance. It also offers a careful metaphor for work: a sensible plan can fail when the system has no way to respond to what is actually happening.

> *A calendar says it is time to proceed. Observation says the chicks are still there.*

At work, the equivalent signal may come from a colleague who notices that a new process takes longer, a customer who cannot use it, or a junior employee who has lost a chance to practise. Good design leaves room for that information to change the plan.

ON THE READING AND LISTENING SHELF

RESEARCH

Building good work in the age of AI

The Institute for the Future of Work's new research on why anticipatory governance, rights and worker voice matter. Read this for its account of why worker participation belongs in technology decisions.

READ, LISTEN OR WATCH

RESEARCH

IBM's 2026 CHRO study

Two surveys covering 1,500 HR leaders and 8,800 employees. The findings on judgement, accountability and invisible work provide practical questions for leaders introducing AI.

READ, LISTEN OR WATCH

RESEARCH

Timing matters for farmland breeding waders

Published in the Journal of Applied Ecology. A research example of how a rule becomes more useful when it responds to local evidence.

READ, LISTEN OR WATCH

PODCAST

Wild About Wellbeing

From The Wildlife Trusts. Its nature and creativity conversations offer a change of pace for a weekend walk.

READ, LISTEN OR WATCH

THINK AND CREATE: A PROMPT FOR YOUR OWN WRITING

Begin with:

> *A good workplace can hear what its own work is telling it.*

Describe a change that looked successful from a distance. Then move closer. What did it ask people to learn, check, repair or carry? Who noticed first? What happened when they spoke?

Finish by imagining the moment when their observation changed the design.

PAUSE AND NOTICE: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Where am I adapting to something I could help reshape?

Consider a routine, a technology, a relationship or an expectation. What have you learned from living with it that its original designer could not have known?

THIS WEEK'S EXPERIMENT: CLOSE ONE FEEDBACK LOOP

Choose one recurring friction in your working week.

Write down what happens, who it affects and one change you could test. Share that observation with someone able to act on it, or make the change yourself if it is within your control. At the end of the week,

note what changed and what you still need to learn.

Keep the experiment small enough to complete. Its purpose is to experience the difference between noticing a problem and helping a system respond.

A FINAL THOUGHT

A living system pays attention to the conditions it has created. A flourishing workplace can do the same.

WORK SMART IS THE MEANS. LIVING WELL IS THE POINT.

Vanessa Aradia

WORK SMART, LIVE WELL · WEEKLY INSPIRATION · ISSUE 06