

LABOUR IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: A LOOMING CRISIS OF (IN)DECENT WORK?

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**Q1: IS WORK BECOMING
LESS DECENT?**

ILO CONCEPTIONS OF DECENT WORK

“Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men” (ILO 2018).



FREEDOM, AUTONOMY AND SURVEILLANCE

- ▣ ICTs enabling work portability
- ▣ Surveillance and monitoring:
 - Metrification of performance (e.g., keystrokes, call times) against management-defined standards
 - Use of 'efficiency managers'
 - Cameras and hand held tracking devices
 - Security scanners
 - Direct and indirect monitoring of online behaviour
 - Wearable devices



“Wonder if the poorly-read, largely white, nationalist drinkers and gamblers pause today to consider the horror that all mankind suffered”



EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN ACCESSING WORK



AI is being sold as a replacement for the costly human side of hiring

Profiling is an increasingly common yet subversive practice

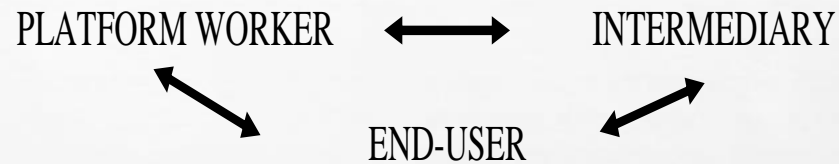


PUBLIC AND OR
PRIVATE LIVES



**Q2: IS PLATFORM WORK
DECENT WORK?**

DIGITAL PLATFORM WORK



- Features of platforms suggest the organisation and experience of platform work may be profoundly different than traditional employment arrangements
- Platform workers typically classified as independent contractors (Productivity Commission 2016); a subset of freelancers or portfolio workers
- Emerging empirical evidence of the motivations of digital platform workers to participate and costs and benefits of doing so
- Benefits: flexibility, autonomy, work/life balance; enhanced skills; ability to supplement existing income; new opportunities to make a living; transparency and fairness (e.G., Productivity commission 2016; Valenduc & Vendramin 2016)



QUALITY/DECENCY OF DIGITAL PLATFORM WORK



- ❑ Wages generally low and often below minimum
- ❑ Social protections may be absent
- ❑ Democracy, voice and participation
- ❑ Flexibility or ultra-responsive?
- ❑ Some apps only available on the latest smartphones
- ❑ Management by algorithm
- ❑ Begging and bragging; unfair review systems
- ❑ Harsh penalties for missed jobs
- ❑ (E.G., Boyce et al 2007; Huws 2014; Hill 2015)

**Q3: HOW INEVITABLE IS THE DEMISE
OF DECENT WORK?**

Resistance to digital platforms: photographers

CONSTRAINED
ability to develop
quality, long-term
client relationships
necessary for repeat
business

THREATENED
professional
identity and
creative
community

DAMAGED
reputations; users
labelled as non-
experts, new-
comers, amateurs

**LIMITED (FAIR)
INCOME**
Useful only for
portfolio or network
building and
supplementary
income

OTHER EXAMPLES OF RESISTANCE

- ▣ Underground fightback of sorts against automation in recruitment where applicants game the system by:
 - Creating fake applications to scope processes
 - Slipping words like 'oxford' into cvs in invisible white text to pass the automated screening
- ▣ 'Workarounds' used by Uber drivers such as logging off to avoid distant requests and turning off 'driver mode' in bad neighbourhoods to avoid jobs they didn't want
- ▣ Industrial disputes related to the gig economy; in particular, gig workers claiming employee status and entitlements to minimum wages and sick/holiday pay

ALTERNATIVE PLATFORM BUSINESS MODELS

- ▣ Recently, a Danish platform for cleaning in private homes signed a collective agreement with 3F, a Danish trade union
 - Guarantees people who work on the platform have access to fair pay (19Euro per hour), sick and holiday pay, and a contribution to their pension
 - Potentially raises the bar for the gig economy and demonstrates how expectations of a fair and decent labour market can align with new digital business models
- ▣ In Australia, Hireup is the legal employer of disability support workers; provide payroll (at casual rates) and insurances
- ▣ Platform cooperatives – structures of traditional cooperatives; worker ownership and governance (Up&Go)



CONCLUSIONS

- ▣ Whilst technological unemployment is without doubt a concern, more pressing concern is that technology has already substantially shifted risks from employers to employees
- ▣ Australia has some of the highest indicators of job quality
- ▣ Work is becoming more diverse, fragmented and individualised; need to **reinvent social protection schemes**
- ▣ Digital platform work deserves urgent attention from policy makers and the development of appropriate regulation (Drahokoupil & Fabo 2016)
- ▣ Significant fiscal challenges for governments
- ▣ Insecure, indecent work **is neither inevitable or predetermined**; in the right institutional context, modern technology can be harnessed for emancipatory ends (Bellmy Foster 2017; Gorz 1999)

Work/Industry Futures Research Program

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Members of the Work/Industry Futures Research Program are linked through ongoing collaborative research projects, relationships with organisational partners, the shared supervision of higher degree research (HDR) students, and cross-faculty and cross-institutional collaborations.



Our areas of research

Our members are engaged in large and small research projects in a diverse range of organisational and industry contexts.



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Contact us

View the various ways you can contact members of the Work/Industry Futures Research Program.

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