



Work in the digital economy: what is old - what is new

Many people think, 'the world of work is set to be hit by a veritable digital tsunami, shattering our present preconceptions about employment. A substantial proportion of the jobs we know today will be rendered obsolete'.

Based on more than 25 years of research, the authors intend to get a better grasp on the digital economy by examining whether the changes we witness today are a continuation of previous trends or a radical change from the past.

For this, they investigate in the first part of the document, which aspects of the digital economy model can be deemed genuine novelties and potential harbingers of major breaks with the past, and which aspects are merely amplified versions of existing trends for industry and service-sector restructuring and workplace transformations.

The second part of the document addresses the main digital changes which nowadays impact strongly on workplaces and lead with them to important future transformations.

The third part examines the new forms of work generated by the digital economy.

The fourth and final part of the document shows the impact of the newly emerging unstructured work environment on the relationships between an individual and the collective, notably with the rise in remote working and broadens the perspective on patterns of integration at work. It raises the challenges our more and more individualised and unstructured work environment poses to collective organisation and regulation.

In their conclusion, the authors call for politicians and trade unions to give top priority to the digitalisation-related challenges.

The authors observe that the smart industry model is being accelerated by the more recent introduction of communicating objects, autonomous robots and learning machines, giving birth to a wide variety of flexible and non-standard forms of work and of business models.

In their minds, digitalisation will nonetheless not change the role of work, which is and will remain central in our individual and collective identity. The phenomenon is of a complex nature, involving interplaying factors such as economic return, work organisation and skills management, and should not be reduced to a technological performance/productivity gains ratio, nor lead to pessimistic conclusions according to which we should expect the increasing replacement of human labour by robots. For the authors, a more positive vision is possible, focusing on the co-existence and complementarity of workers and robots.

Special attention should nevertheless be given to ICT-based mobile workers, a new category of workers operating in increasingly intangible and globalised environments, without time or space regulations, and for whom boundaries between work and home, between employment and self-employment and between producers and consumers of digitised information are blurred.

The rebuilding of social links in increasingly unstructured work situations represents both a challenge and an urgent necessity.



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ETUI report by Gérard Valenduc & Patricia Vendramin - 'Work in the digital economy: sorting the old from the new'

EN <https://www.etui.org/Publications2/Working-Papers/Work-in-the-digital-economy-sorting-the-old-from-the-new>

FR https://irt.univ-amu.fr/sites/irt.univ-amu.fr/files/le_travail_dans_leconomie_digitale_gerard_valenduc_et_patricia_vendramin_ftu.pdf