



**NEW
TECHNOLOGY:
SAME OLD
WORK?**
**HIGHLIGHTING CPOW
RESEARCH AND
RESEARCHERS**

Centre for People,
Organisation & Work



Dr. Stan Karanasios: The different ways technology changes and supports work



The discourse around digital disruption, automation and the transformation of work and industry has grown in recent years. The CPOW panel in this year's Business Research Showcase addresses the interesting question—how much has work changed? Some of Stan's recent research on the use of technology—such as social media and smartphones—by frontline police officers, suggests that while the information tools have changed, the nature of their work remains the same. On the other hand, some of his other research around digital skills in the Australian work force suggests that the skill sets required by employees are changing, and his recent research on Financial Technology in Africa suggest possible disruption to the very nature of the finance space. The answer to the question of 'Same old work?' is therefore problematised by context, the type of technology disruption and social, economic and political factors. These challenges, issues and debates are central to CPOW's research and in particular the theme of Digital Business, Work and Life. Our intention is to inform debates and lead impactful research that can better support organisations and policy makers to navigate the challenges, implications and opportunities arising from rapid changes in digital technology.

Dr. Fiona Macdonald: Taking time and relationships out of care work in the gig economy?



The impact of technology on work in the social care sector is much wider than the obvious innovations, such as replacing care workers with assistive technologies or robotic companions. One of the main applications of digital technology in this field, as in other low-paid service sectors, is in providing employers or labour 'brokers' with much greater control of working time. In labour intensive services, such as care work, while investing in worker skills, can be one way to increase productivity and efficiency, under increasingly public funding constraints, a more common way is to intensify work and, as far as possible, reduce any worker 'downtime'. Digital technology makes it possible to deploy 'just-in-time' service workers and closely monitor and limit the time for which they are paid, excluding all 'non-productive' time (like doing necessary admin work, communicating with supervisors, following up client needs or travelling between clients) from paid work time. Digital platforms also enable care 'brokers' to control individual care workers' access to the labour market by controlling worker 'star ratings' on online matching sites. Most of these platform-based brokers also treat workers as self-employed contractors, placing the brokers outside of the sphere of care and employment regulation, leaving the worker with much greater responsibility and bearing much of the risk. Fiona's research is investigating care work in the context of Australia's new National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Dr. Annie Delaney: Can technology improve ethical and transparency outcomes in global garment supply chains?



impact and potential for

Her current research engages with technologies such as Blockchain and Radio Frequency Identification, to explore how they can be used by garment brands to make supply chain information available to improve ethical and transparency outcomes. The project examines how new technologies can provide greater worker agency and empowerment in the tracking of the labour and environmental conditions under which goods are made, allowing for more virtuous cycles of information and transparency. The research occurs at a time when increasing pressure on corporations to become ethical and accountable, and the need for improved capacity of civil society actors, unions and labour rights groups to thwart the human tragedy that has become synonymous with the garment industry.

The feminized, labor-intensive garment supply chains display a great intricacy of structure, involving many different suppliers for the array of raw materials and production processes that converge in garment manufacture. Lead firm and buyer price pressures on suppliers and subcontractors contribute to low wages, precarious work conditions and lack of freedom of association in these industries. Evidence suggests that transparency in the supply chain is a critical step toward addressing protection of workers and to prevent human rights abuse occurrences amongst all tiers of the supply chain. Recent calls for global brands to take a transparency pledge and commit to supply chain transparency are placing greater demands on these corporations to publish information that will enable labour advocates to find out where their products are made. Annie's research engages in issues around how supply chains are governed and what is the

Dr. Katherine Howard: Opportunities and challenges for Information Management professionals and educators



are not being considered. Information Management educators have an extraordinary opportunity to be involved in educating the upcoming generation of data scientists, which may include roles in research data management, data analytics and digital curation. Yet very few IM programs, particularly in Australia, are teaching the skills that will be required for graduates to be competitive when applying for these roles. Katherine's research focuses on identifying and analysing changes to job titles, job descriptions, and skill and knowledge requirements that have changed as a result of digital technology. The implications that this has for IM education and educators is then examined by taking an international comparative approach to curricula developments.

The advent of digital technologies has greatly expanded the opportunities for Information Management professionals. Their familiarity with information storage, retrieval, use, re-use, preservation and curation, together with well-honed processes of search and evaluation of both digital and analogue forms of information, have them well placed to contribute to the emerging discipline of data science. However, there are concerns that data science, as an emerging academic discipline, is being driven solely by computer science and information technology, and that the values, principles, and perspectives that underpin Information Management (IM)

Prof. Peter Fairbrother: Why a 'political economy of work innovation' matters



The uncertainties about work matter. Often, people experience their work in fragmented ways, with major disruptions to how they live their lives. Major changes include technological transformations, the emergence of global production networks, and transitions to sustainable development. These developments and experiences underline the importance of considering the conditions for better and worse work. The aim is to elaborate the conditions under which insecure work becomes better work, possibly through such practices as flexible employment arrangements, alternative business models, and the benefits of collective mobilisation. Specifically, Peter's research addresses regional transitions and work, often where labour markets are highly concentrated in specific industries. The skills needs and processes of transition, for example, regional

lock-in may occur where industries rely on traditionally trained and experienced workforces in relatively self-contained communities. These themes are addressed in two related projects. First, using a labour process and labour market approach, one project identifies the processes of workforce transition when the automation of work via digital technologies takes place. The second project concerns the impact of climate change, with a focus on resource dependent regions, concentrating on the associated environmental and policy changes underway. These projects aim to contribute to the development of strategies of change and to provide practical cases to identify the conditions for better transitions for workers and their households. It comprises the consideration of long-term and short-term variability arising from seasonal rhythms, disaster events and recovery and longer-term climate change. This research contributes to the development of analytic models that focus on the intersection between labour processes (the organisation and operation of work tasks) and labour markets (employment and related processes) and shifting contextual factors, including the varied forms for regulating work.

Assoc. Professor Mike Rafferty: The Platform economy: Unbundling jobs - shifting risk

In February 2016, the JP Morgan Chase Research Institute released a study based on high-frequency data from a randomized sample of 1 million Chase customers. It looked at the impact of growing income volatility associated with these forms of work on households. One of its conclusions was that: "Rapidly growing online platforms, such as Uber and Airbnb, have created a new marketplace for work by unbundling a job into discrete tasks and directly connecting individual sellers with consumers. These flexible, highly accessible opportunities to work have the potential to help people buffer against income and expense shocks. The "Online Platform Economy" offers fewer worker protections than traditional work arrangements, however, which has led some to claim that the Online Platform Economy represents a fundamental shift in the nature of work."

JPMorgan Chase's depiction of a process of unbundling jobs into discrete tasks is not unique to the 'online platform economy': indeed work in many sectors and occupations have been acquiring many of these characteristics for several decades. Rather what JP Morgan is identifying, in the particular instance of platform-based employment, is the emerging financial logic of more and more paid work. Mike's research has been investigating how workers in the world of work are being expected to take on more and more risk, and often to manage those risks through financial markets that are increasingly underpinned by platform technologies.

Assoc. Professor Marta Poblet Balcell: Linked Democracy



The third generation of the Web (or Web of Data) makes it possible for citizens, groups, organisations, and governments to experiment with new forms of democratic practices in different spaces (citizen assemblies, organisations, workplaces, etc.). Linked Democracy draws from the analogy with the Linked Open Data (LOD) paradigm to explore new ecosystems connecting people, open data, knowledge, and democratic institutions in the digital era. The goal of our team in this new project is to address questions such as: How to analyse the interactions between citizens, open data, and the digital tools that create new spaces and forms of civic action in the digital era? How to analyse the emerging properties (e.g. action-guiding rules) and knowledge in these contexts? How we design socio-technical systems that effectively leverage crowdsourcing, microtasking, open data and knowledge for deliberation and collective decision making? In particular, what are the opportunities and challenges of microtasking for both volunteers and paid workers? Can we design the meta-rules of emergent participatory ecosystems? In our first Linked Democracy Workshop on August 19, held in conjunction with the International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence (IJCAI 2017), we brought together about 30 researchers in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Web science, social sciences, law and philosophy to discuss on how democratic practices can benefit from recent advances in AI and the Web of Data. Linking data, for example, already offers tangible benefits to services, companies, and customers. Are there also benefits for citizens, patients, workers, etc.? We envisage that linking people, data, and knowledge could also improve the openness, inclusiveness and effectiveness of democratic systems.

Dr. Lena Wang: Same Old Work in a Changing World? A Work Design Perspective



What is a good work design? What are the types of jobs that motivate us to drag ourselves from bed and go to work? These are the questions that concern researchers in the area of work design. For years, we have been studying the job characteristics that play an important role in employees' performance and wellbeing. Some characteristics (e.g. autonomy, skill utilization, support from others, etc.) can enrich our work and life, while other characteristics (e.g. high workload, lack of role clarity, etc.) can deplete resources and hurt our wellbeing. However, work design research is facing new challenges in light of the drastic changes in societies. For instance, rapid technological changes have made many jobs at risk, as traditional, labour-intensive and low-skilled jobs are now facing elimination. Meanwhile, technological changes also impose new demands on existing jobs, such as requiring employees to be more innovative and creative, to prevent their work from becoming obsolete. How does this increased level of innovation and creativity in our jobs change our lives? With Professor Zhijun Chen (Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, China) and Dr Rui Li (Suzhou University, China) we are embarking on a global study attempting to understand the impact of creative jobs in shaping employees' wellbeing.

The Centre for People, Organisation and Work (CPOW) brings together social science research expertise

CPOW's research focuses on the leadership and management of people in the workplace, as well as understanding the wider economic, political, technological, social and cultural environment in which organisations operate. A major goal is to formulate positive policies and programs for business, government, and community.

Researchers explore issues such as diversity, skills development, human resource management and how to achieve effective results that are related to financial, operational and organisational sustainability, employee commitment, as well as economic and employee wellbeing.

In undertaking our research, we acknowledge that economic and social divisions are defining features of the world we live in. Our research focuses on addressing economic inequalities and fragmentation, social questions around gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and locality, to enhance working lives and advance positive social change.

The information included in this booklet represents one of the many research strands of the Centre's work.

If you are interested in CPOW's work or becoming a member of CPOW please check out the Centre's website or contact the CPOW Research Officer at: cpow@rmit.edu.au

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