

Introduction to the Minitrack on Digitalization of Work

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1. Introduction

Ongoing digitalization has altered the way we work (Kniffin et al., 2021) through emerging concepts such as; digital labor, playbour, the gig economy, the platform economy, the sharing economy, crowdsourcing, algorithmic automation, cloud-working, liquid workforces, esports, people analytics, the blockchain, human automation resource management, and Industry 4.0. As a result, new digital professions and working conditions have emerged that shift perspectives on work in the digital era. Recent trends such as quiet quitting or quiet firing (Fabritius, 2022) signal fundamental changes in the working world.

The recent changes due to the state of the world (i.e., COVID lockdowns, global climate, and armed conflicts) led to changes to our traditional working environments. These changes accelerated the creation of new digital concepts in the working environments. Thus, we are experiencing a paradigm shift in the workforce, which poses great opportunities and threats for existing and future forms of digital work. This paradigm shift requires a new research stream incorporating multidisciplinary research to address and understand the current issues in these digital work environments. The Work Trend Index states, “Months into hybrid work, not everyone agrees on how it’s going. Employees and employers are divided” (Microsoft, 2022, p. 2). This quote states the current situation we are also facing in research. As there is existing research on, e.g., virtual teams, international communication, and many other digital-enhanced collaborations, there is only limited knowledge on the long-term effects of such a shift (Brammer et al., 2020). There is already research emerging, focusing on the dark sides of this new normal: wellbeing and mental health (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), distant leadership (Tourish, 2020), surveillance and trust (Blumenfeld et al., 2020), or the zoom-fatigue (Richter, 2020). Topics like work-life boundaries (Cook, 2020), isolation (Hafermalz & Riemer, 2020), and visibility (Hafermalz, 2020) will

be relevant to how we approach these new working forms and the merger of labor and leisure. These changes support the long-held views of those propagating that digital work is unavoidable, that work will be “in the cloud” (Cappelli, 2020) and many will become digital nomads (Aroles et al., 2020). There is a call in the human resource community to use this shift and apply bold and critical research (Bierema, 2020).

2. Topics in the Minitrack

This can be observed in this minitrack, which has its premiere in the HICSS-56. The call for papers led to 11 submissions, in which the chairs selected six papers for presentation. The papers address a wide range of relevant topics concerning the ongoing and increasingly relevant digitalization of work.

Even though discussions around topics on digital work are increasing, the term is not precisely defined. Abayomi Baiyere, Sabrina Schneider and Mari-Klara Stein address this topic in their paper “Digital Work: A Conceptual Clarification.” In that paper, the authors analyze the term and offer three variations (digital enabled work, digital engaged work, and digital embedded work) for enhancing the discourse on digital work.

That the working world has an impact on the way wellbeing is affected is shown in the paper “Towards More Digital Wellbeing in Knowledge Work - A Signaling Theory Perspective” by Sünje Clausen, Lea-Marie Braun and Stefan Stieglitz. In this paper, the authors highlight that knowledge work is highly entangled with information and communication technologies, and the usage of these technologies can negatively affect the wellbeing of these knowledge workers. Consequently, digital wellbeing initiatives could counter these issues and have a positive effect on wellbeing as well as organizational attractiveness.

The paper “Leadership in a Digitalized and Crisis-ridden World: Towards a Comprehensive Overview of Relevant Competencies for Leaders” by Christian Vay and Vanessa Maria Steinherr discusses the role of leadership in this digital world and what competencies

are necessary to lead efficiently. The authors are identifying leadership competencies necessary for digital and crisis leadership.

The digitalization of work also creates new challenges and concerns regarding privacy. In their paper “Remote Workers’ Privacy Concerns, Psychological Climate for FaceTime, and Organizational Affective Commitment,” the authors Marie-Colombe Afota, Almudena Cañibano, Ariane Ollier-Malaterre, Yanick Provost Savard and Emmanuelle Léon researched the privacy concerns for remote workers with a focus on the psychological climate and the effect on the organizational affective commitment. The authors highlight that those privacy concerns have an impact on remote workers, therefore, should be included in any remote work strategy.

In the next paper on “It’s not All Shiny and Glamorous: Loneliness and Fear of Missing Out among Digital Nomads,” the authors Cristina Miguel, Christoph Lutz, Filip Majetić, Rodrigo Perez-Vega and Miguel Sánchez-Razo focus on the isolation of digital nomads and how they deal with the issue, that they are not part of the organization. Digital nomads feel isolated from their organization and experience loneliness and fear of missing out. Consequently, being a digital nomad will potentially impact their wellbeing and health.

Finally, digital work also needs to be researched in digital labor platforms. The authors Xuefei (Nancy) Deng and Katy M. Pinto study the interaction of gig workers with platforms in their paper “Understanding Human Enactment of Technology on Digital Labor Platforms.” Gig workers interact with these technologies, especially in the delivery industry. Based on sociomateriality, the authors identify various enactments of technology that range from aid to obstacle and constraining to affording.

All papers show that digital work requires a unique understanding of the digital work environment and that existing practices must be evaluated consistently.

3. Conclusion

It becomes evident that the digitalization of work will continue to grow pervasively and will be a consideration as part of any research on people. Even though that is not surprising, we still do not understand many aspects of this new working world. People are burning out and we see a stark increase in mental health issues. Those alarming trends reveal a need to find the right balance in creating a hybrid workplace. What competencies do the employees and the managers need to survive and flourish in this hybrid world?

Thus, the topic will stay relevant in the near and extended future with value for theory building and identifying practical solutions.

4. References

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