microtask

The Industrial Revolution Is All But Over

Microtask loves the work you hate. The unique crowdsourcing solution turns time consuming and frustrating routine tasks into tradable commodities, distributed over the internet to interested microworkers.

Work changes. So do the workers.

The nature of work is undergoing the most fundamental structural change since the advent of the assembly line in the early 20th century. This time round, the stimulus is, of course, the web. Both of these periods had considerable effects on the organization and distribution of work, and the role of an individual worker.

In August 2010, the research and advisory firm Gartner released their view of the changes the world of work will witness over the next ten years. To name a few, they see work becoming more spontaneous, more work being carried out in swarms formed across organizational boundaries, and company-provided offices and desks becoming scarce. Coping with the change requires systems that support the new ways of working.

The workers are changing too. In December 2009, the Finnish National Foresight Network published a report titled Digital natives, work and citizenship, painting a gloomy picture of today's working life as seen by the Y generation. Inflexible hierarchies and structures and long-term nine-to-five employments do not appeal to the generation grown up in the internet, used to multitasking and immediate feedback.

Routines for some are opportunities for others.

Simple and repetitive routines are frustrating to those busy with more challenging tasks. Wasting the time of highly paid professionals to non-productive tasks kills their motivation and destroys the efficiency of their organizations. It's difficult to find temporary resources to carry out dull tasks at peak times, and outsourcing the jobs to lower-income countries doesn't really help when it's just a part of the jobs that is problematic.

Luckily, the opportunities opened by the increasingly ubiquitous web and the changing ways of working come to the rescue. Crowdsourcing technologies enable the division of work to smaller parts and more workers. Each digital worker retains the complete authority to him or herself to decide how much to work, what sort of payment to accept, when to work, and where to work.

One of the pioneers of the new division of work was NASA. Their 'Be a Martian' project enabled anyone to participate in the mapping of Mars on a game-like web user interface, already in 2000-2001. And people did: this groundbreaking crowdsourcing initiative attracted more than 80 000 people to join in, with no payment of any kind involved. The mere opportunity to be involved was enough to motivate.

Many teenagers, retired persons, parents taking care of children at home, and many others not in traditional full-time employment would happily work, if only they could find something suitable for their specific situation. Especially the young crave for opportunities to show their abilities and gain valuable experience, while other groups may be motivated by a range of objectives from additional income to spending idle time.

With the improving internet backbone in developing countries, a quickly increasing number of potential digital workers have access to high-quality internet. This development will change the global division of labor. For people in developing countries, microtasks on the web provide access to a significant source of income by local standards, without a need for a certain education, specific degrees, traveling or work permits.

Today's assembly line is run by workers.

Microtask splits dull repetitive tasks such as proofing digitized hand-written forms and refining archived materials into tiny microtasks and distributes them over the internet. Once carried out by microworkers around the world, the results are put back together into a completed assignment.

Optimized workflow ensures efficiency, and the quality of work is ensured by handing microtasks to more than one worker. Complete confidence and security is maintained by chopping tasks into bits way too small to make assumptions of their context.

Microworking is designed to be a game-like experience, rewarding successfully completed tasks with instant feedback. An interesting option is to integrate microtasks in web-based games, promising active gamers new in-game benefits or an alternative to paying for virtual goods with real money.

With the automated Microtask platform, tasks are distributed to a very high number of microworkers in just seconds. Microtasks may be limited to a specified group of people such as existing employees, offered to anyone with an internet connection, or given exclusively to interested workers in developing countries.

Microtask was founded in 2009 by four experienced serial entrepreneurs with backgrounds in companies like Hybrid Graphics (acquired by Nvidia) and Ionific (acquired by Sasken). The company is funded by Sunstone Capital and strategic private investors.

For further information, please visit www.microtask.com.

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