

Riyaz Sheikh (2022): *Exploring shaping and reshaping of work* In: *20th European Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work: The International Venue on Practice-centred Computing on the Design of Cooperation Technologies - Doctoral Colloquium (ISSN 2510-2591)*, DOI: 10.48340/ecscw2022_dc09 *Exploring shaping and reshaping of work*

Copyright 2022 held by Authors, DOI: 10.18420/ecscw2022_dc09

Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists, contact the Authors.

Exploring shaping and reshaping of work

Riyaz Sheikh

Department of Computer and Systems Sciences, Stockholm University

Riyaz@dsv.su.se

Abstract. Continuous technological development dominates the discourse around the nature of established and new work practices. It conceptualizes, decides, and designs the present and future of work and workers to conform to the cutting-edge globalized market. Without disavowing the potential and influence of the emerging technologies, this paper documents the intention to explore work practices from the worker's perspective, particularly considering the economic aspects of their labor, reacting to how the technologies shape work and how it is performed *in situ*, and how workers interact and collaborate to conduct the work.

The discussed research intends to use ethnographic and participatory research methods. It aims to contribute to the related CSCW and HCI discussions by recentring epistemology of technology-determined work around the worker by recognizing the economic positioning of their labor.

Research questions and positioning

The variegated nature of work - waged and non-waged, visible and invisible - is broadly studied in CSCW and HCI communities. It evolved as a polymorphous concept, recognizing purpose and circumstance as deciding factors to identify an activity as work (Schmidt, 2011).

The discussed research work recognizes the economic aspect of work as the crucial characteristic exemplifying the purpose and circumstance of labor. This research recognizes economic aspects of labor as a lynchpin for the related purposes and circumstances while exploring work practices from the workers' perspective and focusing on their influence on how work is shaped technologically and performed *in situ*?

Above all, work is a socio-economic activity for workers. A proper economic assessment of labor adds value to their lives. Lack of such evaluation could deteriorate their agency in practice, pushing them and their efforts towards the brinks of invisibility. Amplifying economic gains is a prominent driving factor for workers in most work practices. This becomes particularly evident in setups involving workers from the unorganized sector, where workers have a higher dependency on the income from the labor or where the wages are loosely decided or not predecided. The purpose of work is thus economic at its core. Whereas acquiring new technologies and developing relevant skills to perform the work grows as an unavoidable necessity for the workers to achieve this purpose.

Obstructing this actuality, emerging assertive technologies prevail the discourse about the nature and future of established and new work practices, leading to the epistemology of technology-determined work. These technologies often originate (or are located) in dominating capitalistic setups and evolve to benefit the inholder. Assertive enough to change the elemental form of work, these technologies develop discourse either ignoring or not giving enough space for the workers' purpose or response to the re/shaping of work. The shaping of the work and worker thus becomes technology-determined.

I believe that considering the economic form of labor while exploring the tech driven shaping of labor brings work and workers to the center of the epistemology of technology-determined work.

Methodological approach

Aiming to explore socially asymmetric and pluralist societies, I am inclined to use ethnographic research methods. Also, I think, combining participatory design research methodologies with apt social theories might help unpack varied experiences.

Work to the date

I have explored arguably one of the newest forms of work - gig work (Graham 2019). I investigated the work organized around one of the prominent food delivery online platforms in India. The study was performed in Pune, India.

The empirical data collection lasted almost over a year, starting in May 2020, traversing the first wave of the pandemic, concluded during the early days of the second wave in April 2021. In this duration, four different types of qualitative data was collected. We started with conversational telephonic interviews and field visits. Field notes capture observations and interactions with 20+ food delivery workers from 4 different locations. Moving on to ride-along sessions capturing food delivery practice *in situ* in audio-video format, each accompanied with an in-depth conversational interview with the delivery worker. Lastly, the monthly income details of 46 food delivery workers were collected.

Using a portion of this data, I am drafting the first journal paper revealing the piecework nature of the studied work and the way workers find workarounds for the workflows imposed by the algorithmically managed food delivery platform. I aim to write two more conference papers using the video analysis of the ride-along sessions and the monthly income data.

Next steps

The own going project around the food delivery workers opens space to explore further the complex entanglements of economic intensions of workers and the manipulative vision of algorithmic technologies for implanting and conducting the work. Budling on it, I plan to explore the food delivery practice performed by emigrant workers in the European context. The assumption is that we would be able to draw some parallels with the study performed in the global south.

Next, the aim is to explore another work practice, preferably an established one, e.g., farming. If time permits, I would also like to look into invisible, emotional labor performed at home. The research questions explained above should be appropriate for each of these projects.

References

‘Automation and the future of work’, 2020, Retrieved March 11, 2021 from <https://www.ibm.com/downloads/cas/O17AWNv6>

Graham, M., Woodcock, J. (2019). *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. United Kingdom: Wiley.

Javier Soltero. (2021). ‘Building the future of work with google workspace’, 2022, Retrieved March 11, 2021 from <https://cloud.google.com/blog/products/workspace/the-future-of-work-with-google-workspace>

Schmidt, K. The Concept of 'Work' in CSCW. *Comput Supported Coop Work* **20**, 341–401 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-011-9146-y>

