The Future of Work(places): Creating a Sense of Place for On-demand Work

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ABSTRACT

While the shift to on-demand labor may foster greater control over one's employment in some ways, it has removed much of the benefits that come with consistently working in shared physical spaces. Working in physical spaces allow opportunities for social support, long-term growth, and stability. The goal of this workshop is to facilitate a discussion around how physical spaces and online technologies influence each other in on-demand work. We plan to invite a diverse group of stakeholders, including researchers studying these topics, grassroots organizers who can represent and voice the concerns of their respective worker communities, and designers of on-demand work platforms. Discussion and ideas generated from this workshop will be archived online and made available to the larger research community and the general public.

KEYWORDS: Future of work; digitally-mediated work; gig work; freelance work; crowd work; organizations; place; space; jobs.

INTRODUCTION

As jobs become more temporary and organizations more porous, workers risk losing a sense of "place" that was critical for establishing professional networks, career growth, and sense of community. This loss of place, although affecting workers from all backgrounds, sets the vulnerable and largely invisible human labor force at greater risk because they lack the traditional support structures that typically provide employment rights, benefits, and protections [3,10]. Amidst these hurdles, workers continue to flock to on-demand work, deploying diverse information-seeking tactics to combat heightened uncertainties [2,5]. Moreover, uptake of on-demand work is expected to grow [1,7], in part because such alternative working arrangements provide workers with much needed control over their day-today lives [4,8].

We define *on-demand work* as readily available, often short-term, work that is found or matched via digital platforms. This includes a wide range of areas including gig work on platforms like Uber and TaskRabbit [9,10], piecework on platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk [3], freelance work on platforms like UpWork [6], service work found through public advertisements on platforms like Facebook [4], etc. The length of work tasks or projects could range from a few minutes to a few months long. And while the requester-worker matching occurs digitally, the payment and location of work could occur online or offline.

Given this rapidly burgeoning on-demand workforce, the benefits of physical working environments, and the need for control over one's working schedule, we aim to investigate opportunities that live in a middle ground. We ask, *How might we support workers to leverage the benefits of a physical working environment while preserving the control and autonomy which arise more readily in on-demand work?* We aim to answer this question in order to inform an inclusive future of work that requires a socio-technical understanding and approach to designing platforms, organizations, and places, nudging each to a path that creates more equitable pathways to stable, meaningful employment.

Guiding Questions
- How might the on-demand nature of work help and/or hinder long-term stability, planning, and overall satisfaction for workers?
- How might physical spaces augment on-demand work?
- How does the on-demand nature of work change physical spaces of work?
- How do we build a sense of shared "place" as work becomes more on-demand and distributed?

WORKSHOP GOALS AND THEMES

The goals and themes of this workshop are as follows:

- **Reflect** on trends in research and practice with respect to the "de-placing" of work through on-demand digital mediation.
- **Ideate** opportunities for how physical places (e.g. local organizations, community centers, co-working spaces) could address challenges and risks related to on-demand work.
- **Prototype** concrete plans or takeaways that the CSCW and broader community can use when considering the role of "place" in on-demand work.

We plan to write up a report on the outcomes of this workshop in the form of an ACM Communications article and corresponding blog post.

WORKSHOP LOGISTICS

This will be a 1-day workshop from 9am-5pm. We hope to host 15-20 participants by recruiting a diversity of stakeholders, including researchers (e.g. CSCW, management, computer science), community organizers (e.g. digital labor union leaders), public policy researchers, and platform designers (e.g. UpWork). We will recruit participants via a public website and postings on social media and relevant listservs. Participants will submit a 2-page position paper describing how their research or practice examines or influences on-demand work, or how their work could benefit from such perspectives. The organizers will choose participants based on the relevance of their work to the workshop topic and the diversity of perspectives they represent. Authors of accepted papers will be expected to review papers of others before attending. The workshop will require large post-it pads, blank printer paper, small post-its, markers, and a projector.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

This workshop will be highly interactive, involving presentations, discussions, and activities. There will be two presentations (chosen from the submissions or invited speakers) representing different perspectives on the workshop topic. Perspectives represented in the presentations could include:

- The interplay between the design of physical and digital places for work
- The role of digital mediation in finding work, and the activities surrounding work
- Fairness, equity, and inclusivity in the design of new spaces for on-demand work

We will also have three activities reflecting the three main goals of the workshop, as outlined above:

ORGANIZERS

Julie Hui is an Assistant Professor/Presidential Post-doc at the University of Michigan School of Information. She investigates how to support peer information sharing and social support in informal work contexts, such as online crowdfunding communities, makerspaces, and low-resourced entrepreneurship groups.

Justin Cranshaw is a researcher at Microsoft focusing on building and studying technologies to make individuals, teams, and organizations more productive at work. This workshop topic on the role of place in on-demand work bridges his current research interests to his past research, which focused on designing location-based social technologies for strengthening and supporting places, especially in an urban context.

Yasmine Kotturi is a PhD student in Human-Computer Interaction at Carnegie-Mellon. She studies how online freelancers organically leverage their peers to navigate uncertainties in digitally-mediated work, and builds systems to amplify these efforts. With Community Forge, a co-working space in Wilkinsburg, PA, Yasmine is working to offer training courses on computer literacy and digital labor platforms.

Chinmay Kulkarni is an Assistant Professor of Human Computer Interaction at Carnegie-Mellon, where he directs the Expertise@Scale lab. In his research, Chinmay introduces new collaborative computer systems that help people learn and work better; typically, these systems use the large scale of participation to yield benefits that are otherwise not achievable.

- **Activity 1: Reflect** - Participants will break into groups of 3-4 to reflect on a certain question, such as one of the following: What has the CSCW community done thus far to build a better future, or at least counter the risks, that come with on-demand work? As traditional places are being disrupted, what other categories of places are popping up? Towards the end of this activity, each group will be asked to report out their reflection, which the organizers will help to live synthesize.

- **Activity 2: Ideate** - In different groups of 3-4, participants will ideate opportunities and models for where technology and physical spaces could work in conjunction with each other to address some of the topics identified in the reflection activity. Participants will be asked to keep in mind what they can learn or adopt from other disciplines, fields, and industries. Goals of the ideation could include identifying supports for information sharing, learning, trust, and community.

- **Activity 3: Prototype** - Participants will perform a deep dive into one idea. This could take the form of a digital tool, a set of principles, implications for policy, a novel organizational structure, new categories of place, etc.

Tentative Agenda:
9:00-9:30 am Introductions
9:30-10:00 am Presentation 1 + Discussion
10:00-10:15 am Coffee break
10:15-12:00 pm Activity 1: Reflect
12:00-1:30 pm Lunch
1:30-2:00 pm Presentation 2 + Discussion
2:00-3:00 pm Activity 2: Ideate
3:00-3:15 pm Coffee break
3:15-4:15 pm Activity 3: Prototype
4:15-5 pm Synthesis + Closing

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