



# MICROTASKING

**Trends and Drivers**

**November 15, 2019**

**UTSC Project Update**

# What is microtasking?



Our working definition is:

- Microwork is not part of the standard employment relationship (i.e., someone is not an 'employee' making a wage).
- The work involves taking on short tasks (i.e. 15 minutes to a few hours).
- A microjobber usually takes on a variety of different tasks from a variety of different firms/people.
- Microtasks are found and undertaken on internet-based (cloud) platforms.

Microtasking is not just work that is small or different. We have focused on the kind of microwork that is crowdsourced or 'spliced' onto other ways of earning. It also has a connection with AI, logistics, and machine learning.

# Why TWIG is looking into it



New jobs & forms of work are emerging through infotech and biotech advances.

Toronto Workforce Innovation Group (“TWIG”), is a workforce planning organization. They carry out research on labour market trends relevant for both GTA workers and employers.

Understanding the technology industry and technology jobs is critical for workforce planning.

TWIG is considering work enabled by technology platforms, which we call microwork. *We see this as part of workforce evolution.*

International Labour Organization survey findings show that a substantial proportion of microworkers earn below their local minimum wage.

One recent study found, taking unpaid work into account, a median hourly wage around US \$2 per hour and the mean wages of workers amounted to US \$3.13 per hour.

The final microtasking report will offer strategic perspectives for GTA employers, planners, policymakers, and employment services providers (TWIG’s key stakeholders).

# Microtasking project so far



- You ran a signals sprint on microtasking, providing 374 references related to microwork.
- Researchers found and reviewed 137 further substantive reports and papers (at least 40 are Canadian).
- 33 trends were identified, analysed, and organized into a final set of 12 trends.

# #1

# AI is eating the work



**Alastair Cheng**

Advances in fields like machine learning increasingly allow de-skilling or full automation of work that previously required human involvement.

This is part of the fourth industrial age, which has every indication that it will be as disruptive as previous technological eras.

# #2 Everybody's hustling



Cheryl May

Working nine to Fiverr:

- Working life as one job at a time, on a career path, is changing.
- Many people are temping and freelancing.
- People juggle multiple jobs, build side-hustles, and keep working longer in life.

# #3 T.O. grind



**Alastair Cheng**

Toronto residents face rising affordability challenges.

While Toronto has global tech status, technology also widens the gap between knowledge workers and those most vulnerable to changes in the requirements for entry- and service-level jobs.

# #4 Intimate labour



Cheryl May

Because it commercializes small tasks that require human sensibilities, microwork can get very personal.

People sell access to their opinions, location and taste, and it can extend to befriending, crowdsourcing advice and opinions.



# #5 Work as play



**Marco Campana**

The same work can mean very different things.

People might complete an image-tagging task to unlock a cat video. Casual work for casual income.

# #6 People as a service



Alastair Cheng

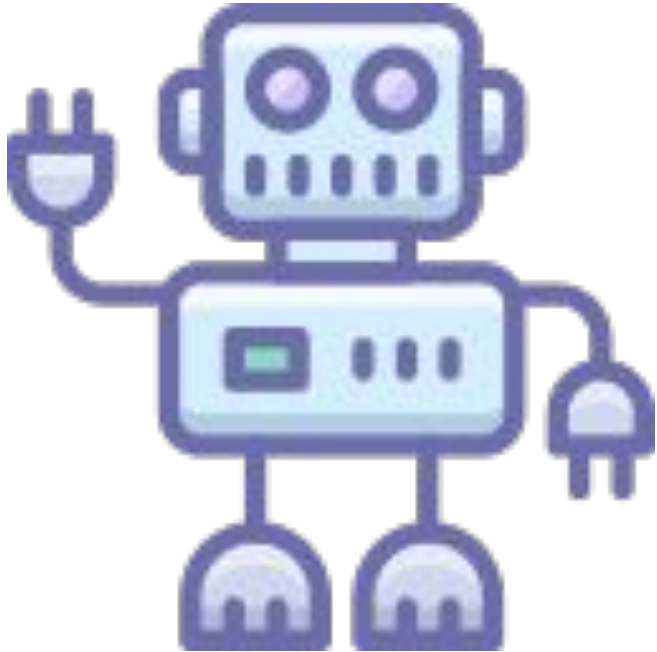
As tech makes coordination with outside parties easier, businesses replace jobs that previously required hiring permanent staff.

Outsourcing and offshoring, to individuals directly or through platforms, is increasingly common.

# #7

## Robots are

# making jobs



Cheryl May

- AI development paradoxically drives microwork demand.
- Microjobbing is replacing labour and service economy work.

However, it doesn't create a career path: there is a shortage of people who can fill skilled jobs related to AI, biotechnology, nanotechnology, etc.

# #8 Solidarity in seconds



Cheryl May

Microwork platforms leave it to microworkers to self-organize. Forums and other communal tactics are used to share struggles and interests, pool information, develop tools and connect. Attempts to increase stability and access to social benefits usually provided through standard employment are on the rise.

# #9 The microstate



Marco Campana

While governments have paid little attention to microwork, there are forces that mean they will be called to actively shape labour markets connected to microtasking.

These might include regulation, public good projects or as microwork requesters.

# #10 Lifesaver



Marco Campana

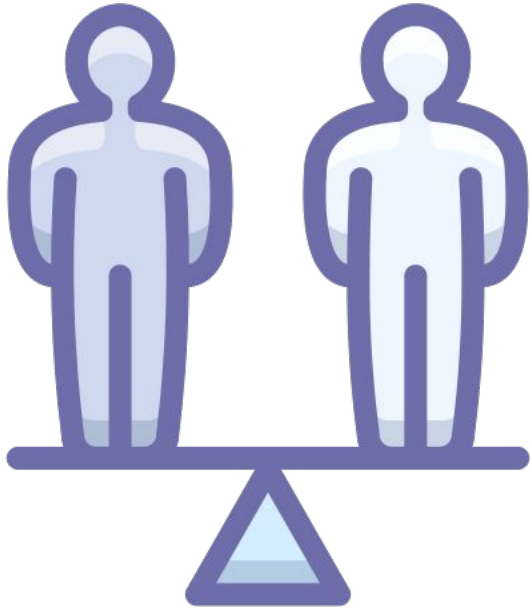
Many people who can't get traditional jobs turn to microwork, from young people who are marginalized to students, to caregivers, to people with disabilities, retirees, and "virtual" immigrants.

# #11 Microworking for

## good

People seek intrinsic benefits beyond their earnings.

Microwork offers an entrepreneurial feeling, represents learning activities, and also can provide the satisfaction of completing tasks with social impact.



Marco Campana

# #12 Borderless work



**Alastair Cheng**

Microtasks can be completed by any of 3.5+ billion people already online. A massive, borderless workforce available 24/7. Cell and internet access levels are projected to rise, and developments such as automated translation further reduce collaborative barriers.



AC



AI is eating the work

CM



Everybody's hustling

AC



T.O. grind

CM



Intimate labour

MC



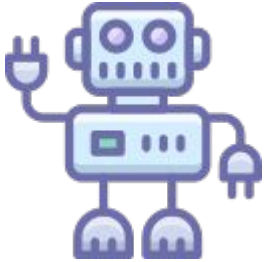
Work as play

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People as a service

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Robots are making jobs

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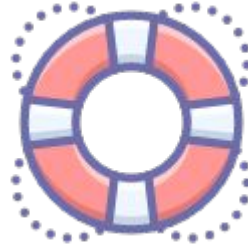
Solidarity in seconds

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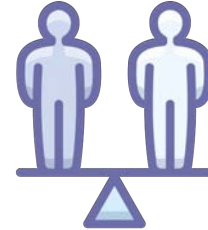
The microstate

MC



Lifesaver

MC



Working for good

AC



Borderless work



# Change Drivers

Drivers cause **significant** disruption on the system.

The outcomes are **uncertain**.

The driver has impact within the timeframe (10–15 years).

It is a succinct statement with a direction to the change.

Change drivers do not describe problems, solutions, advocacy, or desired states.

# Drivers



## **Work is increasingly decentralized**

This is technology dependent. Access to a 24/7, global workforce together with limited labour regulations and no downstream commitments. Added to this the workforce brings its own capital (equipment and internet access) – stronger in the global south

## **Rapid & continuous advancements in technology**

Fourth industrial age | Training AI, data cleaning and categorization | Automation generally | 2  
Digitization of work | High value of data |  
Emergence of AI & Big Data industries

## **Profit motive drives the world economy**

This is the strongest driver. Productivity is tied to profits and the accumulation of wealth. This is global corporations & individual productivity when work is connected to outputs, not an hourly wage.

## **Technology is changing the nature of the service economy**

Since the 1950s, the service economy has replaced factory or agricultural work as low-skilled, low-wage labour jobs. Digitalization has increasingly moved these jobs into an online environment, creating smaller and smaller tasks that can be accomplished on a piece-work basis.

# Drivers



## **Post-war social norms are disappearing rapidly**

Post-war ideas about gender, family, identity, and values are fading, increasing societal acceptance of alternative ways of living and earning. This is a reinforcing driver where the corporate desire for productivity matches the individual desire for autonomy. Productivity-based, digitized work drives a move toward crowdsourcing for quality and performance.

## **Governments operate in an environment of regulatory inertia**

As the nature of work moves ahead, microtasking can continue unmitigated and unregulated. Connected to normalizing microwork to bring it into the mainstream. This means taxation, regulation, and introduction of aspects of a social safety net that are not covered through increased privatization, DIY, and methods that will be connected to future global economics. The need for a social safety net creates pressure on issues of precariousness and decent pay.

# Next: Scenarios and implications



- The **drivers** will be used to develop four scenarios.
- The scenarios will inform the development of a set of implications.
- The implications will be synthesized into strategic perspectives.

More info [microtasking.online](https://microtasking.online)