

Future of work in changing organisations

The caricatures of worker and organisation are not compatible with the futures of work. Digitalisation – the automatization of knowledge tasks to machine learning algorithms, the value creation and mediation of transaction through digital platforms and the cooperation of crowds in massive scales – has created new roles for workers and new ways of organising work.

Take the role of the worker. We are used to thinking in categories of unemployed, employed and entrepreneurs, but this division is challenged especially by platform economy. [The Finnish Government report on the future](#) mentions new categories such as pensioner-freelancers, project nomads and in-betweeners, and [a report by the Institute for the Future](#) describes roles of workers in platform economy, such as gig worker, pragmatist and hustler.

The challenge is that traditional roles are not going anywhere, but more roles will appear. We need to rethink the categories with which we think about workers, but cannot start from a clean slate.

Another change is in the way of organising work. When transaction costs are marginal, a hierarchical organisation is not always the best solution. There are examples of highly successful companies embracing a more self-organising model, such as [Buurtzorg or Morning Star](#), where the org chart is replaced by a web of commitments, autonomous teams and fluid roles. Furthermore, it is also possible to offer the whole organisation as a service through a digital platform (see e.g. [GoCo](#) or [Solved](#)).

Platform economy has also generated a resurgence of cooperatives. Instead of value accumulating to the shareholders of a platform company, it is redistributed to the users of the platform, which are also its owners. Related to cooperatives, there is also a discussion on what types of new commons or “[universal basic assets](#)” are needed to ensure the ability to reskill and find meaningful work in the future?

Technology is further blurring what it is to be a worker or what is an organisation. Blockchain based [distributed autonomous organisations \(DAOs\)](#) execute all agreements and transactions through code and save them in a shared ledger. For example, technically it might be possible for a self-driving car to be its own organisation and operate autonomously (charging for rides to pay for maintenance).

The big question to ask now is who is the worker of the future: a self-guiding project nomad, a platform cooperative commoner, an autonomous algorithm or all of the above?

Mikko Dufva,

Leading Foresight Specialist, Sitra

The logo for SITRA, featuring the word "SITRA" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are stylized, with the 'S' and 'I' having a unique, blocky appearance.