

Digital Technologies and the Changing Nature of Work

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Abstract:

Advances in digital technologies are creating unprecedented opportunities for the ways in which work is defined, designed, organized, performed, and managed. The development in digital technologies paves the way for new work forms that emphasize organizational innovation, creativity, and responsiveness. At the same time, the nature of work has changed toward new forms of managerial control, intensified work regimes, rigid structures, and increased stress among employees. Interestingly, paradoxical effects reflect both an increased and decreased sense of autonomy, an experience of unlimited but also restricted flexibility, benefits and detrimental consequences of constant connectivity, as well as ubiquitous versus restricted use of technology. Despite these fascinating insights, we still know little about how digital technologies alter the work practices and subsequently the foundation of the work environment that is central to the modern human enterprise. The purpose of my talk is to discuss how digital technologies change the nature of work. I will present findings from a study of a telecommunications enterprise, where distributed work has become the new “normal” due to advances in digital technology. The study focuses on the consequences of digital technologies on how work tasks are conducted and how the content of work is being redefined. To make sense of this distributed nature of work, we theorize this phenomenon as a “hybrid condition” for people, tasks, technologies, and organizations that is characterized by ambiguity, incoherence, and blurring of boundaries. We build on the concept of liminality, which refers to an “in-betweenness,” where times and tasks of work and leisure, spaces and technologies of the office and home tend to blend. We believe that in-depth studies can provide groundbreaking insights about ways of organizing, strategizing, and enacting organizational practices mediated by digital technologies.