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INSIDER

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In Workplace of the Future, You're On Your Own (For Better or Worse)

From Ron King



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While economists, entrepreneurs and policymakers huddled in Davos, Switzerland last week to discuss the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” and its impact on the global workforce, almost one in three American workers got up in the morning and faced their boss in the bathroom mirror.

Are the technologies that surround us tools that we can identify, grasp and consciously use to improve our lives? Or are they more than that: powerful objects and enablers that influence our perception of the world, change our behavior and affect what it means to be human?

Technologies are emerging and affecting our lives in ways that indicate we are at the beginning of a Fourth Industrial Revolution, a new era that builds and extends the impact of digitization in new and unanticipated ways. It is therefore worthwhile taking some time to consider exactly what kind of shifts we are experiencing and how we might, collectively and individually, ensure that it creates benefits for the many, rather than the few.

When were the other industrial revolutions?

The First Industrial Revolution is widely taken to be the shift from our reliance on animals, human effort and biomass as primary sources of energy to the use of fossil fuels and the mechanical power this enabled. The Second Industrial Revolution occurred between the end of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, and brought major breakthroughs in the form of electricity distribution, both wireless and wired communication, the synthesis of ammonia and new forms of power

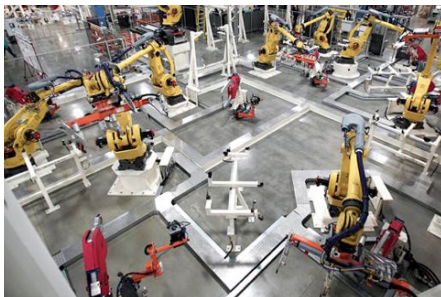
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generation. The Third Industrial Revolution began in the 1950s with the development of digital systems, communication and rapid advances in computing power, which have enabled new ways of generating, processing and sharing information.

Nearly 54 million Americans or roughly a third of the U.S. workforce are involved in some kind of freelance, self-employment or “gig” economy work. That’s up about 700,000 since 2014, according to the Freelancers Union, an online connection tool for self-employed. In its annual report, the Freelancers Union defines five kinds of freelancers: ultra-small business owners, independent contractors, temporary workers, “moonlighters” who have a full-time job and do independent work on the side, and “diversified workers,” part-time workers who also cobble together a series of freelance gigs to get by.



Robots are shown on the assembly line of the new 2015 Chrysler 200 at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in Sterling Heights, Michigan, on March 14, 2014. Bill Pugliano / Getty Images file

The expansion of the independent workforce a vast array of professions that includes everything from chauffeurs to cyber-sleuths is largely attributable to digital innovation and advances in artificial intelligence and robots that are letting companies standardize and automate an array of tasks and functions never before

imaginable, experts say.

That, in turn, is reshaping the fundamental nature of the employer-employee relationship.

The nature of work is moving toward more flexible short-term arrangements as technology is automating away some of the lower end jobs — even things like data entry are being replaced by computer programs that can draw data out of a spreadsheet or website.

“In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation (of the workforce) will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before,” Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, which organized the Davos gathering, recently wrote. “The speed of current breakthroughs has no historical precedent. These changes herald the transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance.”

Experts say we are only at the outset of the fourth revolution and it’s nearly impossible to overstate the changes both good and bad that it will bring. Most experts believe the emerging revolution will continue to benefit those workers with highly specialized, in-demand skills, like mobile app development or testing a company’s computer network for security flaws. Already, 2.9 million freelancers earned more than \$100,000 last year, up from 2 million who hit the six-figure mark just four years earlier, according to MBO Partners.

But labor experts also warn that workers at the low end of the skills spectrum will be stuck competing for a shrinking number of lower-paying jobs many of them contract positions. Without policies that provide freelancers with benefits and worker protections,

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the experts will come at the expense of job and retirement security for those workers and exacerbate an income gap that already is at historic highs.

The division between the two classes, known as “workforce polarization,” already has impacted workers whose jobs are easiest to automate. But that’s only the beginning, UBS bank analysts wrote in a white paper published to coincide with the Davos meeting.

“The greatest disruption could be experienced by workers who have so far felt immune to robotic competition, namely those in middle-skill professions,”

UBS Bank analysts said. Complicating the equation is the fact that the independent workforce is itself diverse, diffused and may be affected by increased automation to different degrees.

Even counting them is a headache, since Census data — generally the gold standard — often fails to capture the full picture because the household survey is based on a voluntary response and freelance workers who also have a “real” job the so-called moonlighters and diversified workers in the Freelancers Union’s parlance mis-classify themselves in their responses.

The Labor Department is taking steps to address the issue, the Bureau of Labor Statistics re-running a survey on the “contingent” workforce to try to obtain “reliable, credible insight into what’s going on across a range of work arrangements” for the agency’s May 2017 Current Population Survey.

The recession that slammed the U.S. economy in 2008 also bears some responsibility

for the high number of independent workers, said analysts of Freelancers.com, which has about 2 million registered users in the U.S., second to 3 million registered independent workers in India.

“On the demand side, we see a whole lot more jobs being posted when economic times get tough,” Freelancers.com said. “On the other hand, we see a surge in freelancers as well and the reasons are somewhat similar.”

The reason is that pushing out employees and replacing them with contract workers helps companies cut costs during tight times. When you have more freelance workers, you have lower fixed costs, so you lower the risk of some of what you can control if you have a bad quarter or so.

Historically, the pendulum has swung back to more permanent employment when the economy improves. But this cycle has been different, thanks in large part to the growing impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with the number of freelancers continuing to grow. One reason for that is that improvements in Internet connectivity and cloud computing make it easier for companies to hire someone with desired skills who lives thousands of miles away and doesn’t want to relocate. We have “freelancers” in Marlboro County: working remotely and conducting business over the internet,

But the bigger factor and the one that will spark the most change going forward is that advances in computing power and artificial intelligence have vastly expanded the kinds of jobs that can be either handled entirely by a robot or a computer

“Historically, the pendulum has swung back to more permanent employment when the economy improves.”



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program or standardized so any trained worker employee or not can complete the task.

It can move from the automation of activities such and product movement and repetitive assembly, to the possibility of automating decision-making. That's where it's going to be very interesting.



A technician works with Baxter, an adaptive manufacturing robot created by Rethink Robotics at The Rodon Group factory in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, on March 12, 2013. Matt Rourke / AP file

The advances already are affecting relatively skilled workers like accountants and analysts. For instance; companies today can use software to extract data from spreadsheets or other sources and perform initial analyses. Human workers have reduced “work” responsibilities and can focus on the most important tasks.

To begin to understand how to interpret that data, you don't have to dig through 25 pages of reports to get what you need. People can come in and make an immediate impact. I truly believe this will be the new normal.

Normal or not, a continued expansion of

independent workforce could have major societal impacts. Even the high end of independent work involves a shifting of risks and costs from companies to individuals, which could result in freelancers earning less total compensation than full-time employees and lacking benefits like health insurance and a 401(k).

Sara Horowitz, founder and executive director of the Freelancers Union, said the solution is rethinking 20th-century employment practices and policies to reflect the changing nature of how people work. “There are downsides, but to me, what's part of this fourth industrial revolution is it's bringing about a different culture,” she said. “I think that we need to make a to-do list.”

Uncoupling benefits like health and unemployment insurance from long-term employment with a single company, for example, would give independent workers a better shot at financial stability, Horowitz said. This has been true for teachers for decades, many times the trailing spouse of a partner's job transfer.

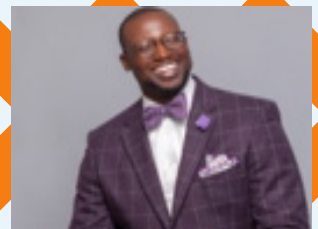
“This is the new way that work will be organized,” she said. “I think the most fruitful thing is to say, what do workers need and let's build in supports. We're just at the beginning of understanding how profound this change is.”

“In Workplace of the Future, You're On Your Own (For Better or Worse).” NBC News. 26 January 2016. Web.

“What is the fourth industrial revolution?” World Economic Forum. 19 January 2016. Web.

AMikids NIGHT of LAUGHTER *Local Laughs for Local Kids*

A comedy show at the Marlboro Civic Center benefitting AMikids, a non-profit organizations that helps South Carolina kids separate a troubled past from a bright future.



Did you know that....

•••• The Wallace Family Life Center (WFLC) is currently hiring for a custodian? They also have a continuous clothing drive. Clothes are available every day at the WFLC.

•••• A new program has been established within the county called "Our Children – Their Future, Inc.?" This is a not for profit organization requesting donations to assist in providing elementary school children with a backpack filled with nutritious foods serving to bridge the gap from school lunch on Friday through school breakfast the following Monday morning. Donations should be mailed to "Our Children – Their Future, Inc.", P. O. Box 152, Bennettsville, SC 29512.

•••• A resurfacing and new fencing project is due to begin in March for the Lake Paul Wallace area. Should you need further information, you may contact Sully Blair at (843) 479-8383.

•••• The Marlboro Arts Council is hosting performances featuring local musicians and artists on the 3rd Thursday of each month? The Council hopes to bring the arts and entertainment to all areas of Marlboro County in upcoming months.



Enjoy clean comedy at its best from two of the funniest comedians around!! This show is a blend of energy, fun, and variety featuring talented comedian **Mike Goodwin and Guests**

Enjoy stand-up comedy and great local food!

\$20 General Admission

EVENT DETAILS

Saturday, April 16th

Pre-show at 6:00pm

Featured performers at 7:00PM

(doors open at 5:30pm)

Marlboro Civic Center

106 Clyde Street,

Bennettsville, SC 29512

Join us for a reception

prior to the show at

The Skye, 210 East Main Street

5PM-5:45PM (hors d'oeuvres served)

Tickets are available for purchase at Marlboro Chamber of Commerce at 122 N. Marlboro Street. 843-535-8184

For more information & for ticket sales you may call: AMIkids Bennettsville 843-479-0420 or AMIkids Infinity Marlboro 843-479-5938

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Marlboro County Calendar of Events

March 2016 Events

Date	Time	Event	Location	Cost
17	3:00pm-7:00pm	1st Annual St. Patrick's Day Festival	Marlboro County Courthouse	Free
8	6:00pm-7:00pm	Class - A How-To Class for Moms Planning to Breastfeed	Staff Development Center at Scotland Memorial Hospital	Free
15	1:00pm-2:30pm	Heart Health Education Program	Community Health Classroom Rehab Building at Scotland Memorial Hospital	Free
17	9:00am-11:00am	Look Good, Feel Better – Program for Women Who Experience Hair Loss/Skin Changes Due to Chemo/Radiation	Scotland Cancer Treatment Center	Free
17-18	7:00pm	The Marlboro Players "Greater Tuna"	Marlboro Civic Center	---
19	10:00am-Noon	Easter Egg Hunt	Kidsland Park, Center Street	---
22	9:00am-11:00am	Veterans In The Know	Veterans' Affairs Office	Free
26	2:00pm-5:00pm	Spring Fling Carnival	First United Methodist Church Gymnasium	\$1

April 2016 Events

Date	Time	Event	Location	Cost
6	10:30am-Noon	Tobacco User? Move Your Way to a Healthier You by Quitting!	Community Health Classroom Rehab Building at Scotland Memorial Hospital	Free
8	10:00am-2:00pm	Military Career and Resource Day	SC National Guard Armory Bville	Free
12	6:00pm-7:00pm	Class - A How-To Class for Moms Planning to Breastfeed	Staff Development Center at Scotland Memorial Hospital	Free
16	6:00pm	AMI Kids -Comedy Night Fund Raiser	Marlboro Civic Center	\$20
19	1:00pm-2:30pm	Heart Health Education Program	Community Health Classroom Rehab Building at Scotland Memorial Hospital	Free
23	5:00pm	ΔΣΘ Sorority Inc. Jabberwok	Marlboro Civic Center	---
23	8:00am	Pageant FUNd Run-4-Life	On the Campus of Scotland Memorial Hospital	Varies



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