

Today, your employer might just as easily be an agency, rather than the business you are working in. The demise of unions and the rise of fixed-term contracts, flexible employment and zero-hour contracts have eroded worker representation and dignity. To compound that, today the corporate HR department seems to protect management from the employees, rather the other

way around. And if you work for Uber or Deliveroo, your boss might not be human at all, but an algorithm, with your concerns addressed by an AI-powered Chatbot programmed by a 25 year old computing grad in Bangalore or Seattle. It won't be just the pizza delivery service that operates this way – jobs in law, financial services or healthcare could be swept away by the algorithmic

oligarchy. With a perfect storm of globalisation, technology, employment practice and standardisation, it will be at our peril if we continue to see work as a process optimisation challenge rather than a socio-cultural phenomenon.

As a discipline, service design has the tools and frameworks to address these problems for both government and private firms who recognise their human and economic costs. But that involves a change of emphasis by designers themselves: instead of seeing customers or users at the heart of everything,

they need to move toward designing for both those who benefit from a service and, equally importantly, those who provide it.

However, it won't be enough for designers to care about these issues: it takes governments and business to take a strategic view about the design of work. There are indications this is happening. Self-determination and autonomy are emerging as attributes valued by forward thinking businesses. The war for talent means that if a business wants to recruit the best people, it has to design job that is fulfilling and gives people line-of-sight to the value they are creating. You need to leave enough gaps in the process and workflow to give the message, 'we trust you'. Such a scenario works for elite minds and talented individuals, so why not the rest of the workforce?

The future of the work is increasingly going to be about the work experience. It can't just be engineered – it's got to be designed, and that is in all of our interests. ♦

Nick de Leon is head of the service design department at the Royal College of Art

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