

University of Minho & Work 4.0 Consortium



Source / Link: <http://work4-0.eu/>

Thematic area:

- Transversal competences
- Technical skills
- Creative skills
- Social skills
- Contextual skills

Type of good practice:

- Project
- Initiative
- Programme
- Methods
- Training materials
- Other

Target group:

- VET and adult education trainers
- Labour market policy experts
- Human recourse management
- Others

Summary:

The technical developments are radically changing not only the prospects of which work will remain to be carried out by people, but also the working conditions that will apply for them. This means by whom, where, when and how the work will be carried out. This flexibilization in working conditions is very beneficial for Work 4.0. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that the positive role of the innovation driven by technology will not arise automatically. The amount of flexibilization of working conditions needs to be balanced by the same amount of security for the workers.

Flexibility in working conditions includes the agreement between the worker and the employer about the adaptation to the market demands with respect to who will do the work (the function), when (the time), where (place) and how (approach) the work will be performed. The working conditions thus become individualised, bringing the opportunity for collective intelligence where workers are empowered to collaborate in the execution of sophisticated tasks; it also can materialize into powerlessness and isolation.

Detailed description

Digitisation overlaps temporal limitations of production. Work becomes more mobile and more independent. New forms of employment emerge, which reflect these changes.

Firstly, the flexibilization of time includes jobs with fewer working hours than full time:

- **Part time job**, which represents a shift from a 40-hours week to a shorter week, on a regular basis.
- **Temporary work** employs workers for a limited time – for a season or for a project.

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- **On call work** (or on-demand work) employs workers at the exact time when there is actual need for them. Many agencies contract on-call workers in order to supply enterprises with quick replacements for employees who become ill during the course of the day.
- **Key-time staffing** allows enterprises to make hourly adjustments in staffing according to fluctuating levels of customer service or production demand. This type of work has been implemented in service industries such as fast-food restaurants, supermarkets or banks.

Secondly, the time flexibilization is reflected also in jobs with different organisation of the working time, such as:

- **Compressed workweeks** means that the employee works the traditional 40-hours week, but in fewer days. For example, instead of five 8-hours days, he/she works four 10-hours days. This arrangement is suitable for workers who need to commute to work.
- **Performance related pay** refers the payment of a salary that does not depend on the time spent at work but on how well the employee performed the job. This can be used for professions such as cars salespeople or production line workers.

Some studies are showing that these forms of employment can eventually lead to a higher employment rate, as they offer opportunities for entering the labour market for the people that would not be able gain a full-time employment. This is also the reason that these types of jobs with time flexibility are getting bigger support in the national policies with varying degrees of monitoring, regulation and social security.

The flexibilization of space is highly influenced by the organization and management of the work among companies and also within companies. Production can be networked, even beyond company boundaries. The companies may outsource the needed job to a person, who is on the other side of the globe. The routines are less centralized, with higher levels of local self-regulation. The most common forms of spatial flexibilization include teleworking where workers do not physically commute to work but use telecommunication technologies (WiFi, tablets, smartphones) to work from a different place. It may be from home, from a coffee place or from a specialised place, like neighbourhood work centres, where workers from different companies can work side by side. Another example would be a virtual office, where people armed with high-tech tools work anywhere, anytime and even cooperate with colleagues

Flexibilization of space covers not only the topic where the workers are, but also the topic of how the workplace is organised. Restructuring offices organized around individualized cubicles into more communal and shared spaces may facilitate teamwork and problem solving, and save costs on physical infrastructure. Management costs may be reduced as more centralized workspaces shift the focus from “management by oversight” to “management for results”. Increased opportunity for communication among workers tends to increase levels of support, lower employee stress and increased productivity. Flexible office spaces are particularly common in the “creative” professions including marketing, software development or research.

Within the company, there is also a bigger need for the functional flexibility, which means the extent to which workers can be transferred from one activity or task to another one. One way to reach the functional flexibility would be outsourcing.

Outsourcing firms are independent firms that supply services to a variety of enterprises. The most common outsourcing companies offer clerical, cafeteria, security and janitorial services, accounting, (insurance) claims processing, printing, computer systems management, sales and product marketing.

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However, it is also possible to reach the functional flexibility within the company, by encouraging job rotation (shift of workers between two or more assignments or jobs), training of employees in different tasks and changing the management structure.

The internet has served the employers in finding their workforce in the global labour market, but it also offers many possibilities for workers to enjoy the flexibility and benefits of part-time jobs. The internet of things (IoT) offers big opportunities for flexible work conditions. There is a strong call for individualisation of product, which gives space to new types of economies.

For example, the Peer-to-Peer, or P2P, economy is a new decentralized type of economy, where the buyer and the seller are directly connected, without any third party serving as a mediator. All the production process is owned and performed by the individual, who also owns the final product. Nonetheless, questions regarding the quality, safety and transparency of the offered goods and services are arising which have led to the emergence of the Platform Economy. The platforms have different means to ensure the lacking qualities of P2P economy, which include mechanisms for identity validation and assessment of participant trustworthiness. The platform economy providers are creating online structures that enable a wide range of human activities and interconnections. Some examples include open-source software development (platforms supporting the participation of any programmer in the development of a usually complex software that can be used by anyone accessing the Internet), TaskRabbits (which is an online and mobile marketplace that matches freelance labour with local demand, allowing consumers to find immediate help with everyday tasks, including cleaning, moving, delivery and handyman work), AirBnB (alternative to hotels, where individuals accommodate other people in their homes), Uber (alternative to TAXI service, where passengers are looking for a free car via an app) or Etsy (for selling handmade products).

Individual specialists can also work in global teams to fulfil given tasks. Collaborative platforms offer opportunities to share information, perform activities online by geographically distributed teams and communicate in real time.

Beneficial Results

Enterprises and workers can both benefit from flexibility and individualization in work, e.g. from better work organisation, from the upward mobility resulting from increased skills, from investment in training that pay off for enterprises while helping workers adapt to and accept change. Ultimately, by ensuring a great flexibility in the professional world, companies will be able to significantly increase their competitiveness, while at the same time workers will have numerous opportunities to grow professionally along with the success of their company or industry.

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