

# Rethinking Work Beyond the Factory

Contraption<sup>co.</sup>

# Technology solves our problems

- 1. Hunter-gatherers → Scarce food
- 2. Farmers → Scarce land
- 3. Factory Workers → Scarce labor
- 4. Knowledge Workers → Scarce attention

# Industrialization introduced the work practices we recognize today.

1. Commuting to the workplace
2. 40-hour work week with shifts
3. Repetitive work in a corporation

# The Internet made knowledge work mainstream.

- Instant, worldwide communication.
- Value created through thinking
- Automation

# Yet, *how* we work hasn't caught up.

- Still commuting to the workplace
- Still 40-hour work week with shifts
- Still repetitive work in a corporation

**Industrial practices make knowledge work abstract, arbitrary, and bureaucratic.**

**Software engineers are changing work to restore autonomy and craft.**



**Philip I. Thomas**  
`philip@contraption.co`

2015  staffjoy

2017  MOONLIGHT

2022 Contraption<sub>co.</sub>

Contraption<sup>co.</sup>

Studio developing tools  
for online work.

Booklet   Postcard   **FRCTNL**

# Building Contraption Company to promote craft and autonomy.

1. No venture capital
2. Structured in a long-term way
3. Just me and contractors

# Trends we will look at:

1. Smaller, remote companies
2. Less rigid work weeks
3. Written, async collaboration

Change 1

**Smaller, remote  
companies**



2017: Companies resisted remote.

2020: Remote becomes the norm.

**At first, companies moved their old office routines online.**

**Recently, they began to rethink work to be remote-first.**

# Remote-native teams

- Hire best person, anywhere in world
- Pay based on abilities instead of location, local economy, or seniority
- Flexibility in location and government

Big teams used to be how factories made more money.

Now, big teams mean bureaucracy and high costs.

Small teams are more profitable.

# Software scales infinitely.

Instagram had 13 employees when it sold for \$1b.

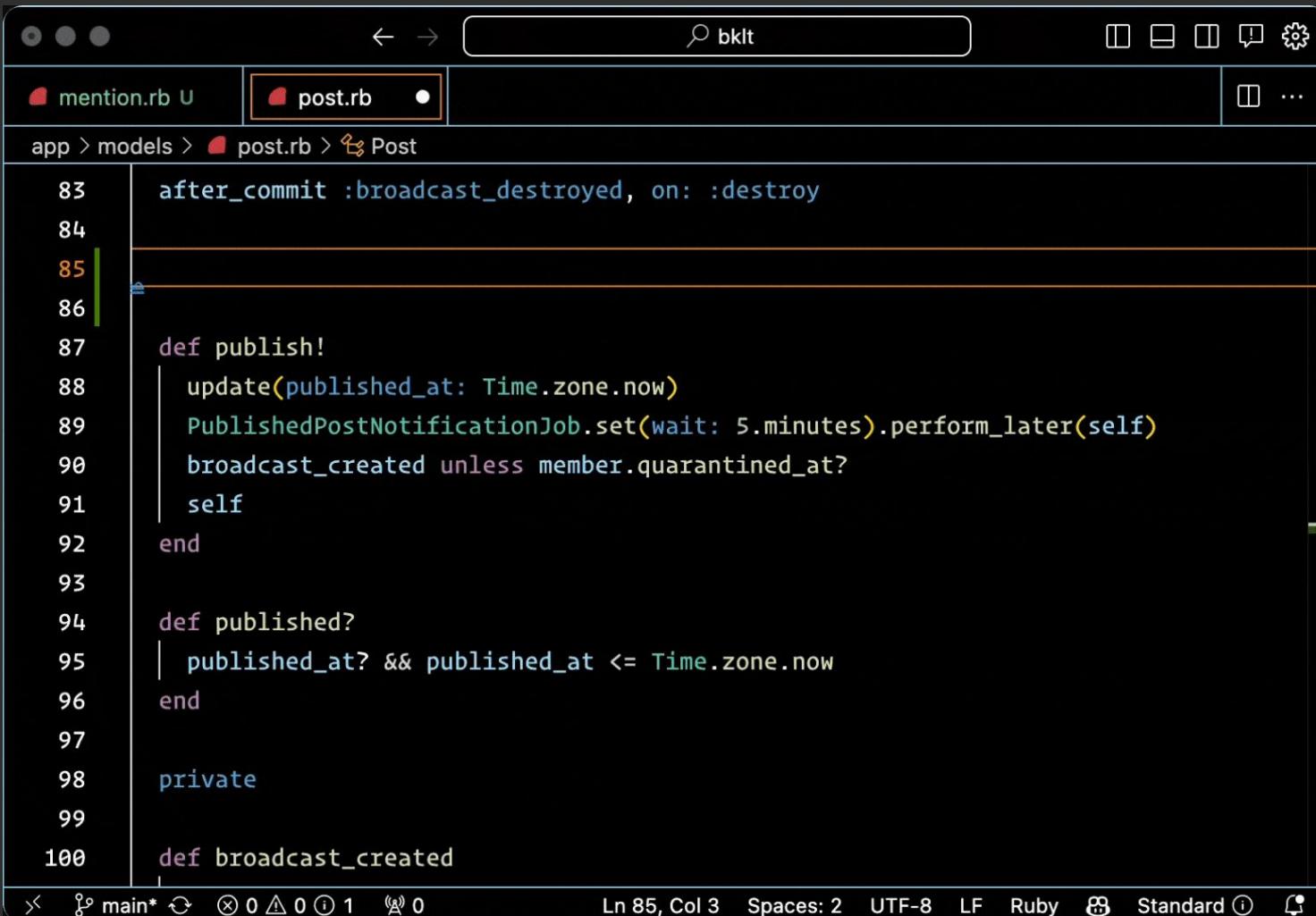
Whatsapp had 55 employees when it sold for \$19b.

Who will make the first one-person \$1b company?

Middle management is going away.

One person can do the work of an entire team.

AI is accelerating this.



mention.rb U post.rb ●

app > models > post.rb > Post

```
83     after_commit :broadcast_destroyed, on: :destroy
84
85
86
87     def publish!
88         update(published_at: Time.zone.now)
89         PublishedPostNotificationJob.set(wait: 5.minutes).perform_later(self)
90         broadcast_created unless member.quarantined_at?
91         self
92     end
93
94     def published?
95         published_at? && published_at <= Time.zone.now
96     end
97
98     private
99
100    def broadcast_created
```

main\* ↻ ⊞ 0 △ 0 ⓘ 1 ⌂ 0

Ln 85, Col 3 Spaces: 2 UTF-8 LF Ruby ⌂ Standard ⓘ ⌂

# New problems are emerging:

- Decoupling of work and social
- Isolation and loneliness
- Changing cities
- Hard for new graduates to learn

Change 2

Less rigid work  
weeks

With remote, nobody sees how long you sit at your desk.

People are judged based on their output.

Factory

**Output = Time**

Knowledge work

**Output = Time × Intensity**

4 hours of intense focus

outperforms

8 hours of moderate focus

## Fractional Work Trend

Experienced engineers are choosing shorter work days instead of higher pay.

# FRCTNL

Community for fractional workers.

Growing quickly.

[www.frctnl.xyz](http://www.frctnl.xyz)

# Fractional brings new problems.

- Shared ownership made Silicon Valley culture
- Work becomes transactional
- Less social support, such as healthcare
- People not spending free time in high-quality ways

Change 3

Written, async  
collaboration

As communication got easier, we started communicating more.

**Memos → Emails → Chats**

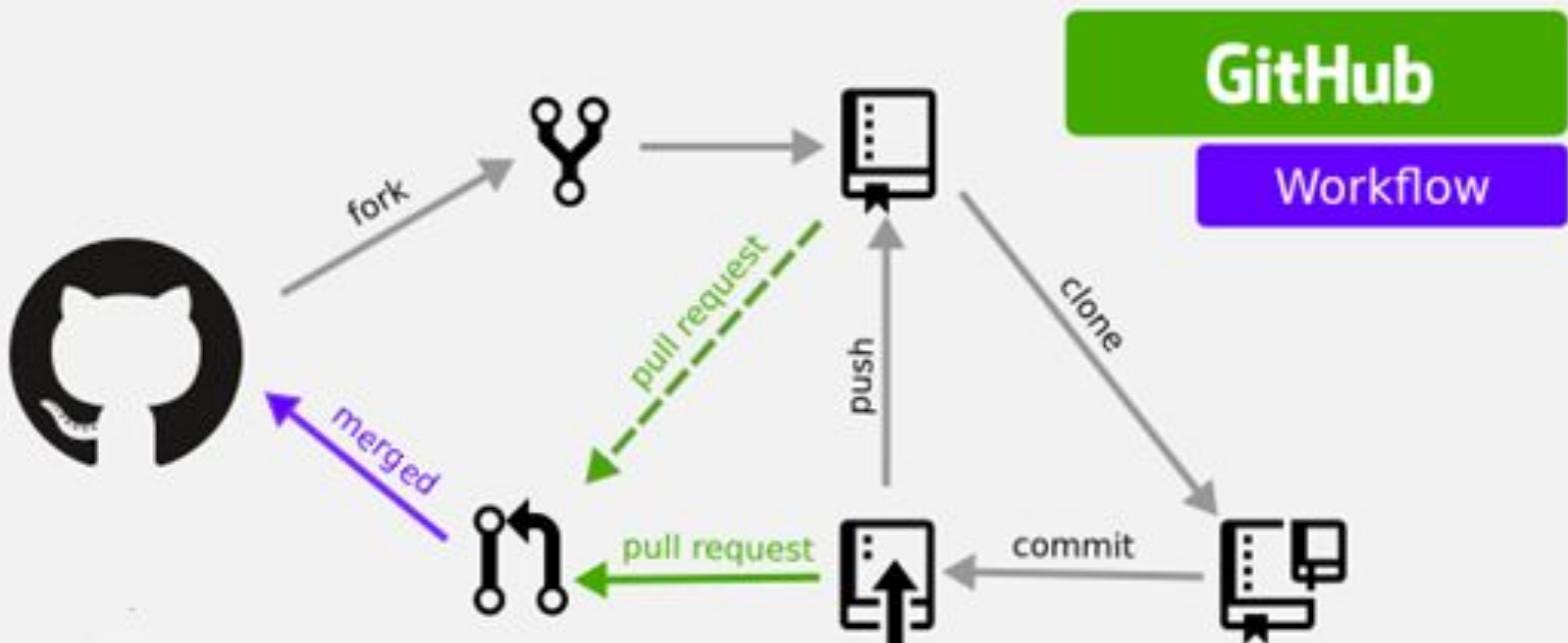
Now, average knowledge worker checks email and chat **every 6 minutes**.

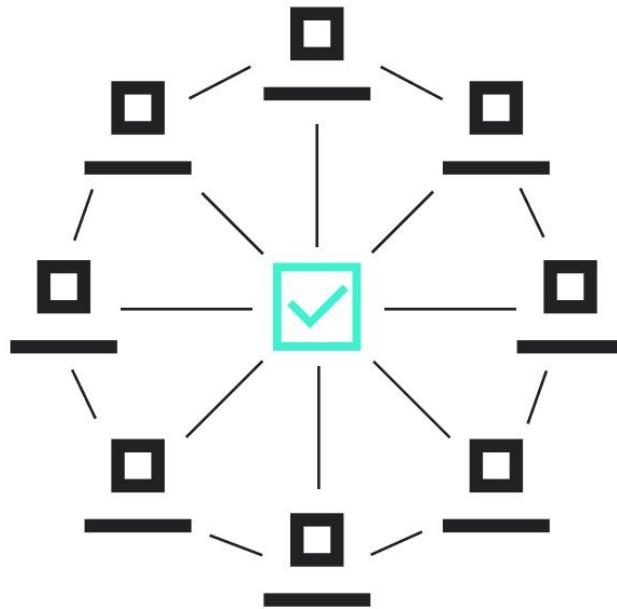
Over-communication harms  
concentration and productivity.

Open-source software powers the world.

People work, for free, on free software.

But, open-source has no meetings. It's entirely asynchronous.





Decentralized Consensus



Centralized Consensus

# Remote work is changing to require lower attention.

- Clear work tasks, organized in a tracker
- Asynchronous communication
- Work submitted and reviewed centrally

**"I stopped pushing  
decision-making  
down. I pulled it in."**

Brian Chesky, CEO Airbnb, on their  
organizational changes.

Chat is a tool for urgent  
communication.

We need a new tool for  
important communication.

New: See viewers on posts

# Async group and community app

Because people are tired of constant notifications,  
and just want an occasional email newsletter.

[Make a free group →](#)

Recent posts

About 8 hours ago

Replies to your post

Thanks for adding this feature!



# Conclusion

# Industrialization introduced the work practices we recognize today.

1. Commuting to the workplace
2. 40-hour work week with shifts
3. Repetitive work in a corporation

# Trends in software engineering signal the future.

1. Smaller, remote companies
2. Less rigid work weeks
3. Written, async collaboration

# We have new problems to address.

- Loneliness and isolation
- Low-quality leisure
- Disorganized communication

# Rethinking Work Beyond the Factory

Contraption<sup>co.</sup>