

*Achieving greater complexity — or “making crowd–work yuge” Crowdwork’s perspective.* **Crowdsourcing research has spent the better part of a decade attempting to prove the viability of crowdsourcing in increasingly complex work.** Kittur et al. map the discussion toward this goal in their work on crowdsourcing complex work [4]. The broader body of work has varied significantly in type — providing conversational assistants, interpreting medical data, and telling coherent and compelling stories, to name a few examples [5, 7, 3].

**This body of research has involved similar approaches to problems, often involving insights made in Computer Science and applied to human work–flows.** The crowdwork literature typically identifies target milestones in CS that have presented significant challenges for researchers, leverages some of the approaches and insights that Computer Science researchers have already made (for example, MapReduce in the case of Kittur et al.’s *CrowdForge*), and arranges humans as computational black boxes within those approaches and processes [4, 8, and others]. This approach has proven a compelling one because it leverages the in–built advantages that technology and digital media afford. *Foundry*’s tools for managing and arranging expert groups into a cohort allow researchers to convincingly argue that expert teams can be rapidly formed, just like non–expert teams [8].

*Piecework’s perspective.* **The research into piecework makes the case that piecework has been limited principally by the challenges of human management and oversight.** Graves, who describes piecework as “... based on examination of various shop jobs, which included calculation of the standard time and compensation for each task”, argues that piecework must be rigorously evaluated at a time that demands *other people* perform the evaluation. Graves later enumerates some of the roles required to facilitate piecework in the early 20th century: “... piecework clerks, inspectors, and “experts”...” [2]. This criterion strictly limits the extent to which piecework can grow in complexity; it must, for instance, be quickly evaluable by another person.

**Piecework researchers also make claims regarding the organizations that benefit from piecework in the first place.** Brown discusses the factors necessary for piecework to thrive: “... incentive pay is less likely in jobs with a variety of duties than in jobs with a narrow set of routinized duties” [1]. Graves adds further, that successful cases of piecework owed themselves in part to the fact that “... only [the largest and most wealthy railroads] had the resources to ... pay the overhead involved in installing work reorganization” [2]. Together, Graves and Brown make a persuasive argument that piecework is limited in complexity by managerial overhead and the fixed cost of adopting a piecework payment regime.

*What’s changed.* **Digital media have expanded the scope of viable piecework by pushing drastically on the limits cited by piecework researchers.** The research on piecework tells us that we should expect piecework to thrive in industries where the nature of the work is limited in complexity. Given the flourishing of on–demand labor platforms such as Uber, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and others, we ask ourselves what — if anything — has changed. We argue that the Internet

has trivialized the costs and challenges of the earlier limiting factors for two reasons: 1) Technology make it much easier to do complex work aided by computers; and 2) The Internet allows us to leverage the benefits of “economies of scale” at very little cost to the system–designer [6].

1

## References

- [1] Charles Brown. “Firms’ Choice of Method of Pay”. In: *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 43.3 (1990), 165S–182S. DOI: [10.1177/001979399004300311](https://doi.org/10.1177/001979399004300311). eprint: <http://ilr.sagepub.com/content/43/3/165S.full.pdf+html>. URL: <http://ilr.sagepub.com/content/43/3/165S.abstract>.
- [2] Carl Graves. “Applying Scientific Management Principles to Railroad Repair Shops — the Santa Fe Experience, 1904–18”. In: *Business and Economic History* 10 (1981), pp. 124–136. ISSN: 08946825. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23702539>.
- [3] Joy Kim and Andres Monroy-Hernandez. “Storia: Summarizing Social Media Content Based on Narrative Theory Using Crowdsourcing”. In: *Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*. CSCW ’16. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2016, pp. 1018–1027. ISBN: 978–1–4503–3592–8. DOI: [10.1145/2818048.2820072](https://doi.org/10.1145/2818048.2820072). URL: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2818048.2820072>.
- [4] Aniket Kittur et al. “CrowdForge: Crowdsourcing Complex Work”. In: *Proceedings of the 24th Annual ACM Symposium on User Interface Software and Technology*. UIST ’11. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2011, pp. 43–52. ISBN: 978–1–4503–0716–1. DOI: [10.1145/2047196.2047202](https://doi.org/10.1145/2047196.2047202). URL: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2047196.2047202>.
- [5] Walter S. Lasecki et al. “Chorus: A Crowd-powered Conversational Assistant”. In: *Proceedings of the 26th Annual ACM Symposium on User Interface Software and Technology*. UIST ’13. St. Andrews, Scotland, United Kingdom: ACM, 2013, pp. 151–162. ISBN: 978–1–4503–2268–3. DOI: [10.1145/2501988.2502057](https://doi.org/10.1145/2501988.2502057). URL: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2501988.2502057>.
- [6] Lawrence Lessig. *Code*. Lawrence Lessig, 2006.
- [7] Sam Mavandadi et al. “Distributed medical image analysis and diagnosis through crowd-sourced games: a malaria case study”. In: *PloS one* 7.5 (2012), e37245.
- [8] Daniela Retelny et al. “Expert Crowdsourcing with Flash Teams”. In: *Proceedings of the 27th Annual ACM Symposium on User Interface Software and Technology*. UIST ’14. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2014, pp. 75–85. ISBN: 978–1–4503–3069–5. DOI: [10.1145/2642918.2647409](https://doi.org/10.1145/2642918.2647409). URL: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2642918.2647409>.

<sup>1</sup>**great topic sentence here.** Teevan, Liebling, and Lasecki push the boundaries of decomposed work, exploring “selfsourcing”, and further this work with Teevan et al. [9, 10]. While some of this work doesn’t strictly fall under “crowdsourcing”, the [scientific] management of the self as a worker (of sorts) will prove relevant as we trace the literature surrounding piecework.

- [9] Jaime Teevan, Daniel J. Liebling, and Walter S. Lasecki. “Selfsourcing Personal Tasks”. In: *CHI '14 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. CHI EA '14. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2014, pp. 2527–2532. ISBN: 978–1-4503–2474–8. DOI: [10.1145/2559206.2581181](https://doi.org/10.1145/2559206.2581181). URL: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2559206.2581181>.
- [10] Jaime Teevan et al. “Productivity Decomposed: Getting Big Things Done with Little Microtasks”. In: *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. CHI EA '16. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2016, pp. 3500–3507. ISBN: 978–1-4503–4082–3. DOI: [10.1145/2851581.2856480](https://doi.org/10.1145/2851581.2856480). URL: <http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2851581.2856480>.