

### *Slicing work smaller — or “putting the ‘micro’ in microwork”*

Concurrent with the body of work on the complexity of crowdsourcing has been a thread of work exploring the decomposition of work. In this section we’ll discuss some of the approaches and the results the crowdsourcing community have taken from their work. Then, as previously, we’ll discuss some of the findings that piecework research has yielded. Finally, we’ll discuss similarities and differences between crowdwork and piecework, and how crowdwork’s limitations and potential differ from piecework’s.

**Crowdwork’s perspective.** The research on crowdwork and decomposition has generally driven toward finding new ways to strip unnecessary context from work, allowing tasks to be broken down into smaller parts. As Verroios and Bernstein frame it, “the crowd must be able to act with global understanding when each contributor only has access to local views” [9]. Researchers have thus investigated the role of distributed, contextually independent work in the contexts of collaborative writing of various forms, software development, classification, and myriad other purposes [8, 1, 2, 7, 3, 4].

**One of the emergent properties of micro-tasks has been the relative cost of finding worthwhile tasks.** The research community has documented and to some extent attempted to intervene in the discovery of worthwhile tasks [5]. Cosley et al. attempts to address this by directing workers to tasks through “intelligent task routing” [6]. Much of this work and the work at the periphery of this space, then, has focused on minimizing the amount of time that people need to spend doing anything other than the work for which they are paid.

**Piecework’s perspective.** My goal for this section is to make this all about the assembly line and scientific management, and how piecework literature tried to measure everything, but found it untenable given the extra equipment that was necessary (but generally which didn’t exist) to track every movement and action that workers took.

**What’s changed.** The finding here is that crowdwork can be more carefully micro-managed than piecework could be, and that this is a double-edged sword: we can effectively give feedback to workers on everything they do, but this is emboldening us to try to over-manage workers just as piecework tried to do.

## References

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