Vitae: Aggregated Work Histories for On–Demand Workers

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todo

State of the world

1. Research is showing that both the *breadth* and *depth* (or *complexity*) of on–demand labor will continue to grow
2. More people will be doing more kinds of work, transiently moving between myriad platforms
3. People's educations are becoming increasingly decomposed; online education platforms make it possible for people to learn and acquire new skills piecemeal, and demonstrate proficiency on ad hoc bases

Trouble!

1. The people who enter the workforce in this capacity are increasingly finding that this form of work doesn't facilitate the building of more complex, more rewarding work
2. tracking and *bringing together* the histories of these workers is difficult
   (a) it's hard to trust individual workers
   (b) platforms don't make it any easier to *amalgamate* data

Intuitive solutions (and why they fail)

1. One solution seems to be to maintain a list of known good workers — "whitelisting" good workers
   (a) This generally suffices for large–scale requesters; they form a cohort of known good workers, and can (in general) afford to "explore" and discover new workers
   (b) This solution doesn't work for smaller scale requesters:
      i. Existing requesters don't have much (read: any) incentive to share rosters of good workers
      ii. Platforms themselves don't necessarily facilitate sharing in the first place
      iii. Small scale requesters don't have sufficient traffic to make it worth it to invest in qualifications exams
      iv. Workers who already spend relatively large proportions of their time **finding tasks** don't want to take qualifying exams to become eligible for one–off tasks

Key insight or "Wao Such Insight! Much ... Insight"

1. In our most recent paper, we highlighted some of the common themes between the historical piecework and the contemporary "gig" or on–demand work [1].
2. We argued that, while significant differences are to be found throughout the comparisons of contemporary cases of on–demand work and historical counterparts, these parallel cases can still *inform* how we observe the evolution of work going forward and, indeed, how we can shape and design that future.
3. In that light, we look to the trajectory of piecework in the 20th century for inspiration and find...
4. what about **hiring halls**? What's important about hiring halls?
   (a) Hiring halls were (/are) communities of workers with various skills who band together to help dispatch qualified workers for various jobs.
   (b) These hiring halls had *de facto* collective bargaining powers.
   (c) This was an important step toward collective action and collective governance (other topics about which we've written [2]).

What we're building

1. Building a system that aggregates workers' histories into a single platform
2. Same with education
3. Through this, workers can demonstrate their proficiency by accumulating work histories from various platforms

Why is this hard (or at least not trivial)

1. [al2: All of the reasons we've ever said that the internet complicates offline things]

2. also, even offline communities of workers are hard to organize; we think we can make some of it easier through technology, but *how* is still an open question

References

[1]   Ali Alkhatib, Michael S. Bernstein, and Margaret Levi. "Examining Crowd Work and Gig Work Through The Historical Lens of Piecework". In: *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. (Denver, Colorado, USA). CHI '17. Denver, Colorado, USA: ACM, 2017, pp. 4599–4616. isbn: 978-1-4503-4655-9. doi: 10.1145/3025453.3025974. url: http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/3025453.3025974.

[2]   Niloufar Salehi et al. "We Are Dynamo: Overcoming Stalling and Friction in Collective Action for Crowd Workers". In: *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. CHI '15. ACM, 2015, pp. 1621–1630. isbn: 978–1-4503–3145–6. doi: 10.1145/2702123.2702508. url: http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/2702123.2702508.