

The Work Platform Is the New “Job” for Displaced Workers

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Government leaders often frame labor policies or future of work solutions in terms of preserving, repatriating or creating the “good jobs” of the past. But this fixation on “jobs” actually limits the potential of their solutions.

The new world of work is one “beyond employment.” As my colleagues Ravin Jesuthasan, David Creelman and I explore in my recent book, [Lead the Work](#), traditional long-term employment is increasingly giving way to medium- or short-term employment. If leaders want to help our economy adapt to a shifting work landscape, they should be focused on [new work arrangements](#), such as platforms.

Displaced Worker Or Global Freelance Expert?

The [Wall Street Journal](#) recently reported that a 12-year veteran machinist at Rexnord, a manufacturing company, was asked to train replacement Mexican workers when the company decided to move its factories. The Indianapolis-based machinist told the *Journal*, “That’s a real kick in the ass to be asked to train your replacement, to train the man that’s going to eat your bread.”

So what’s the solution?

The promise to bring back factory jobs is a sticky issue—and a temporary solution even at best. A recent article in [The Economist](#) noted that “semi-skilled manufacturing jobs are not going to return to America, or anywhere else, because they were not simply shipped abroad. They were destroyed by new ways of boosting productivity and reducing costs which heightened the distinction between routine labor and the rest of manufacturing.”

But employers shouldn't disregard the skills of American laborers just because they're relocating. The machinist at Rexnord is now a trainer. If we "[deconstruct the job](#)" to separate training (which may require long experience) from machine operation (which can be done with less experience after training), couldn't the machinist living in Indianapolis still earn an income and add value by training new machinists remotely?

On freelance platform [Upwork](#), there's a job listing for a "[freelance network trainer](#)" who will deliver training through online video conferencing or Web-ex meetings. Why couldn't similar platforms match experienced operators in one region to train inexperienced operators in another, producing economic value for the workers and the manufacturing company?

Ask "Where's My Platform?" Not "Where's My Old Job?"

Freelance platforms and the "gig economy" usually bring to mind examples like Uber, Lyft and TaskRabbit, but other platforms have already evolved to locate, match, engage and pay workers in other occupations such as computer coders, patent lawyers and media producers. Such platforms are poised to respond to worker displacement, too.

With all the focus on gig workers, the potential for platforms to assist more traditional workers is often overlooked. Yet, a recent [McKinsey Global Institute report](#) estimated that online talent platforms could increase global employment by 2.4 percent by 2025. What's more, the report shows that platforms could help more than 230 million workers globally reduce their job search time, both decreasing unemployment periods and introducing opportunities they otherwise would have missed.

Expanding platforms to offer assistance to displaced workers will require [deconstructing current jobs](#), expanding the language of worker capabilities and opportunities and building a new ecosystem supported by companies, governments, stakeholders and the HR profession. A formidable investment, but with huge social and economic returns.

Citizens often demand that corporations, governments and society address the hardship of work displacement, but promises to preserve or repatriate the "good jobs" of the past are increasingly unrealistic. Such important issues demand solutions beyond jobs, including better platforms and better systems to support the discovery, usability and awareness of these platforms.