



Themes

As a group, we will be exploring four themes as entry points into clusters of interrelated, multifaceted problems and opportunities. We recognize that there are many ways to carve up the future of work problem space, and we're looking for your input to refine our themes for experimentation and solution-building.

A - New systems for non-standard work

B - Automation for good work

C - Designing for continuous transition

D - Share in wealth creation

Further detail on each is provided below:

A - New systems for non-standard work

How might we make Canada the best place in the world to be in non-standard employment?

Roughly a third of the workforce is in non-standard forms of employment, that is part-time work, temporary work, fixed-term contracting and subcontracting, self-employment, and home-based work. Full-time temporary or contract work rose by 53 percent in the last two decades. Non-standard work gives many people who would otherwise be outside the labour market opportunities to participate, and many welcome the flexibility, diversification or ability to pursue their interests.

However, much non-standard work is also insecure, and often not entered into by choice. It can be characterized by lower job tenure, no/fewer employment benefits, little control over work conditions or scheduling, and irregular income or difficulty being paid in a timely manner. These downsides are most keenly felt by those with lower incomes, and many people in non-standard employment experience higher poverty rates. But the effects of insecurity are felt across the board: people in insecure work at both high and low incomes experience poorer mental wellbeing and increased anxiety; few workplace relationships they can draw on; and far fewer opportunities for training and career development compared to their counterparts in secure employment. As non-standard work does bring great benefits to those who are able to embrace it, the question is how to equip many more people with the tools and capabilities to flourish.

Thriving in this new landscape of gig work is a very different challenge. It requires new skills to navigate, organize and distribute work; new ways to manage security, benefits and social wellbeing; and will create both challenges and opportunities in professional and social mobility. There is an opportunity to imagine a very different kind of ecosystem that makes Canada the best place in the world to be in non-standard employment.

A - New systems for non-standard work (contd.)

What types of questions might we ask?

- What would we need to create for life in non-standard work to be just as good, or better, than standard work?
- The model of security as a permanent job, reliable income and a retirement fund is deeply ingrained in our psyches. How might we re-think the concept of security itself in relation to the new needs presented by new working patterns?
- What would it take to invest in professional development across multiple employers?
- How might we reduce transaction/contracting/payment enforcement costs and delays for freelancers and gig economy workers, such as through blockchain based smart contracts?
- How might we achieve both flexibility *and* good mental wellbeing?
- How might we help people more efficiently identify and secure well matched gigs and contracts?
- How might we ensure that the platforms through which work is found and organized provide fair access to all and actively promote people's capabilities?
- How might we support businesses to take advantage of the efficiencies of a flexible labour force, while driving employee satisfaction and wellbeing?

B - Automation for good work

How might we harness the potential of new technologies, such as AI and robotics, to promote 'good work'?

There is much speculation about the pace and scope of automation and its impact on jobs, but agreement that changes will disproportionately impact low-skilled workers, including young people, the low-paid and less educated. In Canada, recent analysis suggests that workers in transportation, finance, logistics and retail industries are some of the most at risk in the next two decades. Small businesses with closer connections to community are less able to adapt as quickly, meaning larger firms are likely to gain significant advantage. The end game is less likely to be wholesale elimination of jobs - but it will result in their transformation as occupations are reshaped to combine human and machine tasks. New jobs will likely be created to replace many of those that are ultimately phased out - but this will still result in winners and losers as people are required to retrain, shift careers and move home in search of new opportunities.

Fears about threats to jobs could dominate our ability to harness the potential of these new technologies, provoking a backlash in public support for innovation at large. Yet, AI, robotics and other technologies could help Canada forge a path towards a better world of work. Business as usual offers too few people the chance to flourish, with low pay, low productivity and often times a lack of meaning. New technologies could phase out mundane tasks, raise productivity, open the door to higher wages and allow both low- and high-skilled workers to concentrate on more human-centric and fulfilling roles.

The challenge, then, may be to accelerate the adoption of AI and robotics - but on our own terms. We want to ask not just how automation will reduce the number of jobs, but how it might actively increase the quality of work for all in ways that demonstrate its positive, human potential.

B - Automation for good work (contd.)

What types of questions might we ask?

- How does Canada become the destination for inclusive automation - what might iconic demonstrations look like that will capture public imagination?
- How might AI actively promote 'good work' for all? e.g. removing bias in recruitment platforms; supporting worker rights and bargaining power; eliminating mundane or dangerous tasks
- How might we use AI to find and promote types of work that promote human flourishing, such as through increasing autonomy and creativity?
- How might we promote the kind of automation that boosts rather than displaces human work?
- How might small businesses become greater adopters of AI and robotics? Are there ways to share costs and benefits?
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- How might we mobilize social investment to sponsor benevolent AI and robotics innovation?
- How might we open up pathways for traditionally underrepresented groups to enter careers in AI and robotics?

C - Designing for continuous transition

How might we support the nimble, adaptive Canadian workforce required to thrive in the future of work?

The nature of work will change significantly in many industries as occupations are reshaped in combination with new technologies and new jobs that appear.

Accelerating technological change makes it harder than ever to predict and prepare as workers, employers, educators or policymakers - there is no “right” scenario to plan for, rather we need to quickly build adaptive capacity for many possible future scenarios. The rate of change in business and industry makes forecasting future employer needs nearly impossible. Educators are tasked with preparing young people for forms of work we cannot fully imagine. Paths for professional development are changing as employers invest less in training a workforce they are less likely to retain. And much of this shifts responsibility to workers to create their own routes for learning and career progression, without commensurate growth in the tools and training to do so.

New models are needed that support continuous adaptation to new forms of work and transitions for workers. What kinds of institutions, investments and infrastructure could support ongoing skills progression across jobs, gigs and industries? The ability to navigate, adapt, and be resilient to downturns are themselves particular skills, requiring people to cultivate a ‘growth mindset’. This is not simply about more efficient matching of supply and demand, but an opportunity to help people and communities build strong identities resilient to changes in work and underpinned by a broader sense of purpose.

C - Designing for continuous transition

What types of questions might we ask?

- How might we create the urgency and incentives for investment in systems that support ongoing adaptation?
- What new solutions will support continual workforce adaptation and skills progression?
- How might we create and share responsibility for investing in ongoing employability and progression across multiple employers?
- How might we increase individual capability for adapting and navigating transitions, particularly among young people and low skilled workers?
- What new education models may be built around supporting more nimble, adaptable careers?
- How might skills and capabilities be recognized, credentials validated and reputation managed across gig work?
- How might we support re-skilling through new forms of upskilling insurance, security, social investment models, or accessing benefits from productivity gains?
- How might we build culture shifting movements in the vein of B Corp, Fair Trade etc to influence trends around broad participation in wealth creation?

D - Share in wealth creation

How might everyone have the opportunity to benefit from the upside of technology?

Robot taxes and universal basic incomes are among recent responses to the need for a modern social contract for economic security in an era that may see less income tax revenue, more concentration of technology ownership, more frequent periods of unemployment and re-skilling, and less traditional wage and salary based work.

The changes driving the future of work are predicted by many to concentrate wealth and influence as immense investments are required to stay at the forefront of fields such as AI and robotics. Others see how technologies such as blockchain, AI enabled decision making, and new business models may help democratize participation in value and wealth creation. Which models are we investing in, and how might we provoke new explorations of those that benefit and engage the most people?

Along with new forms of redistribution, new approaches may include democratising ownership of technologies and the organisations that deploy them, ensuring broader participation in the entrepreneurial opportunities created by new technologies, promoting platforms that benefit both workers and consumers, and reimagining business models that distribute wealth generated based on other types of value contributed, or new approaches to community asset ownership and wealth generation. Beyond wage earning, the future of work may be more about the future of value creation and distribution and how citizens are able to participate in this.

D - Share in wealth creation (contd.)

What types of questions might we ask?

- How might new types of companies re-imagine dividends as rewarding more than financial contributions (compensating value contributed through ideas, designs, data, problems identified/solved, networks developed, etc)
- What new forms could collectively owned assets take and how might membership in the benefits from those assets be defined?
- How might we build funds with broad participation that invest in emerging technologies, to shared benefits?
- How might new technologies build more transparency into supply chains, creating leverage for distribution of wealth created based on work contributed?
- How might platform cooperatives compete with centrally owned gig economy platforms to distribute benefits more widely?
- What types of intermediaries are required for these new forms of organization and distribution to thrive?
- How might new forms of collective ownership substantially increase the resilience and independence of Indigenous peoples in Canada and act as a driver of economic reconciliation?