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Building the future of work together

Jobbing out is the latest trend

Why workers are turning their backs on the classic employment model and going it alone

by Denis Pennel

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Few people would deny that the world of work is changing. Gone are the days of a job for life with the promise of a gold watch and a pension after 40 years of faithful service. Today the employment market is volatile, fast moving and in a constant state of flux. The past 20 years have seen the emergence of many new forms of work (teleworking, co-working, crowd working, job sharing etc.) and now up to 30 different types of labour contract are in use in many countries. Today, however, we are witnessing the emergence of a brand new phenomenon, with **people resigning from secure employee positions to go-it-alone as independent workers.**

This 'jobbing out' as I like to call it has undoubtedly been hastened by the recent economic crisis where a contracting global economy meant that many people lost their jobs and were forced to take a different approach to work. However, it is not just necessity at play. **Workers are increasingly faced with either burn-out or bore-out in their working lives,** and are seeking a new freedom and flexibility in their work.

So how did we get to this point and what is fuelling it? I believe **it can be explained by the convergence of two things - a socio-economic revolution and a digital one.** In the new economic reality, companies need staff to work in more creative and autonomous way, based on temporary projects, resulting in the emergence of protean careers. At the same time, worker are expected to be contactable at any time, even on holiday, and to respond to emails and calls 24/7. This work-life blend leads to exhaustion, frustration and ultimately burn out. And for what? Job security and loyalty are a thing of the past and in the brave new world of work, it's every man for himself.

Workers who are established in their careers are increasingly reflecting on their lives and realising that if they want to hang on to their health, their relationships and perhaps their sanity, there has to be another way. And of course the flipside of the digital revolution is that it frees us to work in a different way. In today's "gig economy" workers are choosing freelance projects and temporary assignments. They are seizing control of their own destiny and creating a working life to suit them. And it is making people happier: a recent survey from the UK Royal Society of Arts shows that 84% of self employed are happier in work than employees, despite the fact that they may earn less¹!

The result is the emergence of **a new, collaborative economy and a renewed spirit of entrepreneurship** as people create portfolio working lives, relying on contacts, word of mouth and the growing number of specialist online platforms (such as Upwork and Youpijob)that have appeared in response to this new trend. These allow people to

¹ The Second Age of Small – Royal Society of Arts, June 2015

network and trade goods and services as a part of a thriving collaborative economy. The growth in micro-activity with multiple sources of income and the ability to scale up or down in function of time and need is a growing feature of our economy.

For employers, this new era challenges their talent acquisition models. Companies only looking to recruit direct, full time staff are missing out on some of the best talent in the market. By contrast, those companies with agile talent supply chain management strategies that allow them to recruit across all labour types and scale their operations on demand, are gaining a competitive advantage.

In the future we could reach the stage where people have work, but don't actually have a job. The nature of this work of course is very different. People will typically work at a number of professional activities at the same time. They might work behind a bar a couple of days a week, take on painting and decorating jobs on other days and do some driving for Uber in the evenings.

I believe the developed world has reached a tipping point in the employer-employee relationship. At a certain age and stage in their life people wake up to the fact that they don't want to live to work: and decide to organise their work around their lives. Time and again people cite the freedom, flexibility and sense of relief that they feel having broken free of the employee treadmill. Having witnessed corporate mergers and downsizing, workers no longer feel the same attachment to a single workplace.

Instead, many are embracing self-employment in order to become masters of their own destiny. As people live longer and need to work longer to subsidise pensions and keep themselves active, **we will see increasing numbers choosing to 'job out' and take the first step towards a better work-life balance.**