

One of the central tasks of this course has been to unpack the ways in which work in today's economy has changed over time. Often, when we talk about this topic, one of the first things that comes to mind is the role of technology in transforming work. Over the past few years, we have seen an explosion in what's known as the on-demand economy. It's visible everywhere. We as consumers are able to have our food delivered, grab a ride home, or even have someone run their errands, all purchased and arranged in a matter of minutes from our smartphones.

Our colleague John McCarthy talks in more detail about these new ways of organizing work in a different video lecture in this course. What we're going to talk about now is how these employment arrangements are connected to two issues-- one, how we think about workers' rights in the on-demand economy, and two, how technology can promote new forms of worker advocacy in settings where gigs, not full-time jobs for one employer, are becoming the employment norm.

Many consumers and workers alike find the flexibility and efficiency of the on-demand economy to be beneficial. Work hours are flexible, for instance, and the efficiency of services saves people time. As has been pointed out, however, many workers undertaking the actual jobs of these companies are employed as independent contractors, meaning that they are not direct employees of the company that is bringing us the good or the service.

A babysitter who gets his work through the website Care.com, for instance, is considered to be self-employed. This means that the benefits and protections that we associate with full time, stable jobs, such as access to paid leave or unemployment insurance, are not available to on-demand workers. Likewise, standards that promote good, quality jobs are often absent from these arrangements, as we've seen through the recent protests by Uber drivers over wages and terms of work in various cities.

So the traditional system of benefits and protections based on full time jobs and employment status no longer makes sense in these settings. Innovative, disruptive technologies that change the way business is done and work is performed require simultaneous innovative changes in how workers are able to access rights on the job. What we've talked about in this course is updating the social contract at work.

One approach to such change comes with support from a broad coalition of technology firms, labor organizations, academics, and foundations. The idea is pretty simple-- that benefits and protections should accrue with the work being performed, no matter the employer. In other words, the number of sick days, for instance, a gig worker can accrue should depend on the number of hours she works, whether providing rides or delivering groceries.

Although firms would contribute to these benefits and protections, they would essentially remain with the worker, allowing for economic security even when working for multiple employers. They can be structured in a way that promotes good jobs that pay living wages. And by making these portable benefits universal, they can also extend to workers beyond the on-demand economy, helping ease the now-commonplace transitions that many of us experience moving from one employer to the next.

The idea of portable benefits mimics these new on-demand arrangements that characterize growing portions of the economy. Likewise, advocates are also finding new ways to use technology to promote workers' rights on the job. In some cases, this is directly relevant to on-demand workers themselves.

Relatively new websites, such as coworker.org and Dynamo, serve as online hubs where workers can start petitions for change, rate their experience with certain employers, and connect with others in their industry. Turkopticon is a similar application that allows crowd workers on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to rate employers.

These applications compliment organizing efforts in other settings as well. In our last video, we talked about [Our Walmart](http://OurWalmart.org), an organization of non-unionized Walmart workers advocating for better working conditions. Using an online campaign through coworker.org, [Our Walmart](http://OurWalmart.org) was recently able to gather widespread support for their demands regarding more stable hours. In response, Walmart changed the way they schedule shifts.

With support from an innovative organization called the Workers Lab, which promotes new forms of worker organizing, [Our Walmart](http://OurWalmart.org) is also developing an app that allows workers to connect with one another while receiving peer-generated advice and training relevant to their jobs. Other organizations are developing applications that not only serve to connect workers and mobilize around specific demands, but also to inform and educate workers about their rights on the job. The [Domestic Worker](http://DomesticWorker.org) app, for example, was created in response to the passage of a domestic worker bill of rights in New York state. Caregivers, nannies, and cleaners can call in or text to access both recorded and live informational episodes and messages about their rights under the state's new legislation.

A different approach is taken by the [Restaurant Opportunity Center](http://RestaurantOpportunityCenter.org), the organization of restaurant workers we discussed in our last video. The center's [Top Server](http://TopServer.org) app is a game that teaches its users about the skills needed to advance in restaurants, imparting training, knowledge, and even the lingo used in restaurant work to servers looking for ways to advance in the industry. To be clear, these new forms of advocacy are not a replacement for direct work or organizing and other advocacy work. But as these organizations show, the types of technologies that are transforming the way we work can also be used to strengthen our efforts to create good jobs.

And as the on-demand economy continues to be fueled by growing consumer demand, we will continue to be presented with opportunities for a potential innovation and re-establishing the social contract at work, not just for on-demand workers, but for all workers throughout the economy.

