
Promoting Wellbeing with Top- and Bottom-up Strategies: Microwork Conditions and Playful Work Design

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Abstract

The microwork economy is rapidly expanding, creating a relatively new labor market driven by individuals who take on short-term, often fragmented tasks through digital platforms. This workforce is highly flexible but also vulnerable, as these "gig" roles come with volatility and limited protections. Despite the recent rapid growth of this sector, little is understood about the factors shaping microworkers' experiences. What motivates their engagement with tasks? How does their work on these platforms affect their work-life balance? Why do some individuals keep exerting themselves on the platform, whereas others decide to leave? In this study, we draw on self-determination theory to explore how top-down and bottom-up strategies influence microworkers' engagement and withdrawal. Specifically, we focus on how work conditions and proactive strategies, i.e., playful work design. We aim to understand how these strategies interact to sustain (and undermine) workers' commitment to microwork and wellbeing over time.

We will conduct a five-wave longitudinal study on Clickworker across five months to test our hypotheses. Data collection concludes on 20 May. The sample size is estimated to consist of 500 individuals and 2000 monthly observations. We analyze the data using a multilevel modeling approach to accommodate the nested structure of data, where months are nested in individuals. We will test interaction effects in addition to mediation. Specifically, we test a moderated-indirect effects model using Bayesian estimation.

We aim to contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we expand the literature on microwork by examining the fluctuating associations of unique microwork characteristics with wellbeing. By investigating these characteristics, we shed light on the implications of microwork aspects not captured by traditional measures and more static research designs. Second, we differentiate bottom-up from top-down strategies to manage engagement. Accordingly, we answer calls for research on proactivity by microworkers. Finally, we extend existing research by elucidating how certain microwork may drive work-home conflict and withdrawal instead of work-home balance and engagement. Thus, the findings may have important practical implications for managing digital labor platforms effectively.

Keywords: playful work design, work design, wellbeing, Gig work, microwork

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