



Knowledge worker to knowledge entrepreneur

Sometimes you feel under-appreciated and used for the wrong purpose. Why am I doing low-value work? It is a question often asked by knowledge workers. You have high expectations and want to be on the steep ascent curve. But the world of work seems to be against you. Fortunately, you have hope, and all you need to do is change your perspective.

The term "knowledge worker" was coined in the 1950s and was limited to a few professions. Now virtually anyone who uses creativity, innovation and a high degree of skill to solve problems or create opportunity can be considered a knowledge worker. The concept of work evolved over the centuries and drove several economic changes.

Four economies

Some described it as the **first economy**—the agrarian economy where farmers mostly used brawn to grow crops and practised subsistence agriculture. Life was tough, and wealth accumulation was only for a few—the landowners—who reaped the profits while the labourers toiled the soil.

The **second economy**—mass production—started the industrial age, and machines did what humans sweated on. Factories can produce cheaper goods, and humans became machine operators and factory supervisors—giving rise to the modern bureaucratic organisation. Some workers, now called managers, were the new "thinkers", and so management was born.

While the agrarian economy mostly died out in the developed world, surviving farmers embraced the treasures of mass production. They rode tractors instead of horses, replaced manure with inorganic fertilisers, and started the green revolution resulting in lower food prices and farm employment. Workers were now free from back-breaking work.

The third economy, the knowledge era, started before the internet age was boosted by information technology. Workers were hired for their brains, and they had a dif-



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ferent kind of machinery—the PC and the internet meant they could work from anywhere and create value through their expertise. The third economy caused a seismic shift in the world of work—anywhere or everywhere—virtually we could be more productive. Information met democracy. The elitist encyclopaedia Britannica was replaced by Google, and anyone can search for information nuggets. The rule of increasing returns replaced the law of diminishing returns.

The **fourth economy**, which has just started, promises to change some knowledge workers to entrepreneurs. While entrepreneurship is old as the first human who took a risk with an innovative idea, it became a more popular concept with the mass-production economy. Innovation and the need to make things better drove a group of thinkers to start their ventures in their garages, dorms, homes, or nearby streets. They became our heroes often with scant resources and a creative mind—Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, and others from Silicon Valley made it to the billionaire's list.

Knowledge worker disillusionment

While entrepreneurship offers employees an opportunity to become more independent and even own a one-person organisation, the transition from worker to business owner is just as great as for a farmer riding a horse to one now driving a pickup truck.

Knowledge professionals often have other issues to consider before they escape their workplaces. Often bureaucratic organisations put people in their defined spaces and cramp their thinking. Knowledge workers also face uncertainty of em-

ployment, corporate restructuring and unfair furlough strategies, and these factors can kill their value-creating ability.

Generation Z members seem less likely to prefer work in the almighty 20th-century organisation. They want to express themselves, be creative, have more autonomy, and work in a more relaxed space. Cubicle life is not for them, as they were raised in a mobile world and prefer dress-down.

The increase in tertiary and professional qualifications, once only for a few, means middle managers oppressed by the red tape of the organisation want to use that expertise. Often the largest share of supervisors, middle managers feel threatened by restructuring and frequently ignored by their bosses.

Knowledge entrepreneur

Knowledge entrepreneurs have an advantage over the old-world work order; they can enter any field quickly. The barriers to entry to knowledge businesses are low and exiting just the same.

The pandemic taught us that we don't necessarily need to work at the office, as value can easily be created at home or anywhere. Home is no longer only a place to live; your castle, with an internet connection, an e-commerce site, and video conferencing, can channel you to global markets.

But beware that knowing how to post on Facebook (Meta) or creating new content on LinkedIn is quite different from sending memos at the office. While in the physical world, location is three times king (location, location, location), on social media, it's triple queen—content, content, content.

Some rules in traditional marketing are out, and you can cheaply experiment in the digital landscape and get immediate feedback. Most internet offerings are subscription-based and may have a free option for a time. If you sign up for Thinkific.com, for example, you can launch your online education business or build your website on Wix.com and not pay a dollar. Freemium is a business model where a firm offers basic

or limited features for free but charges for upgraded services.

It no longer takes a lifetime to create a business or a brand. But the intersection of information, entrepreneurship and digital technologies landscape will unleash human ingenuity like never before and fuel another phase of wealth increase.

Personal brand

If you decide to start a business or have a one-person enterprise, one has to consider a powerful marketing tool. Marketing yourself is not enough; you need to build a personal brand. Knowledge entrepreneurs such as Dorie Clarke and Brendon Burchard have millions of followers and a vast database to market their personal development products.

Emma Brudner, a blogger for Hubspot, writes about why you should invest time in personal branding. In her blog post titled, "Why invest time in personal branding", she suggests that a spot on LinkedIn will not cut it, and she says prospects will want to work with a more familiar and trusted person.

Secondly, Emma says that a brand name differentiates you from others in a crowded field. Thirdly, if fans develop loyalty to your name, it becomes easier to start a business. Finally, you can achieve higher revenue targets as Coke can get more sales than other similar sodas.

Knowledge workers have a golden opportunity to monetise their expertise. As machines and management powered the industrial revolution, digital technologies and entrepreneurship fused into the new world of independent work will create a different economic landscape—millions of dispersed but interconnected knowledge solopreneurs. And, you can be part of the new era of work.

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