

Transforming the Human Experience at Work

Strategic Plan Theme: Global Impact

Funding Level: Between \$1-5 million

Facility Needs: Adjustments to existing facilities will be needed

Submitting Unit: Social Science/Human Resources and Labor Relations

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

The initiative will be led by the College of Social Science, including the School of Human Resources and Labor Relations, Economics, and the industrial/organizational psychology program within Psychology. The College of Business, the department of Media and Information in the College of Communications, the College of Education, the College of Engineering, the College of Osteopathic Medicine, and the College of Nursing are also collaborating in the project.

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

We propose to launch an initiative linking the research expertise of departments, schools, and colleges across MSU with a focus on the evolution and future of work and in particular, on the human experience at work. This proposed initiative would elevate existing and emerging research across campus that examines how the experience of people with work is changing in the face of technological and social forces. It would also increase the engagement of MSU researchers with organizations experiencing changes with work. Technology is redefining jobs, enhancing some work and degrading others. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, workers are demanding more flexibility from employers and a new social contract that provides them with more control over their jobs. Greater workforce diversity is leading employers to adjust their employment practices in ways that emphasize equity and inclusion. What all this means for how humans will engage with work going forward is unclear, yet critically important for the health of our economy and the well-being of our population.

MSU has widespread expertise on this topic across colleges (social science, business, engineering, communications, education, and health sciences), but the work currently lacks the connection and elevation to optimize opportunities for large, integrated research grants that this initiative would bring. Further, the initiative would facilitate new opportunities for student learning and enhance the use of research generated by MSU scholars to drive best practices within Michigan industry and the public sector. We aim to expand and elevate research and practice on the human experience with work in a variety of contexts, including STEM disciplines, health care, and the State of Michigan.

What is the proposal's goal?

The goal of this initiative is to raise existing and emerging research across campus that examines how the experience of people with work is changing in the face of technological and social forces. Given the expertise at MSU, we aim to promote and distinguish MSU research, increase the number of interdisciplinary external research grants, engage students in courses and experiences related to the changing nature of work, and impact practitioners and the policymakers in Michigan and nationally. We will do this through Connection by holding a regular seminar series, an annual conference on work that involves MSU scholars and practitioners, developing partnerships with industry leaders, offering seed money support to MSU researchers, and developing a web page to promote the initiative's research and educational experiences for students. We will also realize our goals through the Dissemination of our research in the form of articles and reports as well

as a special annual report on the State of Work in Michigan. The initiative we propose would link research across the university around four themes related to the human experience with work:

1. The development of new technology and its impact on jobs and workers.
 - a. Research in this thematic area would focus on the implications of technology (AI, machine learning, wearable technology) for people at work. The impact of such technologies on workers include a variety of outcomes: economic, physical health, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Examples include: Professors Andrew Mason and Subir Biswas in the College of Engineering are developing wearable and other wireless devices that collect biometric and other data related to work performance.
2. Assessing the impact of emerging forms of work practices on workers.
 - a. Research in this thematic area would focus on emerging forms of work practices, including remote work, gig work, flexible work scheduling, as well as new forms of worker representation. The impact of these practices on workers include a variety economic, physical health, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive outcomes. For example, Professor Judy Arnetz in the CHM researches how the health and well-being of health care workers impact the quality of patient care.
3. Enhancing the skills of workers in and out of the workplace.
 - a. Research in this thematic area would focus on what we know about preparing the workforce of the future. For example, Professor Amanda Chuan in the College of Social Science examines how occupational changes differentially affect the educational choices of men and women.
4. Ensuring equity and fairness at the workplace.
 - a. Research in this thematic area would focus on promoting equitable and fair work practices. For example, Psychology professor Ann Marie Ryan addresses this topic through her diversity lab.

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

Given that people spend about one-third of their life at work, what happens in this space is of tremendous interest and importance. Much of the discussion about the future of work focuses on technology. Kurzweil's bestseller, *The Singularity is Near* (2005), predicts that technological change in the 21st century will yield roughly 20,000 years of progress with its current rate of advancement. How, when, and where we work has been changed radically by technology (e.g., mobile computing, advanced robotics, machine learning, artificial intelligence), leading people to accomplish more in less time and with fewer resources. However, this transformation of the work itself has not always been accompanied by sufficient attention to the corresponding transformation of the human experience with work. People are simultaneously hyper-connected yet experiencing isolation when working remotely. They are relieved of repetitive and low-level tasks via automation yet are not prepared and supported for more complex work tasks. Workers are gaining the freer lifestyle of a gig economy while losing the benefits of a life-long employer (e.g., training and development, advancement opportunities, security). Moreover, changing workforce demographics are altering the ways in which organizations think about how to structure jobs and make schedules more flexible. Demands for fairness, equity, and voice within the workplace are further changing the work experience.

This issue directly affects the 150 million people in the US workforce, including the nearly 5 million people in the Michigan workforce as well as the tapestry of firms that make up our economy. Understanding the human experience at work is crucial for our economic performance and for the well-being of workers.

Who will be impacted?

This initiative will impact how the research conducted by MSU professors is accomplished and disseminated. It will increase interdisciplinary work on a topic vital to the economy and all working people. The initiative will strengthen MSU's connection to industry leaders who are currently struggling to find ways to adapt work to changing technological and social forces. For example, the initiative will actively seek out partners among Michigan hospitals to help them more effectively confront their workforce issues. The initiative will directly

engage Michigan policymakers through an annual report of the State of Work in Michigan. The initiative will engage students in the issue of the future of work to help them confront and shape their work experience.

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

The National Science Foundation has a Future of Work at the Human-Technology Frontier program that directly supports research on this theme as well as the NSF Science of Organizations program. Beyond financial resources, impact from this initiative would be sustained by implementing reports and conferences that become part of the fabric of MSU and shine a light on MSU research in a sustained way to increase MSU's local, regional, national, and global reputation in this area. We propose two key activities to do this: Publishing an annual report on the State of Work in Michigan and holding an annual conference on the human experience at work that would bring top executives to MSU to interact with researchers on how work is changing and discuss how research can inform solutions to the problems they are encountering.