

Rethinking Work Beyond the Factory

Contraption_{co.}

Technology solves our problems

1. Hunter-gatherers → Scarce food
2. Farmers → Scarce land
3. Factory Workers → Scarce labor
4. Knowledge Workers → Scarce attention

Industrialization introduced the work practices we recognize today.

1. Commuting to the workplace
2. 40-hour work week with shifts
3. Repetitive work in a corporation

The Internet made knowledge work mainstream.

- Instant, worldwide communication.
- Value created through thinking
- Automation

Yet, *how we work* hasn't caught up.

- Still commuting to the workplace
- Still 40-hour work week with shifts
- Still repetitive work in a corporation

Industrial practices make knowledge work abstract, arbitrary, and bureaucratic.

Software engineers are changing work to restore autonomy and craft.



Philip I. Thomas
philip@contraption.co

2015 * staffjoy

2017  MOONLIGHT

2022 **Contraption**_{co.}

Contraption_{co.}

**Studio developing tools
for online work.**

Booklet Postcard FRCTNL

Building Contraption Company to promote craft and autonomy.

1. No venture capital
2. Structured in a long-term way
3. Just me and contractors

Trends we will look at:

1. Smaller, remote companies
2. Less rigid work weeks
3. Written, async collaboration

Change 1

**Smaller, remote
companies**



2017: Companies resisted remote.

2020: Remote becomes the norm.

At first, companies moved their old office routines online.

Recently, they began to rethink work to be remote-first.

Remote-native teams

- Hire best person, anywhere in world
- Pay based on abilities instead of location, local economy, or seniority
- Flexibility in location and government

**Big teams used to be how
factories made more money.**

**Now, big teams mean
bureaucracy and high costs.**

Small teams are more profitable.

Software scales infinitely.

Instagram had 13 employees when it sold for \$1b.

Whatsapp had 55 employees when it sold for \$19b.

Who will make the first one-person \$1b company?

Middle management is going away.

One person can do the work of an entire team.

AI is accelerating this.

```
83   after_commit :broadcast_destroyed, on: :destroy
84
85
86
87   def publish!
88     update(published_at: Time.zone.now)
89     PublishedPostNotificationJob.set(wait: 5.minutes).perform_later(self)
90     broadcast_created unless member.quarantined_at?
91     self
92   end
93
94   def published?
95     published_at? && published_at <= Time.zone.now
96   end
97
98   private
99
100  def broadcast_created
```

New problems are emerging:

- Decoupling of work and social
- Isolation and loneliness
- Changing cities
- Hard for new graduates to learn

Change 2

**Less rigid work
weeks**

With remote, nobody sees how long you sit at your desk.

People are judged based on their output.

Factory

Output = Time

Knowledge work

Output = Time × Intensity

4 hours of intense focus

outperforms

8 hours of moderate focus

Fractional Work Trend

**Experienced engineers are
choosing shorter work days
instead of higher pay.**

FRCTNL

Community for fractional workers.

Growing quickly.

www.frctnl.xyz

Fractional brings new problems.

- Shared ownership made Silicon Valley culture
- Work becomes transactional
- Less social support, such as healthcare
- People not spending free time in high-quality ways

Change 3

**Written, async
collaboration**

As communication got easier, we started communicating more.

Memos → Emails → Chats

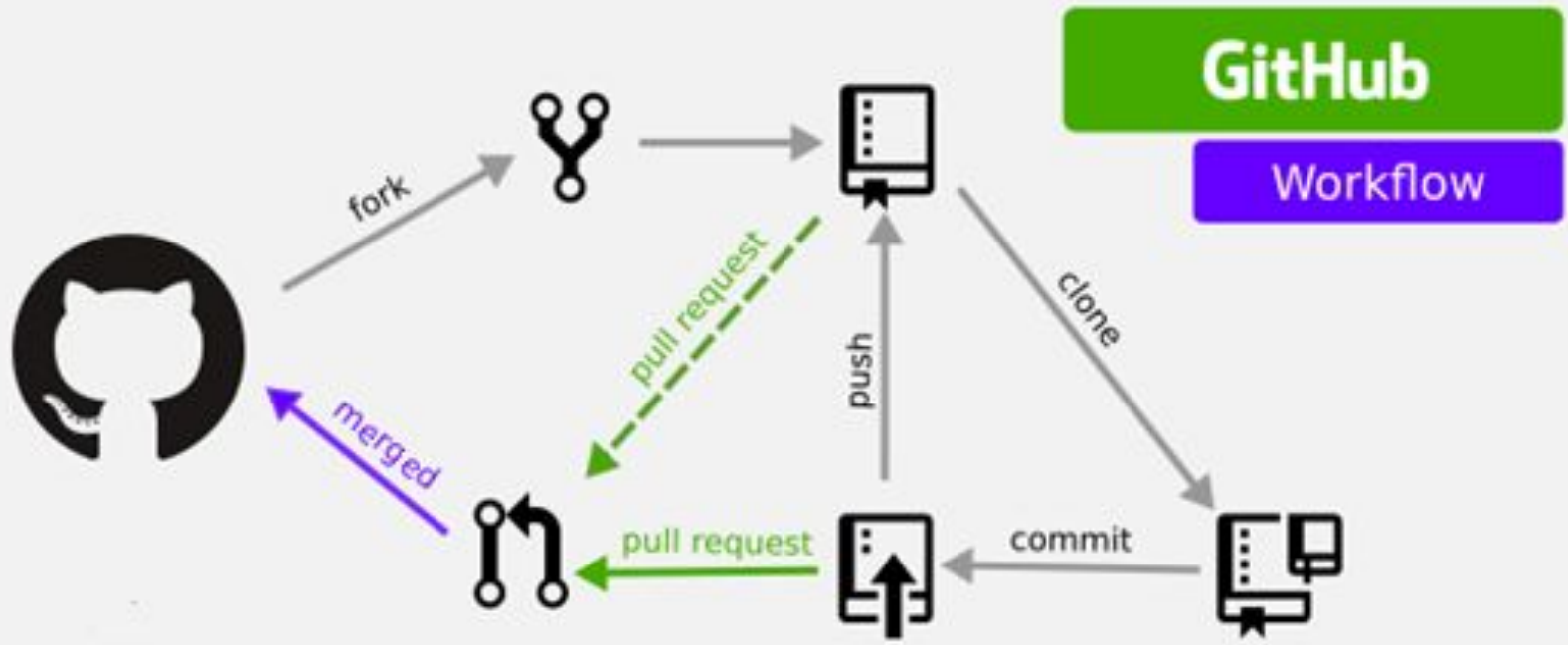
Now, average knowledge worker checks email and chat **every 6 minutes.**

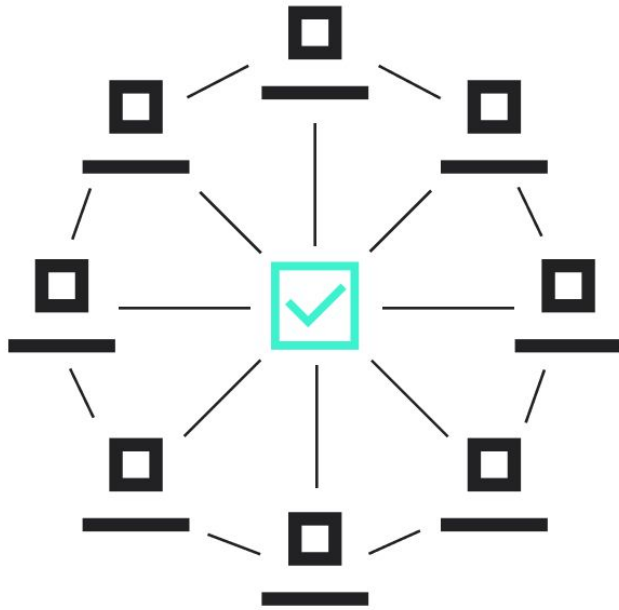
**Over-communication harms
concentration and productivity.**

Open-source software powers the world.

People work, for free, on free software.

But, open-source has no meetings. It's entirely asynchronous.





Decentralized Consensus



Centralized Consensus

Remote work is changing to require lower attention.

- Clear work tasks, organized in a tracker
- Asynchronous communication
- Work submitted and reviewed centrally

**"I stopped pushing
decision-making
down. I pulled it in."**

Brian Chesky, CEO Airbnb, on their
organizational changes.

Chat is a tool for urgent communication.

We need a new tool for important communication.

New: See viewers on posts

Async group and community app

Because people are tired of constant notifications,
and just want an occasional email newsletter.

Make a free group →

Recent posts

About 8 hours ago

Replies to your post

Thanks for adding this feature!



Brooke Jones

Yesterday at 9:02 PM

Conclusion

Industrialization introduced the work practices we recognize today.

1. Commuting to the workplace
2. 40-hour work week with shifts
3. Repetitive work in a corporation

Trends in software engineering signal the future.

1. Smaller, remote companies
2. Less rigid work weeks
3. Written, async collaboration

We have new problems to address.

- Loneliness and isolation
- Low-quality leisure
- Disorganized communication

Rethinking Work Beyond the Factory

Contraption_{co.}