Work and Wealth

Lecture 10-2

Computers & Society (CPSC 430)

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Workplace Changes

• Technology has fundamentally changed workplace organization
  – Flattening out organizational structures: reporting occurs between affected people rather than along predefined paths
  – Facilitating the monitoring of employees
    ▪ Slacking off at work
    ▪ Illegal activities by employees
  – Allowing telecommuting
    ▪ Really accelerated changes due to COVID

• How do you feel about these changes?
  – Do you think they improve or degrade employee experience?
Globalization

• The marketing of goods and services across global rather than national scales
  – Manufacturing goods in China, often using Canadian or Australian raw materials, often designed elsewhere
  – Call centers in India
  – Most chips are made in Taiwan

• Effects of globalization
  – Increased shipping and travel
  – Foreign workers (visas), students
  – Outsourcing

• Do you think globalization is a problem or a benefit?
“The government should attempt to slow or stop the spread of automation technologies that are likely to eliminate large numbers of jobs.”
Increase in Productivity

• Working long hours
  – North Americans (particularly Americans) work longer hours than other cultures and other times in history

• Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
  – A famous explanation of this restless work ethic
  – Linked it to Calvinist theology of predestination

• We have exchanged leisure time for possessions
  – Do you think this exchange is worth it? Would you exchange a much lower standard of living for much more free time?
The “Winner-Take-All Society”

• Occurs when a small number of top performers receive a large fraction of the rewards
  – Athletes, musicians, actors, law schools, social media

• Harmful effects
  – Reduces the production of (e.g., cultural) goods
  – Unfair: severe penalty for falling a bit short
  – Leads to arms races

• What can be done?
  – Legal limits (e.g., working hours) to limit arms races
  – Cooperative agreements (e.g., cap on salaries in sports league)
  – Progressive taxation

• Beneficial effects
  – Why shouldn’t we watch the best actors, athletes, etc?
  – I enjoy reading the same books as my friends (network effects)
  – Maybe a slightly better CEO (lawyer, etc.) really does make a huge difference to my company