

When we learn about the Industrial Revolution in school, we hear a lot about factories, steam engines, maybe the power loom. We are taught that technological innovation drove social change and radically reshaped the world of work.

Likewise, when we talk about today's economy, we focus on smartphones, artificial intelligence, apps. Here, too, the inexorable march of technology is thought to be responsible for disrupting traditional work, phasing out the employee with a regular wage or salary and phasing in independent contractors, consultants, temps and freelancers — the so-called gig economy.

But this narrative is wrong. The history of labor shows that technology does not usually drive social change. On the contrary, social change is typically driven by *decisions* we make about how to organize our world. Only later does technology swoop in, accelerating and consolidating those changes.

This insight is crucial for anyone concerned about the insecurity and other shortcomings of the gig economy. For it reminds us that far from being an unavoidable consequence of technological progress, the nature of work always remains a matter of social choice. It is not a result of an algorithm; it is a collection of decisions by corporations and policymakers.

Continua a leggere su [The New York Times](#)