

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, October 25, 2021

Where: 370 JMHH

When: 12:00 – 1:00 pm

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(Relative) Freedom in Algorithms: How Digital Platforms Repurpose Workplace Consent

ABSTRACT:

This research explores how a new relation of production – specifically, the shift from human to algorithms as managers on digital platforms- renews and repurposes workplace consent. Drawing on a four-year qualitative study of the ride-hailing industry, I describe the experience of being managed by algorithms, specifying the phenomenon of algorithmic work: a set of job-related activities that is constituted, to some extent, by a set of instructions programmed by a computer. I begin with describing how algorithms structure the work through segmenting the labor process at multiple sites of human-algorithm interactions. While some research suggests that algorithms as managers create a hyper-monitored management system that stifles autonomy; I find that the reconfiguration of the work process actually allows for more frequent choice. This choice, while narrow, is real and generates consent. Yet due to the platform's ability to change its algorithms at-will and the flexible work arrangement consent is more fragile than previously theorized.