

Application Form for the Ethics Committee of the University of Basel for research with human subjects

1. General Information

Project Title	xx	
Expected start date and end date	xx	
Type of review	<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Review (Proposal stage) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full Review (required before the project starts)	
Principal Investigator	Name	
	Department	
	Email	
Co-Investigator(s)	Name	
	Department	
	Email	
Co-Investigator(s)	Name	
	Department	
	Email	
Project members	Student Assistant	
Study Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Monocenter study <input type="checkbox"/> Switzerland <input type="checkbox"/> EU Country, specify: <input type="checkbox"/> Non-EU country, specify: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multicenter study <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Switzerland <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EU Country, <input type="checkbox"/> Non-EU country, specify:	
External Partners	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <i>Enter name(s) and institutions and explanation how they are involved</i> The project is conducted in co-operation with:	



	xx
Funding	<i>Explain how the study will be financed</i> The study is financed by xx
Project review	Project has already been reviewed by a funding organization or other entity <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (Please include the part(s) of the project review report relevant for the Ethics Committee).

2. Study Rationale

2.1 Background

Explain the background and scientific relevance of the planned research so that readers can get a sufficient understanding of the performed research in the area and the research question of this project

Digital technologies have profoundly changed the work reality of a diverse array of workers. While they open up new possibilities for the design of good work, they also pose some new problems related to losses of autonomy and meaning, new forms of work fragmentation, labor control and surveillance. To grasp such problematic developments, this research attempts to theoretically elaborate and empirically employ the keyword 'alienation'. So far, elaborations on the concept of alienation concerning digital work have remained mostly on theoretical grounds with little empirical research.

The current project aims to fill this gap by empirically examining the alienation experiences and the appropriation efforts of workers in digitized environments. A central question is in how far digital work correlates across several different occupational groups in the service sector with specific experiences of alienation. The study is also interested in exploring the appropriation efforts undertaken by the employees. This is done using an innovative form of access to subjective experiences of alienation, which consists in examining different levels of alienation: a biographical level, a bodily-emotional level, a practical-action level and a critical-evaluative level.

2.2 Study objectives

Explain the aims and objectives of your study

The aim of the project is the development of an empirically founded concept of digital alienation at work. This includes a new and detailed approach to studying alienation as well as new empirical insights into the current technological changes in the labor world.

Until now, empirical research has reduced the complex term to concepts such as "meaninglessness" or "powerlessness". Conversely, purely theoretical approaches often imply that alienation is a structural phenomenon that cannot be studied through subjective experience. Our aim is thus to connect structural and subjective dimensions into a novel framework, which would further the theoretical discussion and will allow for an in-depth empirical investigation.

Furthermore, the study aims at differentiating between the experiences of workers at different levels of qualification in order to retrace how alienation potentials are interpreted and coped with. The diversified sample includes both strictly digital service workers such as IT developers and more traditional occupations experiencing profound changes due to technological developments such as loan underwriters. This allows for the comparison of many different settings of technological changes and resulting experiences.

In addition to personal experiences, group discussions will examine collective orientations and ideals concerning work and its technological transformation. Through the close connection between theoretical and empirical work, the results are expected to be pertinent beyond strictly sociological discourses and to provide insights for philosophical and psychological alienation studies as well.

2.3 Ethical justification

Please provide a reflection on the ethical justification of your research proposal. Ethical issues at stake may include, but are not narrowed to the following principles: social value, scientific validity, fair subject selection, favorable risk-benefit ratio and respect for subjects.

The social significance of the study is associated with the relevance of digital technologies for the employees' well-being and work satisfaction. By inviting the study participants to reflect on and express their opinions about the technologies they are working with, we will be able to analyze the cases in which digitization causes stress, discomfort, and a feeling of powerlessness. This is an important first step for evaluating the conditions under which technological change happens in accordance with workers' welfare and interests. What is more, group discussions are especially suitable for examining the collective dimensions of employees' wishes, hopes and fears concerning new technologies. Hence the analysis will be a fruitful avenue to assess also the positive potentials of workplace digitization.

The aims of the study call for a qualitative approach, which investigates subjects' perceptions, interpretations, emotions, and responses to these digitized work environments. Only through in-depth interviews and group discussion with the actors directly experiencing digital changes could the study grasp the alienation phenomenon. For the purposes of the qualitative data analysis, the empirical data must be recorded and subsequently transcribed.

We will ensure the validity of our data by: reflecting on biases which might influence our findings; pursuing variances across respondents' accounts to safeguard that different perspective are represented (principles of qualitative sampling); engaging in an ongoing critical reflection of our sampling and methods to warrant a depth of our data and analysis; working as a team on a plurality of interpretative frames in order reduce individual bias and make sure that interpretations are consistent, transparent and intersubjectively reproducible; accounting for the limits of our research before drawing more general conclusions.

The sample includes six main groups, which allows for comparisons between different settings. On all three levels of qualification (low-skilled, skilled, high-skilled), both jobs in the digital economy and employment in classic service sectors will be included. Within this group, we aim for a variation in the business types (large multi-national business to local start-ups) as well as in other relevant factors that could vary subjective experiences such as gender and age.

All participants will be informed about the research aims and goals, the pseudonymization procedure and our data management strategy. Participation in the study is voluntary. Research team-members will pseudonymize all information that might reveal the identity of the respondents, such as personal names, cities, exact age, exact biographical dates, company names and abbreviations. Furthermore, in each case, the researcher will reflect on additional possible information that might endanger the anonymity of the respondents (for example, if the exact job title refers to very few people or if the company details make its identification easy). Participants will be reminded that they do not need to reveal any confidential information regarding their job and the organization they are working for. Also, after the interview participants can ask for the removal of any information they consider to be breaching the confidentiality clauses and disclosure agreements they have signed.

Our partner research team in xx will conduct interviews with low-skilled workers, which might be in precarious life situations and have an emigrational background. They will take extra measures to reduce any possible risks associated with participating in the study. The ethics board of our partner university in xx will review the research project before we begin with the collection of data.



3. Research Protocol

3.1 Study type

- Prospective
- Retrospective

In case of retrospective study, please explain how you obtained the permission to use the data and, if applicable, how participants gave their consent to use their data

3.2 Research techniques, instruments & equipment

- Questionnaire (include as annex), specify: A short questionnaire with close-ended questions will be given to the respondents at the end of the interview. It will contain some attitude and biographical survey questions.
- Interview (include as annex), specify: Semi-structured in-depth interviews and group discussions.
- Participant observation/tracking, specify: Observations will be conducted in order to collect data about the work processes and everyday work reality of the employees.
- Behavioral experiments/manipulation, specify:
- Video/Audio recordings, specify: the interviews will be recorded (audio only).
- Social Media data, specify:
- Data sets with personal data, specify:
- Imaging, specify:
- Other, please specify:

3.3 Research method

Present the methodologies and practical procedures.

The project utilizes biographical narrative interviews and group discussions. The interview guide includes sections about the professional biography, everyday work experiences, the organization of the workplace and general attitudes towards work and social issues. The interviews are conducted primarily in order to understand biographical



appropriation dynamics of work, but also facilitate the observation of changing appropriation options, i.e. newly developing dimensions of appropriation or the loss of such. In addition, demands and expectations about work and the underlying norms can be reconstructed. During the interview process, participants are invited to reflect on and evaluate their work experience and the role of digital technologies in it, the level of their work satisfaction, stress factors and challenges.

Before the interview, the researcher will explain the aim of the project to the participant, request permission to record the conversation and arrange the interview at the subject's time and place of choice. Before the start of the interview, background information about the project will be provided, and subjects will be asked to re-confirm their participation in the project. Interviewees will be asked to sign the consent form and will be provided with any additional information needed regarding the pseudonymization procedure and how their data is going to be stored. The interviews will last between one and two hours. The subjects can end, pause or reschedule it if they want to. After the interview finishes, the interviewers will stress that they remain available for any questions and will give an opportunity to the subjects to stay informed about the outcomes of the study.

The group discussions will help expose collectively shared interpretation patterns used in the evaluation of work. The discussion participants are addressed as observers and critics of their own working conditions and are expected to position themselves in the context of alienation as well. The goal is to understand the workers' conceptions of digital work and alienation as well as general ideas about the organization of work.

The same practical procedures of informing participants and securing informed consent are relevant for the group discussions. Furthermore, in the group discussion consent form subjects are informed that by signing it, they agree to secure the anonymity of other participants by not revealing their identity and their statements. They will take place in different places, such as university buildings, co-working spaces and other locations. The discussions will last around two hours. The conversation will be focused around problems and opportunities related to current changes at work, the role of technology in them and how participants image the future of work.

In the course of the analysis, the pseudonymized transcripts will be used for content-specific and linguistic analysis. Different methods will be applied to identify patterns of experience, coping and evaluation, to create case-specific interpretations and to find points of comparisons and differences between designated groups.

4. Data handling and management

4.1 Data Types

Explain which type of data you are using

Anonymized data, please specify:



- Pseudonymized (coded) data, specify: The personally identifiable information from the interview and group discussion recordings are replaced by pseudonyms (e.g. place1, university3, 'large multi-national software firm'...). In cases where only one organization corresponds to the description, stricter pseudonymization measures will be taken (see 4.2. for more information).
- Non-coded data, specify: the interview is recorded, transcribed and pseudonymized. The audio files are saved encrypted on the servers of the University of Basel.

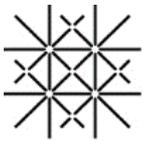
4.2 Data Management

Explain how the privacy of the participants is being protected, how the data is safely stored, who has access to the data, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project. If possible attach Data Management Plan.

The interviews and the group discussions will be recorded with a digital audio recorder after participants' consent. The audio files are initially saved only on the recording device and are not automatically transferred to a cloud or another datacenter. After the interviews have been conducted, they will be saved in encrypted form on the servers of the researchers' home universities. Only the research team in Basel will have access to the original recordings for the interviews conducted by xx and xx . Similarly, only the research team in xx will have access to the original audio recordings of the interviews they have conducted. The original recordings will be deleted after the conclusion of the project and the completion of the dissertation projects.

xx will transcribe and pseudonymize the data of the interviews collected by the team in Basel. They will assign code numbers to participants and remove all personal names, cities, names of companies the subject has worked/works for, or other data that the researchers consider endangering the anonymity of the participants. The team will not differentiate between how big the places of residence or work are. It will assign simply *place1* for one specific location but will not distinguish further between a capital, big city or a small town. In cases when only one organization suits the description in a country, the team will take stricter pseudonymization measure in the publications. For example, if there is only one Swiss multi-national company fabricating machines, which produce toothpaste packages, one of the characteristics of the firm will be omitted so that readers cannot identify the firm.

Only the already pseudo-anonymized transcripts will be shared with the partner research team in xx. Likewise, the research team in Basel will have access only to the pseudo-anonymized transcripts of the interviews conducted by the research team in xx. The exchange of transcripts will happen via through a secure cloud-based platform, which ensures an encrypted transfer of data. The full-transcriptions will not be published.



Each questionnaire, which subjects fill at the end of the interview receives an ID. The questionnaires are shared with the research team in xx. They contain biographical data, such as gender and age. However, they do not provide any data about names, addresses, place of residence, or emails. The exchange of data will happen through a secure cloud-based platform, which ensures an encrypted transfer of data.

Data sets with direct identifiers such as names and contact details shall be stored on the local server systems of the University of Basel and in a data-encrypted form. They will be saved in a different container than where the raw interview data is kept. They allow linking the interview code to the name of the respondent as well as the pseudonyms used during the transcription process. They will not be shared with the partner team in xx.

All together we will have two encrypted containers. In the first one, the raw data and the questionnaire are saved. In the second one we will keep the data set with direct identifiers. In addition, the research data will be backed up locally on a securely stored and locked external hard drive.

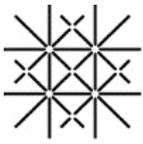
In case of a revocation of consent, the audio-files and the transcripts of the interviews will be deleted. If a participant in the group discussions withdraws his/her consent, his/her speech parts are going to be silenced in the audio files. They will also be deleted from the transcript of the group conversation. In both cases, the data will not be used further after the withdraw.

5. Participants

5.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

List details such as age, sex, ethnic / socio-demographic background, life style factors, etc., under which a participant is deemed to be suitable to participate in the study. Make a statement about the vulnerability of participants. Indicate as well the anticipated number of participants

The sample consists of employees working either in xx or in xx. Due to the comparative character of the study, the selected occupations are characterized by different work profiles and qualification demands (high-skilled work, skilled work, and unskilled work). Furthermore, since digitalization creates not only new occupations in a digital economy but also changes existing occupations, each level of qualification includes an analysis of both: traditional occupations with new digital work components and new digital occupations. Among the subjects will be software developers, Business Process



specialists, employees working in the sphere of digital marketing and the insurance/banking sector, content moderators and retail clerks.

Group discussions will be conducted with employees from all industries and professions as well as former employees from the old and the digital economy. Part of the sample will consist of the subjects we have already interviewed.

The study targets no specific ethnicity, nationality, lifestyle or socio-demographic background. We will aim for a gender balance in the sample and a wide variation of categories deemed relevant to the subjective experience, such as age or type of employer. No participant will be under 18. The participants chosen will be fully aware of what it means to be part of a research study and will be able to understand what constitutes informed consent.

5.2 Sample Size

Please specify the number of participants enrolled in the sample(s) of your study

All in all, around 90 interviews will be conducted with subjects currently employed in xx.

About 10 group discussions are planned with up to a maximum of 10 participants each.

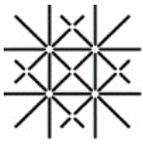
5.3 Recruitment

Specify who will recruit the participants, how, where and by whom the participants will be approached for inclusion and obtainment of informed consent

The research team will use the following sampling techniques:

1) snow-ball: respondents will be given the option to provide referrals to new participants after their interviews.

1.1. When we recruit subjects for interviews, the participants will be told that they do not need to disclose the potential new respondent that they have already taken part in the study. The potential participants will be assured that the participation in the study is completely voluntary and that a refusal to take part will not affect their relationship with the initial referral or with the researcher. They will be contacted by phone or by email and will be provided with information about the goal of the study, the form of the interview and will be guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.



1.2. When recruiting for a group discussion, we will ensure that the participant, who has already agreed to take part in it is aware the new referral s/he suggests might also be in the same group. In the same, way we make sure that the potential new participant agrees to be in the same group discussion with the person, who suggested him/her.

In both cases, the researchers will emphasize that recommending a new participant and taking part in the study following a recommendation from an acquaintance or a colleague is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, to reduce the danger of limiting the independence and volition of participants, we will abstain from using a snow-ball technique when a hierarchical relationship at work exists (e.g. supervisor/manager-subordinate).

2) purposive sampling: potential participants will be contacted via their work email found on the company's websites or via social networking sites. The same information will be provided as in the first case.

3) Companies might be contacted directly and asked to forward information about the research through their means of communication. In this case, the companies will not be asked for personal contact information of their employees. Additionally, to the information given on the study, the contact email will include a reassurance that the study is not conducted for the company and that the company will not be given any information about the participants. Furthermore, the research team will pay special attention that the interview quotes published in future publications do not jeopardize the participants' anonymity.

4) After completing the interview, participants would be asked if they will have the interest to participate also in a group discussion. The participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.

6. Participant Information

Include your Informed Consent form(s) and information letter(s) as annex and describe your Informed Consent procedure in detail.

The interviewers will inform the respondents in advance about the nature and goals of the study. The information will be given during a pre-interview conversation orally and in the information sheet attached to the consent form. The researchers will communicate that participation in the study is voluntary and anonymous. Subjects will be made familiar with the pseudonymization procedure that will be used and how their data is going to be stored.



The interviewers will underline that the interview can be stopped or paused and that participants have the right to withdraw their consent at any time. They will also make clear that the original voice recording is going to be used only for transcription purposes and deleted after the completion of the project. They will be further informed that they can refuse to answer questions and ask for further clarification if needed.

If the respondents decide to take part in the study, they will be asked to read and sign the consent agreement. If needed, the agreement will be explained in a simple language to make sure that the participant understands its content. The respondents will be given a copy of the agreement, which includes an explanation of their rights. After signing the agreement, the participants still have the right to withdraw from the interview.

One copy of the agreement will remain in the participant, and the other one will be scanned and stored in an encrypted form on the server of the University of Basel.

The same consent procedure applies for the group discussions. In addition, by signing the consent form, the subjects agree to ensure the anonymity of the other participants by maintaining confidentiality about their identity and their statements. The obligation to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity and statements of other participants is not affected by the revocation.

7. Research involving deception

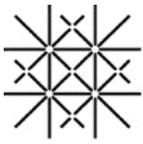
Will participants be deceived?

- No
 Yes – explain why deception is necessary in this study and how participants will be deceived

8. Debriefing

Which information is given to participants during debriefing and how will this be provided?

During the debriefing, the interviewers will stress again the importance of the respondents' answers and the information given for attaining the aims of the project. Participants will be reminded that the interviews and the group discussions are confidential and anonymous. If they express a wish to have access to the transcript, they will be given a pseudonymized copy of the text afterwards. They will be invited to contact the research team at any time if they have questions about how their data is being



stored and analyzed. They will be reminded that they can contact the team in case they feel any psychological discomfort as a result of the interview.

Participants will be asked to leave their contact information, which will be saved in an encrypted form.

9. Risks, discomfort and counseling

Describe possible risks and whether participants might experience (physical or mental) discomfort, embarrassment, confusion etc. during the course of the study or afterwards. Explain how you plan to minimize these risks. Explain if any support or counseling is offered during and after participation.

The study aims to explore employees' experience of digital technologies at work. As a central part of the research project is understanding the experiences of subjective suffering at work, questions related to stress, lack of autonomy, and dissatisfaction might trigger discomfort and negative emotions. This risk could be even higher in the case of low-skilled workers, which might be a subject to precarious labor conditions and intense digital control. However, even in the case of middle- and high-skilled employees, reflecting on stressful experiences or expressing a disappointment with their job/occupation might cause uneasiness.

In order to minimize the risks of mental discomfort, we will implement the following measures:

- The interviews will be conducted at a place of choice of the respondents, where they feel safe and at comfort.
- The participants will be reassured that they have the right not to answer questions and to end or pause the interview at any time.
- During the interview process, the interviewees will show verbally and non-verbally that they have an empathic stand towards the employees' well-being.
- The interviewer remains sensitive to the emotional well-being of the respondent.

In case of an occurrence of intense negative emotions, the researcher will ask if the respondent would like to pause the interview.

- More difficult questions are asked towards the end of the interview, where already a trust relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer will have been built. This way, the probability of potential discomfort is reduced. Furthermore, respondents still have the right not to answer questions.

- The interview questions are wide and open-ended enough, so subjects are given the freedom to decide on which aspects of their experiences they want to focus on. This leaves participants in control of the type of information they are willing to give.

Group discussions will not concentrate on feelings of suffering but rather on participants' evaluation about the world of work and its future. No possible risks of discomfort are involved.



Respondents will be informed that if they experience any discomfort, confusion or negative emotions as a result of the interview, they could contact the interviewer and share their feelings and thought. The research team remains open for a conversation regarding the psychological state of the participants after the interview and will consult them to seek professional help if needed.

10. Remuneration, benefits and study outcome

Will participants receive a remuneration or compensation for their participation?

- No – explain:
- Yes – cost reimbursement (i.e. transport, food, drinks) – specify:
- Yes – additional compensation (e.g. voucher, course credits, money) – specify:

Are there other benefits to participation in this project?

- No
- Yes – specify:

Which information is given to participants about the outcome of the study? Will participants receive their individual results or only the overall study results? How will this information be provided?

At the end of the interview, the researchers will share with the participants a link to the project website and to the project log at the website xx , where the interviewees can obtain information about the newest developments and current outcomes of the study. During the phase of data collection and initial analysis, the participants will be given the possibility to contact the research team and gain information about the current stage of the project.

Checklist annexes

- Participant information letter(s)
- Informed Consent form(s)
- Questionnaire(s) or interview format(s)
- Other documents – specify: