

The death of the career: why double jobs and passive income are becoming the new normal

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For decades, the promise of work was a simple bargain. Pick a lane, get qualified, climb steadily, retire with something like security. That story is fraying fast. Across rich and poorer countries alike, the modern working life is increasingly defined less by a single profession than by a shifting mix of jobs, gigs, short contracts and income streams, some of them sold as passive, most of them anything but.

The language has changed with reality. People talk about side hustles, portfolio work and being “open to opportunities” as a default setting. Employers, meanwhile, hire in bursts, outsource projects and expect workers to stay flexible. In Bangladesh, where informality has always been central to how people earn a living, new platform jobs, overseas migration and digital work are layering fresh volatility onto an already precarious labour market. In the UK and elsewhere, the supposed stability of salaried work is being eroded by high living costs, housing insecurity and weak wage growth.

What is emerging is not just a new labour market, but a new mindset: careers as a single narrative arc are being replaced by work as continuous adaptation.

From ladder to patchwork

A “career” is a relatively modern idea, tied to the growth of large organisations that could offer predictable progression. Even where that model never reached everyone, it shaped expectations: you trained for a role, you built experience inside a field, you gradually traded youth and stamina for seniority and stability.

Today, for many, the ladder has been replaced by a patchwork. Work is assembled. Hours are stretched. Skills are repackaged for new markets. When people do stay in one sector, it is often because switching has become part of survival rather than ambition: the move from one employer to another, one platform to the next, one contract to a different kind of contract.

Global labour data helps explain why. The International Labour Organization estimates that informal work remains vast, with the number of informal workers rising by more than 120 million since 2019 and reaching over 2 billion in 2023. In Asia and the Pacific, the ILO puts informal employment at about two thirds of total employment in 2023, and in South Asia it estimates informality at 87 percent. In economies where most work is informal, the very concept of a single employer underpinning a life plan is the exception, not the rule.

Yet the shift is not confined to poorer countries. In high income economies, the old model is weakening under different pressures: the rising cost of housing, the spread of temporary and subcontracted labour, and an economy increasingly organised around services, platforms and projects.

The platformisation of work

Technology was once marketed as the route to liberation from drudgery. In practice, it has often reshaped work into more fragmented forms while concentrating power in the hands of those who control the platforms.

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Bangladesh offers a vivid case study of how quickly this model can take root. Studies of platform work in the country describe ride hailing and delivery firms using an independent contractor model that leaves workers without employment benefits. Fairwork’s research on Bangladeshi labour platforms has repeatedly raised concerns about low pay, insecurity and weak contracts across major services, from

ride hailing to delivery and home services. A Friedrich Ebert Stiftung report on the “platform economy” in Bangladesh frames these workers as part of a growing precariat, pulled into app mediated jobs when other options shrink.

The point is not that platform work has replaced formal employment. It has not. The point is that it has normalised a style of working that looks less like a career and more like a constant search for the next shift.

Bangladesh’s working reality, and the new layers of insecurity

Bangladesh’s labour market has long been defined by informality, family enterprises and migration. What is changing is the texture of that informality and the intensity of the scramble.

ILOSTAT, the ILO’s statistical platform, puts Bangladesh’s informal employment rate at 80.9 percent in 2024. The same source lists Bangladesh’s unemployment rate at 3.6 percent in 2024, a figure that can look reassuring until you ask what kind of work people are actually doing, and how much it pays. In countries with large informal sectors, unemployment is often low not because jobs are good, but because households cannot afford not to work.

For younger people, the problem is sharper. ILOSTAT’s snapshot for youth not in employment, education or training puts



Bangladesh’s youth NEET rate at 15.4 percent in 2024, with a pronounced gender gap. That represents a substantial share of young people cut off from both formal labour markets and the training routes that might lead to better work.

At the same time, Bangladesh is facing structural pressures that make stable careers hard to build. A labour market profile produced by the Danish Trade Union Development Agency and Bangladeshi partners points to weak collective bargaining coverage and flags automation risk in industrial employment, alongside low social protection coverage. In that landscape, people hedge. They sell products online while holding a day job. They drive ride hailing at night after factory shifts. They keep one foot in a family business while chasing contracts elsewhere.

The myth and reality of passive income

In the UK and elsewhere, “passive income” is often sold through property, dividends, online courses, affiliate links and financial products. In Bangladesh, the phrase circulates too, increasingly through social media, but the underlying reality is different. For most people, the closest analogue is money sent by relatives abroad, income from a small plot of land, or earnings from a micro enterprise that still requires constant effort.

Digital work is often placed in the passive income bucket by influencers, but much of it is precarious labour sold to distant clients. Bangladesh’s push into IT and outsourcing shows both the promise and the limits. A recent Business Standard report put Bangladesh’s ICT exports at \$724.6m against a far larger stated ambition, with computer services making up the bulk. For skilled workers, this can mean access to international markets and higher pay than many local jobs. For the labour market as

a whole, it can also mean intense competition, unstable demand, and income tied to algorithms and client ratings.

The appeal of passive income is easy to understand. It offers a fantasy of escaping wage work in a world where wages often do not stretch far enough. Yet the practical outcome for many households is the opposite: more work, spread across more tasks, with the risk shifted from employer to worker.

Always moving, because standing still is risky

If careers are dying, it is partly because immobility has become expensive. People move jobs to chase pay rises, because promotions are scarce, or because employment itself has become a series of short engagements. They move sectors because technology and trade reshape demand. They move cities because rural livelihoods are squeezed. They move countries because the wage gap is too large to ignore.

In Bangladesh, that movement is increasingly shaped by climate as well as economics. A Reuters report on a World Bank assessment said rising heat cost Bangladesh about \$1.78bn in 2024 and led to the loss of 25 million workdays in that year alone. Heat stress is not just an environmental story. It is a labour market story, pushing workers to juggle hours, shift to indoor work when possible, or accept more precarious

jobs that fit around the constraints of health and season.

The policy response is often framed as skills and jobs, and those matter. But protection matters too. In April 2025, Reuters reported that the World Bank signed financing agreements with Bangladesh including support for a social protection project intended to serve millions of vulnerable people through cash assistance, livelihoods support and skills training. In a world of patchwork work, the safety net increasingly determines whether flexibility is empowering or simply punishing.

What replaces the career

The death of the career does not mean the end of ambition or professional identity. For a minority, especially those with scarce skills and strong bargaining power, career arcs still exist and can be lucrative. But for growing numbers, the organising principle of working life is shifting from progression to resilience.

That has consequences. Pension systems designed around continuous employment struggle when people zigzag between formal and informal work. Labour laws built around a clear employer employee relationship struggle when platforms classify workers as contractors. Education systems struggle when the job market demands constant retraining while offering no guarantee that new skills will be rewarded.

Bangladesh shows these tensions in concentrated form, because informality is already the norm and migration already functions as a private welfare system for many families. But the broader drift is visible far beyond South Asia. The question for governments, employers and workers is no longer how to restore the old career ladder. It is how to build security, rights and dignity in an economy where most people are expected to keep moving.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

AI overestimates human rationality, study finds

NEXT STEP DESK

AI systems may be making a basic error when dealing with humans. They assume people are far more rational and strategically sophisticated than they actually are, according to a new study by researchers from the Higher School of Economics and the University of Lausanne, recently published in the Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization.

The researchers tested several major large language models, including GPT-4o, GPT-4o Mini, Claude-Sonnet-4, Gemini-2.5 Flash and Llama-4 Maverick, using a classic economic experiment known as Keynes’s “beauty contest”, or the “guess the number” game. In the game, players choose a number between 0 and 100. The winner is the one whose number is closest to a fraction of the group’s average. Winning depends on predicting how others will think.

To compare AI and human behaviour, the team reproduced the conditions of 16 earlier experiments that had been conducted with real participants. The AI models were given the same game rules and detailed descriptions of their supposed opponents, including first-year economics students, conference attendees, individuals with strong analytical skills, and participants experiencing various emotional states.

The results showed that the models consistently expected their opponents to think in highly sophisticated ways. They adjusted their choices depending on who they believed they were facing, selecting numbers closer to theoretical predictions when matched with experts and higher numbers when facing less experienced groups. However, this tendency often worked against them because human players usually do not apply such deep strategic reasoning.

The study found that while the AI systems understood the game and demonstrated strategic thinking, they frequently “played too cleverly” and made poor predictions about real human behaviour. The models also failed to identify dominant strategies in simple two-player versions of the game. The authors conclude that current AI systems may struggle in real-world decision-making tasks because they model human behaviour as more rational than it actually is.



“Challenge yourself; it’s the only path which leads to growth.”

MORGAN FREEMAN

A year wrapped in data, metrics, and gamified moments

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Every December, a familiar ritual unfolds across our timelines as we see brightly coloured slides summarising our year in music flood social media, each confession delivered with a mix of pride, embarrassment, and self-discovery. Spotify Wrapped has become the closest thing we have to a global festival that requires no tickets, no dress code, and no coordination; just a willingness to let an algorithm tell us who we have been for 12 months. But what becomes more fascinating is not the music itself, but how this recap culture has multiplied far beyond Spotify, quietly transforming into a blueprint for how apps, brands, and platforms expect us to engage with the world. Wrapped has become a template, and the rest of our digital lives are following its logic.

We now live inside a series of dashboards. If Spotify is the most visible example, it is hardly alone. Everything from our sleep to our steps to our language-learning streaks comes with a neatly packaged scorecard at the end of the year. Duolingo tells us how many hours we spent learning Korean or Spanish, accompanied by a smug cartoon owl congratulating us for our unbelievable dedication, even when we barely scraped through 20 minutes a week. Headspace and Calm send out serene-looking infographics

about how many minutes of mindfulness we managed. Strava gives runners a beautifully animated breakdown of kilometres conquered, elevation gained, and personal bests. Goodreads tracks how many pages we read, how slow or fast we devoured particular books, and whether we lived up to last year’s reading goals. Apple Fitness compiles a



IMAGE: SPOTIFY

dramatic year-end highlight reel of our move rings, celebrating our most active month, our longest streak, and the improbably intense workout we somehow completed on a random Tuesday. Suddenly, everything is trackable, and everything tracked demands a celebratory recap. However, underneath the fun colours and cheeky captions is a deeper idea that our behaviour becomes more meaningful when quantified.

The technical appeal is clear. Human behaviour generates massive datasets.

Spotify leverages every play, skip, playlist addition, and repeat to construct a narrative of user engagement. Machine learning models predict the content users are likely to appreciate most, but Wrapped flips the paradigm: instead of merely feeding recommendations, it presents retrospective insights, turning user data into a story. This

narrative encourages reflection, comparison, and social sharing, which in turn strengthens platform engagement. The result is that Wrapped has become less of a feature and more of a cultural expectation. People crave their summaries now, as the recap is now an emotional milestone. These reports give structure to a year that may otherwise feel chaotic or forgettable. They remind us of choices we made months ago, moods we lived through, and unexpected patterns that reveal who we are becoming. In a strange way, data

has become a form of memory.

The entertainment world saw this power long before other industries. Netflix experimented with recap-style content summaries, revealing your most-binged genres and the hours you spent watching Korean dramas at 2 am. YouTube Music, Apple Music, and even Deezer have all created their own versions of this because they recognised that people love personalised storytelling. They love being told that their quirks are valid, that their habits make sense in the context of a bigger picture, that their preferences deserve a presentation. These summaries turn gameplay into a personal identity, and as gaming and entertainment increasingly merge, these identity markers start travelling across platforms.

Even writing communities have been pulled into this world. Wattpad sends writers yearly analytics about reads, votes, comments, and the most engaged chapters. Medium shares your most-read stories, the countries you reached, and the number of minutes readers spent with your work. All of it feeds a hunger that Wrapped awakened: the desire for our choices to feel intentional and visible. This is where the future of entertainment seems to be heading. Imagine film studios offering personalised year-end summaries based on your viewing preferences, analysing your emotional responses using watch data,

or curating your year in cinema playlists.

But along with charm, Wrapped culture carries tension. When every habit is quantified, the line between motivation and pressure becomes thin. People start curating their year for better metrics. They listen to certain songs more because they want them to show up on Wrapped. And yet, even with these contradictions, it remains one of the few digital rituals that feel genuinely joyful. Maybe that is because it is not about comparison as much as nostalgia.

The point is not to be impressive but to be seen by yourself, most of all. Wrapped recaps work because they stabilise time. They show that your year was not a blur. You did things. You felt things. You lived. As this culture spreads, we will see more platforms turning our behaviours into annual stories. Some may do it beautifully; others may feel excessive. But the underlying message is that people want meaning, not just metrics.

And Wrapped, for all its commercial roots, offers that in surprising ways. It invites us to look back not just at what we consumed, but at who we were while consuming it. Maybe that is the reason it feels relevant year after year. Because beneath the animations and playlists and statistics, Wrapped gives us something we rarely get anymore: a pause, a moment of reflection disguised as a celebration.