

> Do you work much as a Turker?

No. If I worked more as a Turker, I would better understand Turkers' challenges and Turkopticon might be better. But my day job is to do research.

> What was the impetus for you to say „we must change anything”?

In 2008, Lilly posted two tasks to Mechanical Turk. In one she asked workers to write short poems [1]. In the other she asked what Turkers would like their "Bill of Rights" to be [2]. Many said they felt the ability of employers to reject work (i.e., not pay for it) without explanation was unfair.

At that time, technologists were celebrating Mechanical Turk. To us they did not seem to know about the problems the rejection "feature" caused for workers. Our goal was simply to bring attention to workers' problems.

> How arose the idea to improve the work in the crowd by a reputation system?

Reputation systems are common online. For example, eBay and Amazon Marketplace have them. Mechanical Turk itself tracks workers' "approval rates" (i.e., how often employers have paid them). So the idea of a reputation system is not new. After reading the responses to Lilly's Turker Bill of Rights survey, we thought Mechanical Turk should have one for employers.

We hoped building an "external" employer reputation system would call attention to the problems with the current design, and maybe prompt Amazon to make a built-in one. But this did not happen. Instead, workers rely on Turkopticon, and Amazon executives say "the community handles the problems" caused by employer misbehavior. But a built-in system would be better. For example, Mechanical Turk could show how often an employer rejected work for a given task, or on average over all their tasks.

> How many use Turkopticon?

We don't know exactly. But as of September 16, 2013, the browser add-ons have been downloaded 18170 times since August 2012. And 21160 people have registered on the web application.

Compared to Mechanical Turk's workforce, said to be in the hundreds of thousands, this is very small.

> Turkopticon also stands for more fairness to crowd workers. A word which is missing out? What is the reason?

I don't know for sure, but it may have to do with the cultures of American business and computer science.

The US does not have co-determination. Management has much more power than workers. Workers are often seen as costs to be minimized. Managers' first duties are to shareholders. Fairness is seen as a "fuzzy" concept. But profits are easy to measure. So it is often hard for a business to justify doing something to improve "fairness" if it costs money.

Computer science takes ethical issues like privacy and security seriously. But it doesn't have a strong tradition of thinking about fairness or power. One prominent computer scientist told me: "computer science has an almost libertarian culture: if something is possible in code, you have a right to create it." So crowd work platforms are "good" if they make new things possible for technologists. Workers are far away and their problems are easy to ignore. Even if one agrees their problems are real, one can say that "life is not fair", it is not the programmer's fault, and it is not the programmer's job to make it fair.

In both cases, fairness is mostly "somebody else's problem".

> Do you know what Amazon or single clients think about Turkopticon?

I don't know what Amazon thinks about Turkopticon. They did buy the domain name "turkopticon.com" in 2009, though, so they know about it. (Turkopticon is hosted at turkopticon.differenceengines.com.)

Most of the employers we've talked to agree Mechanical Turk should have an employer reputation system. So they see the value of the idea behind Turkopticon. But some employers do have bad experiences with it. Sometimes workers abuse the system. We try to stop these abuses, but we could do a better job. (So could a built-in system.)

> The reviews of the customers are one point. Has the (indirect) communication among the crowd worker other positive effects?

It's hard to say. I don't think it has had a negative effect. But I think worker forums like Turker Nation are better for general discussion and community building than Turkopticon.

> Do you think the authorities have now always in mind, that they might receive a bad review and behave differently?

Not all employers know about Turkopticon. But some employers do respond to workers' complaints and suggestions on it. So I think it has encouraged some employers to be more responsive to workers.

> You gain a lot of encouragement. What makes Turkers most happy?

I can't speak for Turkers. If you really want to know you should ask through Mechanical Turk—and pay well.

I can tell you what I see on forums and Turkopticon, and in the responses to Lilly's Turker Bill of Rights surveys. Turkers seem to like well- and fast-paying tasks with clear instructions and no technical problems. They also seem to like employers that take their concerns seriously and respond quickly to questions or feedback.

> What is next? Is a new or commercial version planned?

No commercial version is planned. Turkopticon has always been not-for-profit. We have no plans to change that.

What's next for Turkopticon? We have a list of requests for new features and changes. Some of these are simple; some are more complex and need to be discussed with workers. We do our best to make these changes as we have time.

But I hope someday Turkopticon will not be needed. Maybe Amazon will build a good employer reputation system for Mechanical Turk. Or maybe somebody will build a new crowd work market, with transparency, accountability, and co-determination built in. Workers, employers, and administrators could work together to produce good work for employers and good livelihoods for workers. The market could be owned at least partly by workers.

Other models for crowd work markets are possible. I am interested in exploring them. In my research right now I am building simulations of alternative market designs. This is theoretical work, but I hope it can help create, as one group of researchers <stanford.io/12mMSGv> put it, a future for crowd work that is "effective, efficient, and fair".

[1] haikuturk.differenceengines.com

[2] turkwork.differenceengines.com; 2013 edition at turkwork2013.differenceengines.com.