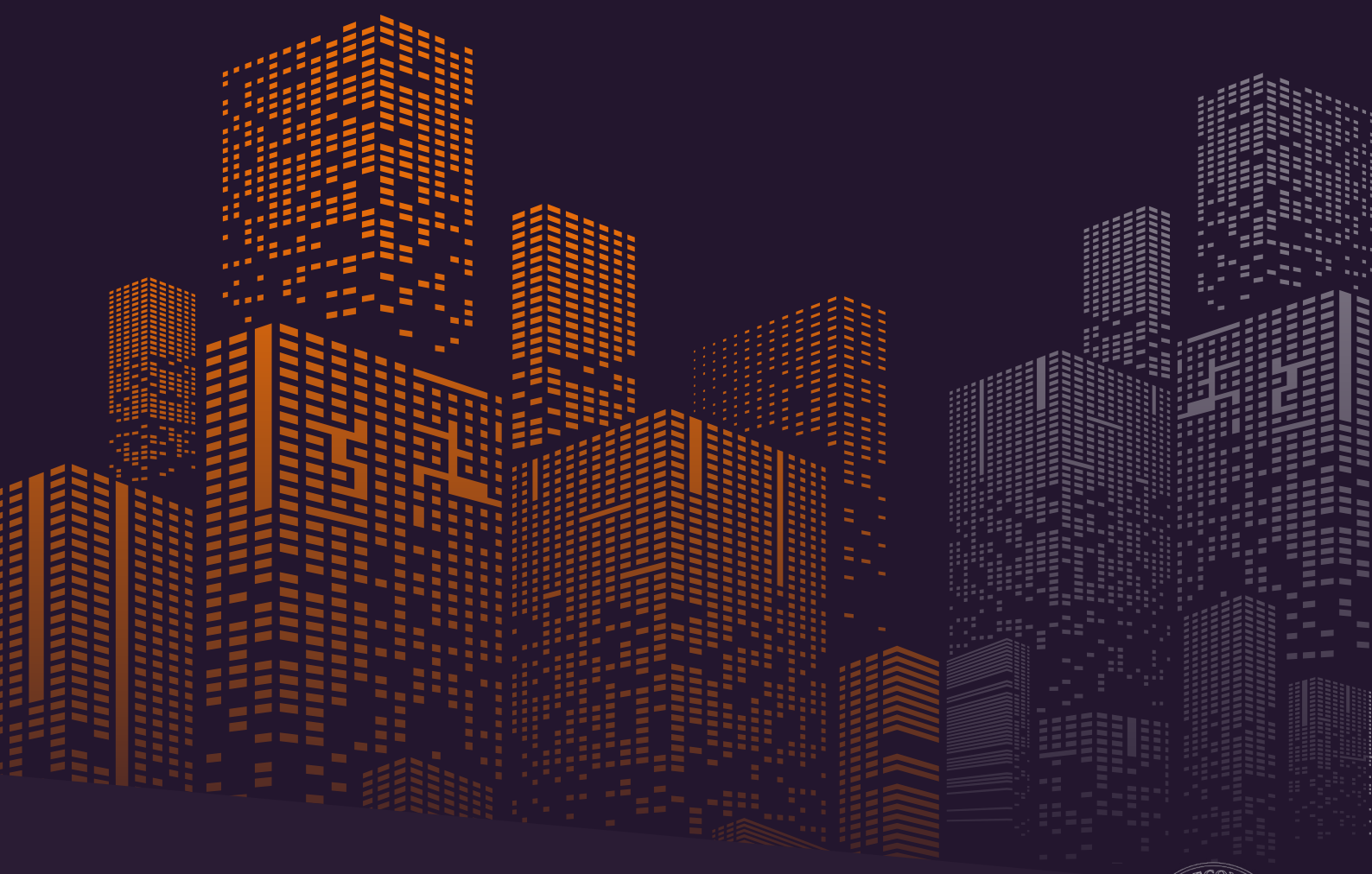


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SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT IN THE AGE OF DIGITALISATION: UNPACKING THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

The increasing use of digital technology influences our society on multiple levels, including the world of work. The implementation of digital technologies changes tasks, jobs, organisations and eventually the composition of the labour market. Whereas it is theorised how technology possibly affects working conditions, the limited amount of empirical studies show that the organisation is the determining mediating actor (Veile et al., 2019). To understand how organisations choices affect the relationship between digital technologies and the sustainability of jobs, this study organises 25 case studies in Belgian organisations that vary in size and sector. Sustainability of jobs is defined as a multidimensional concept including objective job characteristics as well as subjective experiences of employees such as job satisfaction and health and well-being.

Digital technologies are defined as “the proverbial marriage between manufacturing and information technologies leading up to the networking of human, physical and digital components of industrial production processes throughout the value chain” (Vereycken, Ramioul & Hermans, 2020, p.1; Hermann, Pentek and Otto, 2016; Butollo, Jürgens and Krzywdzinski, 2018). This study distinguishes between three types of digital technologies: (1) measurement and recording technology; (2) automation technology; (3) interaction technology (Meylemans et al., 2020).

Regarding the organisational level, it is clear that the implementation of highly innovative technologies can have far-reaching effects on the organisational structure but also challenges leadership and HR policies, and implies changes in the job content and conditions of employees. To cope with new technologies, Veile et al. (2019) describe the need to adapt job design to adequately incorporate new tasks and responsibilities for employees. In the case of Belgium, it is expected that job content will mainly shift to control and monitoring as opposed to performing tasks (Delagrangé and Notebaert, 2019). Since the organisational context is crucial for the workability of these newly adapted jobs, this study more specifically looks at the role of the middle manager in the design process. In the coming months, document analysis and interviews with employees, middle and top management are organised. Preliminary first results can be presented at the conference.
