Perspectives on Working Life

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“Opportunity is missed by most people because it comes dressed in overalls and looks like work”
—Thomas Edison

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PREFACE

WORK IN A SEASON OF COVID-19

> *The job, as it were, is his property: as long as he can stand and see, he must hold it against all comers because in losing hold, he loses his claim upon the world's supplies of the necessaries of life.*
> *—Change in the Village, George Bourne, 1912, 87.*

Our work means a lot to us, even for those who do not enjoy the toil. Through our work, we reveal what kind of human beings we are and are prepared to be. Sometimes our work is a stepping-stone to something else, and a means to an end. Other times, we commit our whole lives to it, from the 'cradle to the grave.'

This book investigates work from various worldviews and viewpoints, comprising cultural, religious, and Indigenous. Our work lives can be understood in more profound ways, enlightened by values, knowledge, and realities different from our own. Moving closer to understanding different ways of knowing about work will yield new insights and possibilities about the intersection of identities and labor.

Work comes in many forms, and people do their job with different inspirations. So this book is not intended to advise how work *should* be practiced or best understood; that is for the reader to resolve. Instead, the goal is to scrutinize how people experience and live out their working lives. Why is this important?

Western culture has experienced significant shifts in work practice since the European Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Industrial Revolution radically transformed the nature of work and family life. Rather than work at home on the

land, family members were required to leave home and go to work. They experienced long periods of travel time from family and community. Although many jobs today permit people to work from home, the Industrial Revolution's effects still prevail. In normal circumstances, most of us do not work from home.

Similarly, how we are expected to work says something about our humanness or perceived humanness. Prisoners at Auschwitz, a Nazi concentration camp that operated between 1940 and 1945, were required to walk under an iron gate with a sign that read "Arbeit macht frei," which in German means, "work sets you free." It was a cruel twist of the phrase. The treatment accorded to these workers depended on their classification in a Nazi racial hierarchy (Roth, 1980, 79). Jews fared worst. If they were allowed to live at all, Roth notes, theirs was the most strenuous and dangerous work. The treatment received was starvation diets, the virtual absence of health and death (Roth, 1980, 80). In the words of the 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, human life became nasty, brutish, and short (Jonas, 1996, 95).

Reframing Workplaces

There is no doubt that people can endure dramatic work changes and in rapid time. In 2020, in the space of a few days, the Covid-19 pandemic left offices and small businesses around the world empty. As I am writing this book, the world is in the "middle" of the virus, and predicting when it will end is near impossible. When the number of people with the virus began to surge, governments and politicians worldwide encouraged people to self-isolate, stay at home, and work. Work became "essential" and "non-essential." "Social-distancing," which was essentially a non-word, now became a moral imperative. The Government of the United Kingdom has recently launched a social distancing device for the workplace. These are gadgets worn around the neck that emit a sound or vibrate to keep people two meters apart.

"Essential work" meant services that would endanger the life, health, or personal safety of the whole or part of the population if interrupted. "Non-essential" services included services not providing food supplies, health, financial provision, or utilities and, when not accessible to the public, would not affect life, health, or personal safety. Airline flights stopped, restaurant dining forbidden, empty market shelves in stores became the norm, while millions of people self-quarantined at home.

Employers worked flexible working hours, and it became mandatory for non-essential workers to work from home. The cancellation of face-to-face work events and gatherings occurred; others adapted to video conferencing. "Zooming" became a new reality for the workplace.

The closing of businesses, in particular small businesses, due to Covid-19, has reframed the importance and nature of work. There are record numbers of newly unemployed people around the world; for example, in the United States, the world's largest economy, the Labor Department reports 3.3 million people applied for unemployment benefits in March 2020, some of the highest numbers ever recorded. On January 22, 2020, Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum and website, indicated that with the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the world is facing a reskilling emergency, and more than 1 billion people will have to reskill by 2030. Reskilling will be the demand placed on the visionaries of the 'Fourth' Industrial Revolution.

There is little doubt that 2021 is an uncertain period for workers and the economy, and only time will tell how people's health and the state of the economy will recover. How governments have responded to Covid-19 discloses something about how governments perceive the purpose of employment and what work actually means to people. It appears that governments have perceived work almost exclusively in terms of income rather than the goods and services it delivers, especially for "non-essential" work (Pennings, 2020). Moreover, governments have given

nominal consideration to the *non-economic* factors of work, such as bounded solidarity and trust, happiness, and well-being. These are just as important as receiving an income.

Of course, what somebody calls "essential" or "non-essential" depends on the state of affairs in which one finds themselves. I overheard a person discussing the loss of their job in the following way: "Governments have decided that my work is no longer essential. They seem to forget that for my family, my work is very essential." People have protested that while small businesses, hairdressers, restaurants, and brick-and-mortar retail are closed, big-box businesses are open simply because someone deemed them "essential."

In Ontario, Canada, the conservative provincial government seeking an election win in 2018 ran on the slogan, 'Open for Business.' At this time of writing, May-July 2020, as the number of reported virus cases rises, Ontario is closed for business until further notice. For office workers, companies, and educational institutions, people depend on preserving their work obligations using video platforms such as *Zoom,* which for many, has become the new office and workplace. However, for those trades and professions who cannot utilize *Zoom*, such as restaurants, hairdressers, dentists, and thousands of other "non-essential" service industries, many have been forced to temporarily and permanently close their doors to the public.

With the pandemic threatening to change the traditional workplace forever, in April 2020, the *Economist* magazine ran on its front page, a news story titled, 'The Death of the Office' (Nixey 2020). The author suggests that the traditional office may be on its way out forever. Only time will tell if this turns out to be true.

In one sense, going to a place of work can distract us from both the ordinary course of events in life and the critical life-changing global events, that are often beyond our control. Work also keeps us focused on the local and provides motivation for the future, such as saving and spending money. In so doing, work gives us

direction, distraction, and enhances our life purpose. Although some people might wish to leave or retire from their work, sooner rather than later, studies suggest that most of us are happy to work because work supports a healthy identity and positive view of oneself. Although we are not our work, the workplace serves as a context for constructing and developing our identity (Okhuysen et al., 2013, 492).

There are numerous reasons people work in general and why they engage in specific occupations. People work only for the money, convenience, or to use their skills and qualifications. Sometimes people work because, frankly, they could not imagine life without it. As one employee for a Sheepskin factory in Australia explained to me, "I would be bored without work." Work can provide a welcome distraction from life and ourselves.

In 2003, I commenced doctoral research on the work experiences and motivations of 35 to 63-year-olds. Over two years, I interviewed individuals who had left their former occupations for various reasons and begin new careers as schoolteachers. Some had been former CEO's, anthropologists, television hosts, insurance agents, and oilrig workers. I came to realize the importance these people placed on their working lives. Some of these people were overworked, others agonized over retrenchment, while some had experienced a health crisis at work, there was one common denominator—they all believed a new occupation would give them a renewed sense of purpose for life. Whatever the motives for changing work midlife as an older person competing with a younger generation, it was necessary and worth the risk.

This book aims to highlight the importance of work, and draw attention to the association of work practice and worldview. A worldview has three key features. It explains how the world *is* and how it *should* be, including what is essential to know, and value. The worldviews discussed include:

1. Religious and spiritual worldviews

2. Cultural worldviews
3. Indigenous worldviews
4. Humanist worldviews

Although not exhaustive, these four worldviews comprise beliefs and values that tend to organize themselves into balanced systems. Any incoherence in the workplace often leads to decisions that will restore or correct that balance using the worldview as a measure or standard for adjustment. Any sense of coherence a person locates in their particular worldview gives them a sense of psychological security and serenity, building tenacity for the challenges that are inevitably involved in performing their work duties (Antonovsky, 1987).

The Importance of Work

If you are like most people, you will spend most of your life in work activities. Work is a place with possibilities for experiencing joy, passion, success, stress, conflict, risk, and loss. It is a place where you put in the best of you as you serve, sacrifice, try to please, and establish relationships on the teams with whom you work.

We can experience positive and emotionally trying times at work (Cloud and Townsend, 2006, 243). Any work-study should offer a comprehensive explanation, meaning it should be holistic as it examines all features of a person (Stevens, 1993). It is essential to study work from its spiritual, emotional, physical, and psychological aspects because people make up work. These are the elements that make humans complex, diverse and predictable.

Work is important to us, including the process (how we do it) and the outcome or end product or service provided. Work is a central feature and a primary source of fulfillment in our lives. At work, we cultivate long term and fulfilling relationships, experience community, and develop new skills and understandings about life and ourselves. Moreover, over half of our conversations take

place in the workplace. Non-work related experiences are essential for our need for social connection.

Work affects our relationships, determines where we live, governs the type of transport we use, and even governs how we plan and structure our life. If we stop to think about it, what would life be without work? What activity provides so much content to complain about to friends and family? Moreover, think about the people who retire from work every year. Be it through age, injury, wealth, or success, many of us will experience retirement.

However, the notion of "retirement" is an interesting and somewhat modern one. In the past, people may have been more inclined to phase work slowly out of their lives. In 13 B.C., the Roman Emperor Augustus began paying pensions to Roman Legionnaires, who had served 20 years. In the 16th century, Britain and several European countries offered pensions to their troops. Still, it was not until 1889 when German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck adopted the concept of old-age social insurance, which advanced what we call today, 'retirement.'

The idea of 'retirement' was put forward at Bismarck's behest, in 1881 by Germany's Emperor, William the First. The Social Security History website, *n.d*, refers to a letter from William the First to the German Parliament: "Those who are disabled from work by age and invalidity have a well-grounded claim to care from the state." Retirement became synonymous with work incapacity in Bismarck's Germany in 1883.

In 1880, eighty-one percent of all seventy-year-olds were still in the labor force, but only 22 percent were in 1990 (Costa, 1998, 12). I once met a farmer who told me that farmers never retire; they work until they die or cannot work anymore. In Western nations, age sixty-five generally marks the beginning of "old age," and the use of sixty-five as the age of retirement has a long history. However, retirement is generally a complete, abrupt, and permanent withdrawal from paid labor and public life (Costa,

1998, 6). This is a concern because research shows that when people retire, there is a cognitive decline. Maybe there is something true in the saying, 'use it, or lose it.'

At the beginning of the twentieth century, aging was associated with a loss of productivity. William Ostler, a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins, argued in 1905 that "all men should retire at age sixty because by then they had lost all mental elasticity similarly the English economist William Beveridge in 1909 agreed that that older workers lacked adaptability (Costa, 1998, 11). However, historical evidence shows that age sixty-five does not mark a discrete decrease in mental and physical abilities; nevertheless, 65 has become the age of retirement but only because policymakers believe that it does (Costa, 1998, 11).

Since 1889, people have been living longer than 70 years of age, and many want to continue working. Moreover, for religious people, the notion of "retirement" is not characteristic of life's purpose. As the sociologist James Hunter notes, people who hold to a religious worldview, i.e., Christian, Jewish, Muslim, do not have a retirement concept revealed in their teachings. When a person adopts retirement, this is more than what a religious worldview teaches and signals that 'secular' society is attempting to become far more influential than is appreciated.

The question of retirement or forced retirement becomes even more pertinent at the beginning of 2020 as the world watches record increases in unemployment, quarantines, and business closures. We have a belief, albeit a false one, that work will always be available. The closing of businesses due to the global pandemic has changed that belief and has been a warning for millions of workers and employers. What will work look like, feel like, be like, post-pandemic? No one knows.

Occasionally work can create problems too. We can place work above other essential responsibilities such as our health or relationships. In fact, out of all the variables that influence work-life happiness, the amount of time spent at work is the strongest

and most consistent predictor (Dhas, 2015, 21659-21665). If we experience boredom and burnout at work, we endeavor to reset our work-life with the notion of trying to *balance* work with life. Studies related to 'work-life balance' suggest that about one in four employees experience high conflict-related levels to work and family (Duxbury and Higgins, 2012, 8). For many of us, "balancing" work and life is a mysterious concept that sounds good but almost impossible to accomplish. What does it even mean to "balance" work and life? The metaphor conjures up an image of a scale with life placed on one side and our occupation on the other. That is not how we live our lives. In the end, trying to "balance" life and work could be more of a pipe dream rather than an achievable goal.

Losing a job or being unemployed can negatively affect our self-esteem. Job loss also affects society because work helps to keep us civil. For example, studies suggest that when the rate of unemployment is high, the rate of crime is also likely to be high. Job loss can ripple across from the individual, family, and society because there is always a non-financial aspect to work. Unemployment negatively affects civic participation, crime, health, and domestic child abuse (Murray, 2012). People do find other activities in life besides their jobs to endorse their self-worth, however, in general, people need work, the process, and the reward, to feel good about themselves while society greatly benefits when that transpires.

Work also provides a platform for people who hope to include in the workplace their culture, religion, values, or traditions. When this transpires, co-workers are encouraged to inform themselves about the values, beliefs, and dispositions of their co-workers. Consequently, a perspectival approach to work helps produce understanding about those aspects of life that are meaningful and influential but often invisible.

So employees, if you have ever wanted your boss, supervisor, or manager to know why you think and act the way you do, then

this book is for you. To employers— if you have ever wondered why your team behaves the way they do, there is probably a fair and reasonable explanation; consequently, this book is for you.

By understanding some of the best insights from each worldview and work culture, one can get pretty close to their desirable model. Should you choose to accept it, your mission is to explore these worldview lenses, examine your worldview lens and work motivation, and consider alternate beliefs and practices.

I encourage you (and me) to shine a light on our unexamined work values in the spirit of developing a more meaningful motivational work-intelligence.

Accordingly, this book presents an intriguing journey into an activity that takes up so much of our lives—*Work*. Enjoy the journey into the fascinating and diverse world of work.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO WORK AND BELIEFS

"Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence… work provides an "artificial" world of things."
– Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, p.7

A few months ago, a neighbor confessed to me, "I have a great job, but I'm unhappy." Alex was enjoying a career with a high salary, flexible work hours, and many problem-solving projects. The company Alex worked for was large and dynamic, employing hundreds of workers on site. It sounded like a 'dream job,' yet something was not quite right.

In terms of working space, research suggests that the physical extent of the workplace, together with a larger number of workers, can affect altruism, social connection, and trust. It appears that smaller workplaces with fewer employees encourage more trusting and healthier work communities (Schumacher, 1973). The website, Changing Nature of Organizations, Work, and Workplace, suggests that the characteristics of social capital, i.e., trust, relationship building, and sharing of resources, are more evident in workplaces, which comprise small numbers of employees and have shared, open, and unassigned meeting spaces (Heerwagen, 2016).

On the surface, our work can appear to others as perfect. Yet, in reality, many people experience work in terms of the 'hamster syndrome.' We run around doing the same thing over and over while never sensing achievement. The result is boredom, repetitiveness, leading to a lack of motivation. Our work interferes with life, that is, a meaningful and full life, and our

frustration inhibits other areas, such as relationships with friends or family.

Putting aside the possibility that work boredom is typically a Western "problem," perhaps the real challenge is that work is 'unnatural' to living a full and meaningful life. The ancient Greeks, who left a lasting imprint on Western civilization, would agree. In ancient Greece, work itself enjoyed minimal importance. Literally, the Greek says, "we are unleisurely in order to have leisure" (Pieper, 1963, 20). To be "unleisurely", according to Pieper, is the word Greeks used for ordinary everyday work. Work was unnatural to a life of leisure, and was only a means to an end. However, if work could yield an invention that could solve a significant problem or make life easier, the job did have value. Therefore, the ancients Greeks' valued the effectiveness of a manufactured good, but not *how* the good was developed. This idea originates from an ancient Greek worldview.

If the ancient Greeks were right about work, then there are approximately 7.7 billion people in the world today living unnatural lives due to their work commitments. That number is nearly 70 percent of people in the world now who are working. A striking figure of about 5 billion jobs: alternatively, it could just be that Work is valuable and necessary for living a good and meaningful life. Of course, this might depend on the type of work one does. Some occupations, by their very nature, are destructive to the mind, body, and soul.

Another idea is that work is meaningful because it affects our self-esteem, our confidence, and our relatability to the world around us. Work can be a vital measure of our identity. Being out of work, retrenched, and losing a business can be very painful because work is not only about giving up your time in return for money, as many people choose to work for reasons beyond financial rewards.

It is not surprising to learn that our occupations are among the first topics of conversations with friends and strangers. Few

people leave a social gathering without knowing others' working lives while sharing some of their own occupational experiences. We think about work always, engage with it earnestly, spend our life pursuing it, and sometimes even try avoiding it. Yet, for most people, work is not just what we do but what we *should* do.

Yet, there is always the good and the bad to consider concerning anything in life. Nowhere is this more evident than in the 1951 movie, 'A Christmas Carol.' Ebenezer Scrooge is a stingy and wealthy businessperson. He has no time for sentimentality and largely views Christmas as a waste of time. For people like Ebenezer, work becomes godlike. It is who they are; there is no other reality, joy, or contentment outside of their occupation. 'Workaholics' are devoted to their work, which is not necessarily a immoral commitment, but like most things in life, that which can enrich can also destroy. The message is the same one that Ebenezer Scrooge eventually realizes that money does not produce happiness; instead, we need people to make us happy.

Nevertheless, for most human beings, work consumes much of their time here on earth. On the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website, the average 70-year-old has lived for 613,200 hours and spent 90,000 of those hours at work. Full-time employed persons average 8.5 hours of work each day on weekdays and 5.4 hours on weekend days.

During the last twenty years, the perception of work and expected work duties has changed too. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website shows that approximately 82 percent of employed persons work outside of the home, while 24 percent do some or all of their work at home. Employed persons aged 25 and over, and those with an advanced college degree, are even more likely to work at home. Compare this with one of the Nordic nations. For example, in Finland, the *Working Hours Act* (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2011) passed in 1996. It gave many, but not all, employees the right to adjust their workplace's typical daily hours by starting or finishing up to

three hours earlier or later (Savage, 2018, 5). Working families could manage work and family demands. In Finland, 92 percent of companies allow their workers to adapt their hours, compared to 76 percent in the U.K. and the U.S., with 50 percent in Russia and just 18 percent of families in Japan can manage their work and family demands (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2011).

The difference here is that flexible working hours must be rooted in a culture of trust. Research by Lott and Chung in Germany found that people with flexible work-time arrangements put in almost four hours more overtime and intensity than people who work standard, fixed hours (Lott and Chung, 2016, 752–765).

In 2018, on an average day in America, 84 percent of women and 69 percent of men engaged in unpaid household activities. On that day, among adults living in households with children under age 6, the woman spent 1.1 hours providing physical care (such as bathing or feeding a child) to household children. The U.S. Bureau of Statistics website shows that men spent 26 minutes providing similar physical care by contrast. From 2003 to 2018, the share of men doing food preparation and cleanup on an average day increased from 35 percent to 46 percent (U.S. Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

So with all this to consider, how content are we with our work, and is contentment even an important factor? After all, most of us have bills to pay, food to buy, rent to cover, and mortgages to attend. Perhaps work supports you and your family in various ways, and that is sufficient. Perhaps work provides you with meaning and purpose in life. It could even be that work supports a personal life goal. Regardless of the reason, be it psychological or material or both, most of us need to work, and the ways we think about work in terms of purpose expose our values and beliefs about what is important to us.

People also compartmentalize their work-life; that is, they keep both realms happily at arm's length and live and work in public

and private spaces. We leave work at the 'office,' so to speak. Yet, for others, work and private life are not separate. Work can advance a favored lifestyle while similarly confirming our personal beliefs. Some of us realize our best and most appreciated selves at work, while for others, work sustains physical, emotional, or spiritual needs. I marvel at people who work in dangerous, life-threatening, and challenging occupations every day. The oilrig worker incurs isolated and lengthy-time away from family and friends, not to mention the harsh and perilous ocean drilling work from an oil rig far out at sea.

Yet people do choose work that is dangerous and unpredictable. Consider a correctional officer. Many officers work daily in intimidating circumstances, and they do not receive very much money for doing it. In the United States, a correctional officer earns an average of $45,000 per year, while in Canada, it is $54,809. In Sweden, prison officers are "low-wage" employees, similar to other care staff, such as elderly people or hospitals. They receive a medium salary of $37,644.24 annually. Police are another group of workers who frequently experience dangerous encounters. In Canada, they make approximately $56,969 per year. In Japan, police officers generate $35,606.40 annually. What drives people to choose jobs that entail dangerous and potentially live menacing workplace environments?

Indeed, work can be dangerous to life. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Census of *Fatal Occupational Injuries* list occupations that led to a fatal injury for full-time employees while at work. Here are the top five most dangerous jobs in America (Parker, 2019).

1. Logging workers
2. Aircraft pilots and flight engineers
3. Roofers
4. Refuse and recyclable material collectors
5. Structural iron and steelworkers

Staying within North America but heading north of the U.S. border, Canada also claims some of the most dangerous jobs, according to statistics from the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (Swartz, *n.d*). Their list includes the total fatalities and is in order of danger. Here are the top 5:

1. Fishing And Trapping: 52 fatalities per 100,000 workers.
2. Mining, Quarrying And Oil Wells: 46.9 fatalities per 100,000 workers
3. Logging And Forestry: 33.3 workplace fatalities per 100,000 workers, rounds out the top three.
4. Construction: 20.2 fatalities per 100,000 workers.
5. Transportation and storage: 16.0 workplace fatalities per 100,000 workers.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list; many other jobs are not listed here but have proved to be just as dangerous and deadly.

In Bangladesh's Dhaka District on April 24, 2013, hundreds of garment workers reported working. Within seconds, the plaza — home to clothing factories, apartments, stores, and a bank — crumbled to the ground, tragically with the workers still inside. More than 1,100 people died during the collapse, and thousands of more people were injured (Nittle, 2018).

Another deadly work incident occurred on 9 December 2019, in the Indian capital of Delhi. Forty-three factory workers went to their deaths when a fire swept through a factory that made school bags. At least 100 people were sleeping inside the factory when the fire started (Prakash, 2019).

Workplace safety is not essential in all countries, so workplaces become deadly places to earn a living. Yet, for various reasons, people continue to work in unsafe areas. Many people in developing nations do not have the protection of workplace safety regulations; moreover, they do not have the freedom to work elsewhere. Next time we complain about our tedious job,

think about the people who work in occupations, which pose endless physical and emotional danger.

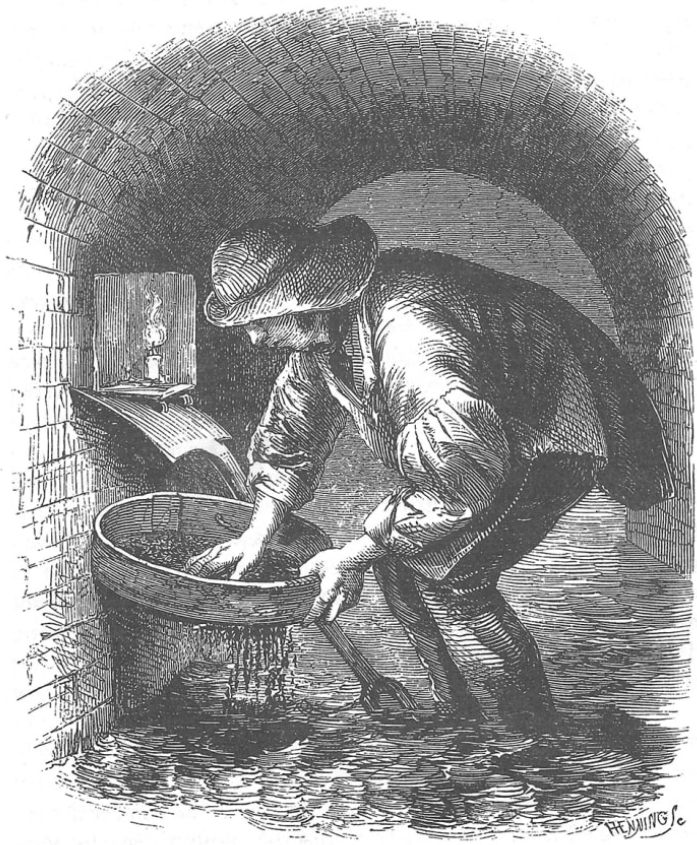
Today, the workplace has evolved, particularly in terms of equality. Equality of opportunity is the term often used, and this is good. However, "equality" in the workplace can also be tragic. Nineteenth-century capitalism treated all family members as equals. Although this appears as a good in itself, the consequences were outrageous. Under the pretext of "equality," nineteenth-century capitalism prepared to employ six-year-old children in mines and factories in place of grown men (Tucker, 2014, 147). Capitalism was not the problem; rather, it was *unregulated* capitalism.

So working in the Victorian could be a constricting, unpleasant, and confusing time to be alive, although the truth is, "every era has its silliness and false starts" (Lind, 2019, 300). When we look carefully at the 17th century Victorians of Holland and 18th century England we can see many outstanding accomplishments, which ultimately led to the universal spreading of middle-class values. What were these middle-class values? The Victorians believed in the principles of order, prosperity, and freedom. Their work values comprised modesty, honesty in business dealings, delayed gratification, and charity.

The Victorians' middle-class values also meant that work itself was intrinsically good and not just to earn a wage. These values were expressions of a more profound belief and faith and lasted right up to the 1950s, even if you were poor. Hard work, saving, and honesty were celebrated, while mindless consumption was frowned upon.

It is also true that in Victorian London, there was no shortage of hazardous jobs. One example is the *toshers* employed by the city to clean the sewers as a sewer-flusher. The sewer hunters reeked of the sewers because that is where they spent their days searching the sewers. They sifted through raw sewage, looking for valuables that had fallen down the drain. Cleaning the sewers

was hazardous work as noxious fumes formed deadly pockets, not to mention the tunnels frequently crumbling and the swarms of rats that shared their workspace in the sewers (Cock-Starkey, 2017).



THE SEWER-HUNTER.

[*From a Daguerreotype by* BEARD.]

An 1851 illustration of a sewer-hunter or "tosher."Wikimedia // public domain

Up until the late 19th century, you could also be a medicinal leech collector. In Tudor times, between 1485 and 1603 in England and Wales, the Gong farmers were night-workers who did the essential job of clearing human excrement from England's cesspits and latrines.

Our occupations can say a lot about our values, culture, priorities, and beliefs. Of course, some people will always have more meaningful work choices. They can choose employment based on pay and benefits, job security, family wants and needs, workload, opportunities for advancing a career, and so forth.

There are also those individuals who delay their working lives for 4-6 years to attend university or college. They do so in the expectation of acquiring a particular type of work restricted to their education. In most Western nations, attainable work via a university degree usually comes at a tremendous financial cost. For example, in the U.K., it is not unusual for graduates to be paying their student loans back well into their 50s. Three-quarters of university graduates will not earn very much after completing their degree and will never clear that debt in a lifetime.

Many employers know that employees appreciate fair wages, security, health care, and a promotion prospect. An emotionally healthy work relationship between employer and employee is essential. Maybe a shared philosophy of life, flexibility of work hours, a happy and trusting work environment, together with the potential for personal growth and learning. However, studies from the past sixty years suggest that besides the satisfaction of fulfilling a job description, employers do not know much about their employee's beliefs and values (Fowler, 2014).

Just recently, I stopped into a Starbucks coffee shop. While I waited for my order, I had the opportunity to talk with a Starbucks employee who had recently ended a prosperous acting career. She was now working in the service industry as a barista at Starbucks. An acting career had consumed too much of her life and in her words, " I had become neglectful to the needs of my

family." As a barista, the 9 am to 5 pm working hours she had requested before agreeing to the job were advantageous to quality time spent with family and travel. Her priorities had shifted over time.

We might call this a *work-life* balance decision. If we believe that our work should positively benefit others, and when it does, then there is consolidation. If we think our work should reflect a commitment to a Deity, and when it does, then there is consolidation. However, sometimes we have needs that no occupation can nurture. Susan Fowler (2014) explains:

> An employee, who feels trapped in their job, feels she is being taken advantage of, or feels overwhelmed by what is being asked of her may ask for more money. Under her breath, she is saying, "they don't pay me enough to put up with this." What she does not understand is that there will never be enough money to make up for the void created when her psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are not satisfied. People cannot ask for what they do not know they need (Fowler, 2015).

In her book, 'Why Motivating Peoples Doesn't Work,' Fowler (2014) explains that autonomy is the human need to perceive we have choices in life. Relatedness is our need to care about and be cared for and contribute to something larger than ourselves. Competence is our need to effectively meet everyday challenges and opportunities, experiencing a sense of growth and flourishing. Susan Fowler marks all these as psychological needs to explain why people can interpret the same work expectations very differently.

The prevailing culture also forms beliefs about work. Some of these cultural values might include working hard, being entirely honest, being a productive team member, respecting company policy, and keeping promises. These cultural ideals set the tone for the culture of any workplace. The question is, what happens when these values do not align with the values of the employees. Training employees to embody the values of their work is an

ethically questionable activity. Indoctrination is usually reserved for religious or spiritual organizations, where people's participation is seen as volitional" (Okhuysen *et al*., 2013, 498).

If personal values are out of alignment, people work towards different goals, intentions, and outcomes. This can harm work relationships, productivity, job satisfaction, duty, and creative potential. Consequently, one of the most critical actions that employers and employees can make is understanding how personal, religious, or cultural values affect people in the workplace.

Some people have a deep sense of who they are, let us call this *identity*, which can influence how they perform at work. Even if we are not always aware of it, personal beliefs and values, which make up our identities, guide our behavior, perceptions, expectations, and relationships with colleagues, including the questions we ask ourselves and the tasks we set for ourselves.

Freedom in the workplace is vital for some people. Employees' freedom can range from functioning outside the office or traditional worksite conventions, a say in company policy and initiatives, which can lead to increased productivity and employee happiness. Having the freedom to choose our workspaces or contribute to business policy assumes that we can make decent work choices, that we know what we are actually talking about. There is a cultural component to this assumption. For example, having the right to choose the type of work we desire is not a universally held practice. For example, the Amish and various Asian cultures do not place individual autonomy as a high priority in life, including choosing our work or work practices. The autonomous self is de-emphasized compared with tradition, family, and community. For the Amish, formal education terminates at the end of eighth grade, so there are apparent limits to the choices one can make regarding a profession or job. The Amish do not prioritize having the independence to choose whether to become a small business owner, carpenter, baker, horse trainer, or any other occupation. The Amish sense of

identity is not fashioned by individual self-sufficiency but from respecting tradition with an identity and work choice sanctioned by the community (Choi, 2014).

During a recent conversation, a friend of mine on the verge of retirement reminded me that only the young have the energy and idealism to challenge the workplace, that is, to make practices more efficient, meaningful, and equitable. He supposed, "When you get older, you begin just to accept the way things are and let them be, like it or not."[1] This reminded me of the German-American developmental psychologist Erik Erikson. He composed "stages of life," with one of those stages being *generativity* versus *stagnation*. This theoretically occurs from the age of 45 to approximately 60 years. We supposedly contribute to society and act to benefit future generations or we stagnate and fail to find ways to contribute during this stage.

In terms of worker productivity, consider the average worker ant who labors efficiently 19 hours a day with no coffee or bathroom breaks and no overseer, and they do so with less than five hours of sleep a day. Also, each ant carries more than 20 times its body weight (Ward, 2010). The worker ant must find food and provide the care necessary to rear more workers. In contrast, the numbers of workers engaged in each task are always appropriate to the current situation because the job performed will ensure the colony's survival. Worker ant production often accelerates as worker number increases.

In comparison with humans, the ant's work-life seems grueling, setting a very high standard for efficiency that few humans could or would even want to replicate. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the cute and cuddly Koala dozes for most of the day. They can spend up to 18 hours a day sleeping. Although we may

[1] Heywood. 2016. "How Religion Influences Work". Interviewed by Matthew Etherington, July 18, 2016. Audio, 13:11.